11 Transcending Authorities: Literature and Performance in an Integrated Reading-writing Classroom in Russia

Irina Kuznetsova-Simpson
New Economic School, Moscow

Writing a composition on a literary topic has traditionally been an integral part of Russian education. However, as this chapter argues, the methods of writing pedagogy in literature classes both in first language (L1) and foreign language (FL) instruction have not evolved much since the Soviet times. Most students are still used to passive learning and to prescriptive teaching models. Similar to Russian youth back in the 1990s, today's students seem to have learned that there are authorities that shouldn't be questioned: the authority of the author, of a renowned literary critic, of a tradition, or of a teacher. Even when they formulate their thoughts autonomously, they often seem to search for one "true" interpretation, as well as for one main didactic function of the text. In this chapter, I examine the challenges that my students meet while confronting Western methods of writing pedagogy and advocate for substituting the traditional methods of teaching literature and writing with more liberating and creative practices. In particular, I discuss how I attempt to break with students' perception of a teacher as knowledge-producer and encourage them to challenge and question traditional "authorities" and interpretations. Drawing on my experience of teaching a comparative literature class, "Drama and theatre", I argue that a reader-response approach to interpreting literature in tandem with performance theory and practice can have a transformative impact on students' writing, facilitating their interpretative, analytical, and creative skills.

Writing a composition on a literary topic has traditionally been an integral part of Russian education (see Chapter 2). In the Soviet Union, students prac-

DOI: https://doi.org/10.37514/INT-B.2021.1428.2.11

ticed writing such essays beginning in middle school. Those who aimed for an advanced degree in the humanities were required to write a literary essay as a part of their entrance exam to the university. Yet, the teaching methods on how to write such essays differed significantly from those associated with Western-style pedagogy. I experienced an extreme example of the approach practiced at the time during a tutoring session with a professor of Russian literature at one Moscow university. In preparation for the university entrance exam, she handed out a printed copy of a paper on Griboyedov's *Woe from Wit* and asked me to learn it by heart for our next tutoring session. Puzzled by my bewildered expression, she explained that rote learning is the most-effective way to teach a student to write an excellent essay during the exam. She meant that I had to know precisely what to say about the topic, who to cite, and what language to use.

Twenty years later, while teaching literature and writing courses in English at the New Economic School in Russia, I often wonder whether the methods of teaching literature and writing in Russian schools, both in a native and foreign language classroom, have progressed much since the Soviet period. Most students starting our courses, it seemed, are still used to passive learning and to prescriptive teaching models. When dealing with literary texts, they assume that there are authorities who should not be questioned: the authority of the author, of a renowned literary critic, of a tradition, or of a teacher. Even when they formulate their thoughts autonomously, they often search for one true interpretation, as well as well as for one main didactic function of the text.

Indeed, the research I conducted for this project shows that whereas literature still plays an integral part in acquiring literacy, both in first language (L1) and foreign language (FL) instruction, the methods of teaching literature still favor traditional approaches. Namely, in L1 classrooms, author-centered and text-centered approaches to interpreting literature have dominated; in FL instruction, literary texts have served the primary goal of improving students' overall linguistic proficiency. Thus, interpretation of these texts has been secondary to language-oriented priorities. These traditional methods create significant hurdles when students confront core-literature courses conducted exclusively in the target language. Moreover, they hinder the development of important critical, interpretative, and creative writing skills that the study of literature should facilitate.

In this essay I would like to advocate for substituting a linguistic approach to teaching literature in upper-level foreign language classes in Russia with a reader-response approach, better suited for the integrated reading-writing classroom. I should note that this approach could also be used in combination

with other methods—textual, contextual, personal-response, and linguistic—as some studies have contended (Bloemert et al., 2017; Gilroy & Parkinson, 1996). A discussion of integrating these approaches is, however, beyond the scope of this chapter. I will further argue that engagement with performance in literature courses could serve as a very effective bridge between both skills—reading and writing—as well as a tool for sharpening students' analytical, creative, and independent writing skills. To illustrate this last point, I would like to draw on my experience of teaching a comparative literature class called Drama and Theatre, conducted in English, and to discuss some writing practices that enabled us to unite reading, writing, and performance successfully.

Literature and Writing Pedagogy in the Soviet Union

Reverence toward literature and literary study has always been one of the distinctive features of Russian culture. Therefore, in the USSR, the practice of writing a composition (сочинение) was primarily associated with an essay on a given literary topic (see Chapter 2). Anyone who studied in the Soviet Union had to write numerous compositions during his or her years of education in Russian schools, including as university entrance exams. As Irina Korotkina has already pointed out in Chapter 1 and in her previous work, this composition assignment was based on a literary text from the prescribed reading list. It primarily tested students' knowledge of the text, their ability to reproduce quotes by heart (during in-class composition writing), as well as their ability to interpret the text *correctly*, as prescribed in the teacher's manual (Korotkina, 2014). Spelling and punctuation were among the major grading criteria in assessing such essays. Further, as Korotkina (2014) stated, "the paper is considered excellent if the student uses elaborate language, quotes the prescribed critics beyond the manual, and expresses the prescribed ideas passionately, as if they were their own" (p. 3). The organization of the essays was assessed only marginally—it was sufficient to have an introduction, main thesis, and conclusion). Overall, the number of mistakes the student made and the instructor's subjective opinion on whether the topic of the essay was sufficiently covered or not (тема раскрыта или не раскрыта) would determine the failure or success of the given task.

The skills involved in writing compositions were not explicitly taught in Russian schools. As a student in humanities, with literature as a core component, I do not remember a single seminar devoted to writing per se. Whereas, undoubtedly a lot depended on individual literature teachers, the idea that was often transmitted in schools suggested that good writing—both cre-

ative and academic—was something innate, and that neither Dostoevsky nor Tolstoy were taught how to write.

What the instructors taught us, however, was how to interpret literary texts. The offered methods of interpretation favored predominately contextual author- and text-centered analysis of literary works, which according to recent teaching manuals, are still practiced in Russian schools (Chertov & Ippolitova, 2018; Kohanova, 2011). In other words, a successful literary essay pursued the goal of deciphering the author's ideas and intentions within a certain historical and socio-political context, with the help of famous and *recommended* literary critics. The degree of individual input in such compositions, let alone genuine critical analysis, was scanty.

The situation with teaching literature in a foreign language classroom—the primary focus of this paper—was similar. Traditionally, both in the Soviet Union and in the West, literary texts were "a staple of foreign language instruction" (Hirvela, 2001, p. 110). Especially during the era of the grammar translation method, literature was the main source of input for teaching the target language. Hirvela (2001) has stated the following reasons for using literature in FL classrooms back in the 1950s to 1970s, which were not much different from the ones considered in the USSR. First, the focus in foreign language classrooms was on practicing reading and writing. Second, literary texts served as models of the target language in use, offering, as in Coleridge's famous quote, "the best words in the best order" (as cited in Hirvela, 2001, p. 111). Third, the ability to read literary texts in a foreign language was indicative of reaching the pinnacle in foreign language proficiency (Hirvela, 2001). In the Soviet Union, in addition, the ultimate goal of learning a foreign language was the ability to understand and translate complex texts: literature always offered good examples of the required complexity.

In the West of the 1970s, however, with the introduction of the communicative method of teaching and the advent of English for specific purposes (ESP), literature was knocked off the pedestal (Hirvela, 2004; Khabit, 2011). With more practical goals in mind, foreign language instructors started discarding literary texts as being too difficult, too "deviant," "neither everyday, nor academic," and therefore "too remote from the learners' experience" (Gilroy & Parkinson, 1996, p. 214).

The Russian system of education, in contrast, retained its attitude of exaltation toward literature. Thus, literature continued to serve the purpose of enhancing overall language proficiency, but it was also recognized as essential for developing cultural competence. Yet, these two skills—linguistic and cultural—were often addressed in separate literature courses. For example, in the 1990s, the English department at Moscow State Pedagogical University,

aside from general English practice courses, offered a lecture course on British literature conducted in Russian, and a literature course called Home Reading conducted in English. The latter emphasized a language-based approach and utilized literary texts to practice vocabulary and grammatical structures. The discussion of literary works in such classes thus involved summarizing the plot, characterization of the main heroes, reading comprehension questions, sentence completion exercises, etc. The lecture courses in Russian, however, informed students of the major names, texts, contexts, and literary movements associated with British literature and required one term paper at the end of the semester. In general, literature in Russia in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, even at specialized linguistic institutions, was employed primarily for the enhancement of the mechanics of reading and writing in a foreign language. Good writing in the FL therefore was equated with grammatical and lexical accuracy and did not pursue any cognitive or argumentative goals. Individual experiences could vary, but in general, these literature classes, with this linguistic emphasis in mind, hardly offered the practice of textual, stylistic or cultural analysis of literary works, and thus failed in developing other important competencies—interpretative and critical thinking skills.

Literature and Writing Pedagogy in Modern EFL classroom in Russia

Presently, there are few studies of the contemporary use of literature in the EFL classroom in Russia and how the methods of working with literary texts have evolved since the Soviet period. The most recent and most comprehensive research in this regard is probably that of Raees Calafato (2018). His study, based on questionnaires collected from 152 Russian EFL teachers, attests to the fact that the major goal of using literary texts in the EFL classroom is advancing linguistic skills, yet it confirms the fact that many instructors recognize the importance of literary texts for the development of students' cultural awareness and critical thinking (Calafato, 2018). Further, Calafato contends, "there are notable shifts in teachers' attitudes towards learner interest and ability that reveal evolving teacher priorities and motivations" (2018, p. 92). What the scholar means by this is that many English instructors try to employ learner-centered approaches to teaching and choosing literary texts. For example, some university instructors employ modern literary texts from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries to teach English (Calafato, 2018). Yet, Calafato argues, "literary works that were popular during Soviet times [Jerome K. Jerome, John Galsworthy, Somerset Maugham, and others] continue to be used, although contemporary American students, might not know

them" (2018, p. 95). As for the practices of teaching literature, they still include sentence-completion exercises, summary writing, etc., namely, exercises aimed at improving language proficiency (Calafato, 2018). Overall, Calafato concludes that even though the use of literature in the EFL context evolved after the collapse of the Soviet Union, traditional Soviet practices have continued to influence language classrooms.

I drew conclusions similar to Calafato's (2018), having reviewed ten different reading guides, teaching manuals[1] and other online resources from several major foreign language departments in Russian universities. First, I have noticed that not all language programs have offered literature classes. Whereas the B.A. in EFL teaching at Moscow State Linguistic University offers only one course, History of Literature, during the fourth year of study, (Moscow State Linguistic University, 2020), the English program at Moscow State Pedagogical University no longer offers any literature courses per se (Zvjagintseva & Borisova, 2019). This does not mean, however, that literary texts have not been employed in other courses of study. The potential exists that these texts might play a complementary function in general linguistic instruction.

In comparison, the Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia—allegedly the best pedagogical university in the country—offers courses on foreign literature for future FL teachers in Russian. A teaching manual at a branch of this university, entitled *Contemporary Methodologies and Techniques in Teaching Foreign Language and Literature in School and at a University* (Murtazaeva et al., 2012) states the following goals of the target language literature course: "historical and literary process, connected to English literary canons," and "development of students' knowledge about English literature as an integral part of the European literary process"[2] (Kostareva, 2012, p. 69). The first assignments that this teacher's manual offers, however, are to summarize and compare the interpretations of Shakespeare's character Hamlet by Vissarion Belinsky (a famous Russian literary critic of the nineteenth century) and another famous Russian writer, Ivan Turgenev (Kostareva, 2012). Other suggested assignments include compiling "a terminological dictionary" of literary terms and "writing a reading journal," which should include biographical information about the author, as well as information about the publication of the work, its main characters, etc. (Kostareva, 2012, p. 71).

Furthermore, my review of other reading guides for intermediate, upper intermediate, and advanced students of English revealed that the literary texts

1 Generally, these reading guides and teaching manuals are published by universities and kept at universities. Therefore, it is difficult to get public access to such publications.

2 All citations from N. L. Kostareva are translated by Kuznetsova-Simpson.

often offered for reading are the same as the texts popular in the 1990s: short stories by Jeffrey Archer (Beljaeva & Petrischeva, 2016), Maugham's *The Painted Veil* and Wilde's *Ideal Husband* (Rokosovskaya, 2006), Sheldon' *Rage of Angels* (Tarverdjan & Ustinova, 2013), Arthur Hailey's *Airport* (Kosheleva, 2013). Notably, some of these manuals list as their goals "the development of oral and written, creative and analytical skills" (Tarverdjan & Zueva, 2012, p. 3). Yet, they provide exercises for practicing mainly grammar and vocabulary without any communicative context and often ask students to translate sentences and word expressions from Russian into English and vice versa (Beljaeva & Petrischeva, 2016; Danchevskaya, 2012; Tarverdjan & Ustinova, 2013; Tarverdjan & Zueva, 2012). Most of the questions formulated in these manuals target primarily reading comprehension, and few questions, if any, elicit literary analysis and interpretation. For example, the manual compiled by Beljaeva and Petrischeva (2016) offers the following assignments for text analysis:

> Give the summary of the story. – What is the turning point of the story? – What kinds of narrations are used (description, a dialogue or any other)? – What kind of atmosphere do you feel in the story" (p. 98)

and the following questions for general discussion:

> What do you think about the title of the story?
>
> What is the message of the story? (p. 127)

Even though the manuals available for review offered many useful exercises for the advancement of grammatical and lexical skills, these materials lack assignments that encourage text analysis, creativity, and genuine discussion. Moreover, they indicate that in Russia, EFL teachers generally do not gain proper training in how to work with literary texts, although there exist good materials on the subject published in Russian (for example, Natalia Smetannikova's *Strategic Approach to Teaching Reading* [Strategialjnij podohd k obucheniu chteniju], 2005). Therefore, these teachers can transmit to the classes they conduct only the experiences they gained during their own study. I admit though that more empirical research is necessary to properly evaluate the use of literature in the FL context in Russia.

Reader-Response Approach in the Literature Classroom

The English language program for bachelor's students at the New Economic School (NES) offers a different approach to teaching literature in a language

classroom. Following the model of a Western-type liberal arts education, the English professors conduct literature classes in the target language from the second semester of study on, resembling the practices of the monolingual English-speaking classroom. The requirement for taking these classes is an upper-intermediate or advanced level of English, as well as successful completion of the advanced college writing course in English. These literature courses continue to develop students' overall linguistic and cultural competencies, yet they also emphasize the enhancement of students' analytical and interpretative reading and writing skills.

The use of literature in foreign language instruction, as well as in L1 and L2 composition, has long been a topic of debate in Western scholarship (Belcher & Hirvela, 2000). In EFL and ESL instruction, literature, as mentioned earlier, has often been dismissed due to its lexical, syntactical, grammatical, and cultural difficulties (Hirvela, 2004). Similarly, in L1 composition classrooms, literary texts are often viewed as irrelevant to students' practical needs and overall academic writing practice. As Vandrick (2018) writes, "those against including literature claim that academic discourse, not literature, should be the focus of writing classes" (p. 2).

Yet, there have been multiple studies that have viewed literature as an integral part of language teaching and as a domain offering not only culturally authentic texts, but also rich material for teaching both reading and good writing (Gilroy & Parkinson, 1996). As scholarship attests, one should teach these two skills—reading and writing—together (Carson & Leki, 1993; Hirvela, 2004; Vandrick, 2018). Both activities are processes of "composing" and "meaning construction" (Tierney & Person, 1983, p. 568); they both are closely linked and enrich each other (Vandrick, 2018). As Hirvela (2004) points out,

> Writing with or from source texts is an act of reading as well as writing, since it is through reading that the required writing material is appropriated. . . . students' performance as readers is bound to have an important effect on their performance as writers. Students who do not read texts well are not likely to write about them successfully. (p. 109)

In other words, students' performance as readers and writers is recursive, and each skill affects, informs, and enhances the other.

Following this teaching philosophy, we emphasize both reading and writing in the literature courses we offer at NES. Even though the overall language proficiency of students taking these courses is high, we still frequently confront hurdles. For example, as my personal teaching experience has shown, the majority of Russian students often believe in one true inter-

pretation of a literary work, which they search for while deciphering the author's intentions in the background of the text's social and historical context. They also often assume that a literary text should have a didactic function, strengthening our *ethical* and *moral values* and admit to enjoying texts which have main characters they can identify with. Such an attitude to literature has been particularly noticeable when students have struggled to provide brief personal responses to any scenes, themes, characters, or other issues raised by the readings. The reverence they feel toward classical texts, their authors, and what famous critics had to say about them, makes these tasks especially challenging. Furthermore, I've noticed that students often expect to be lectured on the material and find it difficult to explore the writer's techniques or various interpretations through close reading of the texts. Being used to assigned lists of essay topics, learners struggle to articulate their own research questions and arguments and often have asked me to write some sample essay questions for their projects.

I have tried to resolve this problem by practicing the so-called *reader-response approach* to interpreting literary texts. Even though Barthes's idea of the *death of the author* still resonates as alien among Russian learners, especially in a non-specialized literary institution, the concept of readers' active contributions to a literary text often excites students. As Gilroy and Parkinson (1996) write,

> Reader response theory . . . challenges text-oriented theories, claiming that a text has no real existence until it is read. By completing meaning, thus actualizing or realizing it, the reader does not take a passive role, as was traditionally thought, but is an active agent in the creation of meaning. (p. 215)

So, reader-response theory appears to be especially advantageous for undermining students' reverence toward the authority of the text. Instead of decoding what the author or text says and responding to meanings presumably rooted in the text, learners in reader-response theory play an active and creative role in the production of meaning through interacting with the text. Thus, the reader-response approach elevates reading as a productive activity. As Hirvela (1996) argues, "Reading here creates meaning, meaning produced by and reflecting the learner and how he or she read and transformed the original text, as opposed to passively locating meaning conveyed by the text" (p. 132). In other words, the reader-response method puts emphasis on "telling a story of reading" (Hirvela, 1996 p. 131), and it acknowledges that readers are not subordinate toward the text, "but the text serves, and is secondary to, the learner/reader" (Hirvela, 1996 p. 130). Since learners contribute different im-

pulses to the text in the process of reading, their interpretations reflect both the readers and the text simultaneously (Hirvela, 1996).

The reader-response approach certainly helps to develop students' literary competence and more independent interpretative skills. As Gilroy and Parkinson (1996) have already suggested, being involved in reading as a dynamic process, learners have opportunities to acquire new information and revise their positions, thereby producing diverse responses to texts. Students' ability to produce such responses makes reader-response theory especially well-suited for integrated reading-writing literature instruction both in EFL and in a native language classroom.

Practicing *Complex Seeing*: Dramatic Performance and Writing Pedagogy

Aside from the reader-response approach to literature, I have found working with a theatre performance in a literature classroom especially productive for breaking habits of author-based and text-centered interpretations. Any performance based on literature already presents an artistic interpretation and the embodiment of a director's reading of a literary text, rather than the author's. Watching and analyzing a performance involves an endeavor in reconstructing this interpretation. This task, according to the experience with my students—who are the products of a predominantly visual culture—appears to generate a higher volume of motivated responses than a literary text on its own. These responses eventually bring along students' independent interpretations of both the text and the play.

The interconnection between literature and theatre, composition and performance, has already been addressed in multiple studies. Collie and Slater (1987), for example, provide useful activities for incorporating a play in a language classroom, including "a staged reading of a play" (pp. 165-166). In her study, Deb Margolin (1997) shared the experience of teaching a performance composition class, where, through a series of diverse and often very personal writing and acting exercises, students managed to reach the synergy between both creative acts. Fishman et al. (2005), in their famous Berkeley experiment, demonstrated that "student writing is increasingly linked to theories and practices of performance" (p. 224). Manis (2009) and Werry and Walseth (2011) have also addressed the productive role of composition in the performance classroom. In accordance with this research, my experience has demonstrated that the introduction of elements of performance into an integrated reading-writing classroom also could be beneficial for the advancement of writing skills.

The close connection between performance and composition goes as far back as ancient Greece, where writing practically emerged and developed out of acts of performance (Manis, 2009). Dramas, poems, and speeches at the time were first performed in front of an audience, before being documented as written texts. Consequently, Aristotelian rhetorical concepts and canons of argumentation, still employed for constructing written arguments, were first primarily concerned with the art of public speaking. After rhetoric disconnected from performance and became an integral part of composition, writing and performance continued to intersect productively in multiple ways. As Werry and Walseth (2011) write, referencing the theory of embodiment, "both writing and performing are bodily practices and forms of corporeal intelligence" (p. 187). As scholars have agreed and Manis (2009) nicely has stated,

> both fields pay a great deal of attention to audience, both emphasize the importance of process, both understand themselves as ways of knowing and of coming to know, both are invested in their creative power, both struggle with the question of "authenticity." (p. 142)

Furthermore, composition and performance, as products of creative endeavor, strive for synergy between content and form; they both can be simultaneously collaborative as well as individual, public as well as intimately personal projects. In general, as Werry and Walseth (2011) contend, "both writing and performance provide rich opportunities for enacting critical and emancipatory pedagogies, and for training students to become critical thinkers and engaged cultural citizens" (p. 187).

I find Bertolt Brecht's (1964/2014) ideas on the epic theatre particularly beneficial for addressing and practicing students' critical skills. Whereas European drama since Aristotle has invited spectators to identify and empathize with the destiny of its main characters, in pursuing the so-called cathartic experience, Brecht's drama, in contrast, has attempted to examine rather than to stimulate emotions. As Brooker (2006) writes, Brecht's theatre "sought to produce a knowledge of the 'causal laws of development,' to divide rather than unify its audience, to intervene in and so transform ideas and attitudes" (p. 213). The dialectical theatre that Brecht proposed (Brecht, 1964/2014) confronts the audience with a performance full of effects—*alienation effects*—which would enable critical detachment: an epic play would always remind its audience of the artificial nature of the theatrical performance and make it confront and recognize alternatives to the portrayed actions.

This alienation effect (Verfremdungseffect) enables the presentation of the familiar as strange and the strange as familiar. It brings the needed rup-

ture into performance, undermining the spectators' common practice of identifying with the characters and actions on stage. It objectifies itself in the innovative method of acting (an actor turns into a *demonstrator*); in the narrative form of the performance and songs; in the elements of the stage design, such as placards, decorations, and film projections on the screen; but also in new expectations from the audience.

The theatre that Brecht advocated required a new type of spectator. Brecht (1964/2014) wrote that the form of narration that his theatre adapts turns "spectators into critical observers," but also "awakens their activity" and "forces them to make decisions" (p. 1643). As Benjamin (1966/1998) famously wrote, "Brecht has attempted to make the thinking man, indeed the wise man, into an actual dramatic hero" (p. 17). "The art of the epic theatre consists in arousing astonishment rather than empathy. . . . instead of identifying itself with the hero, the audience should learn to feel astonished at the circumstances under which he functions" (Benjamin, 1966/1998, p. 18). In other words, Brecht's plays were designed to challenge the audience to think, to recognize alternatives not in opposing characters and scenes, but often embodied in one person and one action; they were produced to expose possibilities for change. Brecht believed that the plays he wrote, with proper distancing effects designed, forced spectators to "adopt a watching-while-smoking attitude" and thus engendered what he called *complex seeing*: "Complex seeing must be practiced. . . . thinking across the flow [of a play] is almost more important than thinking in the flow" (Brecht, 1964/2014, p. 1818). This *complex seeing*, as Raymond Williams (1961) wrote, was Brecht's "most original dramatic contribution" (p. 156).

Some of Brecht's ideas on the theatre could well be applied to reading, interpreting, and writing about literary texts as well. First, Brecht's theatre (1964/2014), much more strongly than naturalistic theatre, emphasized its audience. Whereas an actor in a naturalistic play is divided from his or her audience with the so-called *fourth wall*, an epic actor often interacts directly with spectators. Watching and discussing this interaction, I have tried to convey to my students that similar awareness of the audience can be applied to the writing process. Further, in my classes, I have encouraged students to sustain critical distance while working with texts rather than to empathize with characters and situations. My students also practiced looking at the texts anew—even in a strange and unfamiliar way—allowing for new meanings and alternatives to emerge.

The exercise in *complex seeing* is also rewarding in academic writing, since the formulation of an argument rests on seeing and recognizing different alternatives and counterarguments. As Manis (2009) already suggests, Brecht's

(1964/2014) concept of *not-but* could well be applied to writing instruction and to teaching students to acknowledge counterarguments productively in their papers. Brecht (1964/2014) introduced the concept of *not-but* as a means for the actor to "fix" or "freeze" the alternatives that may be communicated (p. 2609). He writes:

> When they appear on the stage, besides what the actors actually are doing they will at all essential points discover, specify, imply what they are not doing; that is to say, they will act in such a way that the alternative emerges as clearly as possible. (Brecht, 1964/2014, p. 4326)

Thus, the main idea of this *not-but* is to demonstrate that nothing is fixed and inevitable and to expose the choices that an actor or character might face. As Brecht writes: "Whatever he [the actor] does not do must be contained and conserved in what he does. In this way every sentence and every gesture signify a decision; the character remains under observation and is tested" (Brecht, 1964/2014, p. 4330). So, as Manis (2009) writes, the act of recognizing alternatives is also integral to constructing counterarguments. "Brecht's theorization of how to render deliberate decision making clear as an actor portraying a character provides an excellent way of thinking about acknowledging counterarguments and establishing authority as a writer aware of the many contingencies informing one's topic" (Manis, 2009, p. 144).

Overall, I believe that teaching literature and writing through the study of theatre and performance has a transformative and productive character. The study of performance theory and practice can help students to develop skills in both creative and academic writing. Performances in general resonate more powerfully in students' memories and thus provide additional motivation to write about them, as was manifested in the writing assignments I gave in my drama and theatre class.

During the semester of teaching the drama and theatre course, my students—independently and as a group, together with me—attended and discussed several productions in Moscow theatres, ranging from classical to post-modern. Most of the productions we watched were based on the texts we read in class. We saw plays staged by some of the most famous Russian directors (Yuri Lubimov, Konstantin Raikin, Yuri Butusov, Konstantin Bogomolov, and others), but also the productions of British theatres—Barbican, Old Vic, National Theatre—broadcasted in Moscow through Theatre HD. Toward the end of the semester, the students had to write a review of one of the productions of their choice (Assignment #1). I encouraged them to evaluate the play while assuming the role of a distant spectator—a spectator

who could both enjoy and critically analyze the production. The assignment was to examine in an objective manner the success or failure of a given production, as intended for its target audience. In particular, they had to provide an interpretation and evaluation of the staging, acting, directing, etc., while concentrating on a few important and interesting aspects and critical or problematic points that the performance illustrated.

I always encouraged my students to attend plays with an open mind and willingness to accept the play as the director has presented it in the production, as well as to try to find good explanations and interpretations for what they considered a deviation from a standard or classical performance. The questions they had to address during their analysis also included the following: "How would you account for the choice of costumes, set designs, special effects, etc.? Did the director miss anything important you were able to see in your reading of the play? What are the new or different insights that the director tried to convey?"

In comparison to earlier assignments given in class, based on the reading and interpreting of a literary work, I felt that my students were more motivated to conduct the analysis of an adaptation of a literary text. They seemed to have less anxiety about expressing their judgments about a theatrical production, rather than about a text itself, scrutinized by intellectuals over centuries, and they honestly felt they could say something new. The immediacy of the performance and their own preconceptions of what this performance should have been like provided additional ground for forming their own judgments of the production. They were learning to disagree and to analyze in an objective manner rather than just to criticize what they had seen. Overall, this assignment provided them with the liberty to formulate their own opinions concerning the performance. I felt that my students were finally getting into the position of authority—the authority of the critic, knowledgeable about the text, and capable of judging how well the text was adapted for the stage. Moreover, I believe this assignment also encouraged them to conceptualize themselves as artists and producers of the performance, which prepared them for other more creative writing assignments.

The next writing project I assigned to my students (Assignment #2) was to take upon themselves the role of a contemporary theatre director and to express in writing their ideas about staging one of the dramas we discussed in class. The target audience for this production, as the assignment suggested, were primarily spectators of the same generation as my students. The learners also had to speculate about why the particular play they chose would resonate with younger audiences in Russia and how the questions or issues it addressed could potentially be relevant to or interesting for contemporary

spectators. Their concept proposal also had to address the elements of the production itself (the setting, costumes, music, stage design, etc.), as well as other theatrical techniques that the student-directors wanted to employ. The participants also had the liberty to choose either a classical or an experimental stage interpretation; an *epic theatre*, an absurdist, or a naturalistic production, as well as to alter the original text, if they wished. As Pope (1995) wrote in his book *Textual Intervention*, "the best way to understand how a text works, . . . is to change it: to play around with it, to intervene in it in some way (large or small), and then to try to account for the exact effect of what you have done" (p. 1). Even though intervention in the original text of the drama was allowed, it was not a required task. Yet, my students' papers demonstrated that they found this choice particularly exciting and productive.

As a result, in the conception of one student, the absurdist situation of Didi and Gogo from Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* turned into a "waiting for promotion" of two miserable analysts who hated their positions in a bank but would not dare to change anything in their lives (Sample 3).[3] In the conception of another student, the same characters represented two Russians—an intellectual and a philistine—waiting for the political change that never occurred. Another conception looked at Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* as a precursor to the post-modern concept of precariat (social class characterized by lack of job security, affecting both the material and psychological spheres of life) and moved the setting of the play from the palace to "a front office of some big corporation," retaining, however, most of the absurdist dialogues between the characters. One of the conceptions, based on Ibsen's *A Doll's House,* reflected on what gender dynamics would look like in the contemporary world and how politics can affect the life of a simple family (Sample 2).

In the end, what these students finally produced were proposals of quite independent dramas. Most of the essays offered either the modernization of a classical text, relocated the characters to altered yet similar circumstances, or visualized new dramas, which combined in a creative manner several texts through references and citations in a manner typical of post-modernism. Most importantly though, the majority of the student-directors tried to stress that they targeted critical and distant spectators and suggested several alienation effects that their dramas could employ, as well as alternative situations that spectators could elicit from their dramas. For example, a student working

3 See Appendix. The sample demonstrates an excerpt from students' play that grew out of the drama conception (Assignment #1) and the performance that I will discuss later in the chapter.

on Chekhov's *Three Sisters* moved the focus of the play from the Prozorov sisters to Natasha (probably the most unpleasant character in the drama) and suggested an alternative view on her, challenging traditional interpretations of the play. Stressing Natasha's ambitiousness and resourcefulness in comparison to the inertia and arrogance of the sisters, the student drew attention to the outcomes of the shifts in the social, class, and value system of the society. The aforementioned play, called *Waiting for Promotion*, attempted to create "a higher sense of absurdity" with the following alienating technique: "[analysts'] faces are colored in white and there are big black circles under the eyes. . . . Overwork is highlighted by the size of the objects of stage design: all the office staff—pens, paper piles, computers and chairs—are abnormally big" (from the conception on which Sample 3 was based). In the actual performance of the play, the students also critically juxtaposed their made-up absurd situation with those in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, having started Didi and Gogo's dialogue with an altered version of Chekhov's famous lines, projected on the screen.

> The time will come, and all will know what these sufferings [are] for, there will be no secrets, but now we need to live . . . we need to work, work harder. Tomorrow I will again sleep 4 hours, will work at the bank and will sacrifice my life to those who may need it. It's autumn now, soon it'll be winter with the snow, but I will be working, will be working. Good God, let alone being a man, it would be better to be an ox, better to be a simple horse, as long as one can sleep, rather [than] be a young man who finishes his work at 2 in the morning, spends 2 hours on a way back home, sleeps for 2 hours and then convulsively drinks coffee to be in shape. (Sample 3)

The adaptation of Wilde's *Salome* was conceptualized in a truly meta-theatrical manner as a rehearsal of the play, reflecting the predicament of a director and his actors to present a performance that could be contemporary and innovative, yet would touch upon the eternal artistic, philosophical and gender issues addressed in Wilde's text. This predicament was signaled with the following alienation technique, as the stage directions to the actual play demonstrate:

> In "STOP" moment the sound of the cassette rewinding appears. The sound is annoying and short, presenting "interruption" in its most direct and explicit form. It is important that a preceding action may be reversed and played one more time in

> a "distorted" version. Our aim is to "overfeed" a spectator with contemporary allusions and distortions, to create a feeling of the cumulative "awkwardness" with each new director's insertion. (Sample 1)

Even those students who at the beginning of the semester had advocated for classical adaptations of literature, chose to experiment creatively with canonical texts, unveiling both for themselves and for me as a reader latent themes and ideas they had discovered in these texts.

The writing assignment discussed above also laid the foundation for the final creative group project in my class—a 20-minute performance. My students had a choice to present a scene or scenes from one of the dramas we had covered in class or their own short play. Several groups chose to stage a play, drafted earlier by one of the students for Assignment #2, and to work together on its development. Thus, many of the students' ideas, expressed in Assignment #2, received practical realization on the stage of our classroom.

After the performances, my students had to submit scripts of their plays (Assignment #3). While I was reading these scripts, I found it fascinating to trace how students had distilled and re-conceptualized in writing some ideas that they earlier had tried to express during the production. Both performance and writing, it seemed, stimulated their critical awareness and editing initiatives, making them discern the conceptions that appeared awkward and unproductive during the play. Overall, I believe, throughout these activities (evaluating a play, conceptualizing one's own performance, staging it, and documenting it), my students got a taste of a genuine artistic process which always involves research, reflection, recording, and revision.

The major problems that I encountered during these assignments were the following. I noticed that some students found it difficult to carry through their ideas to their logical end, to connect conceptually all the elements of the production, and to interpret the choices they had made. Yet, taking into account that my students were future economists, rather than actors or directors, the overall result of this creative work truly exceeded my expectations. I also felt that the three essays discussed surpassed the previous class assignments in grammatical and lexical accuracy. This could have been the result not only of improvement through writing progression, but also the outcome of higher personal motivation associated with the creative task itself and the opportunity to choose the texts and themes the students found most engaging. I found it difficult, however, to establish proper evaluation criteria for the performances and the scripts because of the artistic nature of the assignment and the issue related to group-authorship. But since the performing project

accounted for only one-fourth of the course grade, I felt that participation in this creative collaborative work was more essential than each individual's contribution.

The feedback I received from students indicated that the majority of the class found creative writing assignments especially interesting and rewarding. Some of the students wrote in their evaluations that it was "cool" to go to the theatre and to be able to produce in writing a critical and informed judgment of a performance. Out of all literature and writing classes I have taught, I received more comments stating that students not only "improved," but "truly enjoyed writing" only in this class. Further, I believe this assignment provided my students with the long-desired liberty and space for shaping their thoughts; it encouraged them to experiment with new ideas and to subvert creatively the authority of traditional Russian stage interpretations.

Conclusion

Russian universities have consistently offered very strong education in foreign languages and linguistics. Yet, there is further potential to train students not only to succeed in the formal elements of writing in a foreign language, but also in the mechanics of thinking and argumentation, as well as in creative use of language. Yet, the integrated reading-writing literature instruction in the target language in the EFL context is only possible if FL instructors similarly receive proper training in teaching literature along with linguistic education.

Literature presents a crossroads of various discourses; therefore, its study offers rich opportunities for enhancing students' linguistic, cultural, and interpretative competencies along with analytical and creative writing skills. As Myles Chilton (2016) writes—and I can only agree with this—

> When we teach literature in a language foreign to that of our students, we are initiating and maintaining the circulation of not only a text, but also responses to the text. These responses too can be literature; these too can create knowledge, rather than merely regurgitate readings and interpretations that come from a professor of literature, an "authority." (p. 137)

The experience I had in my drama and theatre course demonstrated that through engagement with performance, my students not only sharpened their literary competencies, but also acquired their autonomous voices: the creative freedom they gained in this class was an effective step in overcoming former dependences upon assigned essay topics, authorial intentions, and authoritative teaching models. Most importantly, theatre enabled my students to un-

derstand more sharply the dramas we had been reading, to draw connections between writing and performance, and to create their own literary texts.

References

Belcher, D., & Hirvela, A. (2000). Literature and L2 composition: Revisiting the debate. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *9*(1), 21-39. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1060-3743(99)00021-1

Beljaeva, O. V., & Petrischeva, O. S. (2016). *Anglijskij Jazik:* Uchebnoje posobije po domashnemu chteniju po rasskazam Jeffrey Archer [English: A reading guide to short stories by Jeffrey Archer]. MGIMO University.

Benjamin, W. (1998). *Understanding Brecht*. (A. Bostock, Trans.). Verso. (Original work published 1966). https://www.scribd.com/document/138098970/Benjamin-Walter-Understanding-Brecht

Bloemert, J., Paran A., Jansen E., & van de Grift, W. (2017). Students' perspective on the benefits of EFL literature education. *The Language Learning Journal*, *47*(3), 371-384. https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2017.1298149

Brecht, B. (2014). *Brecht on theatre.* (M. Siberman, T. Kuhn, & S. Giles, Eds.) (Davis, R. Fursland, & S. Giles, Trans.) [Kindle edition]. Bloomsbury. (Original work published 1964). https://www.amazon.com/Brecht-Theatre-Development-Aesthetic-Bertolt/dp/0809005425

Brooker, P. (2006). Key words in Brecht's theory and practice of theatre. In P. Thomas & G. Sacks (Eds.), *The Cambridge companion to Brecht* (pp. 209-224). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521857090

Calafato, R. (2018). Literature in language education: Evolving language pedagogies and text preferences in contemporary Russia. *Voprosy obrazovaniya [Educational Studies], 2*, 91-116. https://doi.org/10.17323/1814-9545-2018-2-91-116

Carson, J. G., & Leki, I. (1993). *Reading in the composition classroom: Second language perspectives.* Heinle & Heinle; Wadsworth.

Chertov, V. F. (Ed.). (2018). *Programmi obscheobrazovateljnih uchrezdenij*: *Literatura, 5-11 classi,* [Comprehensive school programs: Literature, grades 5-11]. Prosveschenije. https://www.sinykova.ru/biblioteka/chertov_literatyra_5-11kl/

Chilton, M. (2016). *English studies beyond the "center:" Teaching literature and the future of global English.* Routledge.

Collie, J., & Slater, S. (1987). *Literature in the language classroom: a resource book of ideas and activities*. Cambridge University Press.

Danchevskaya, O. E. (2012). *"The magician" by W. S. Maugham: Uchebnoe posobie po domashnemu chteniju* [*The magician* by W. S. Maugham: Reading guide]. Flinta.

Fishman, J., Lunsford A., McGregor B., & Otuteye M. (2005). Performing writing, performing literacy. *College Composition and Communication*, *57*(2), 224-252. http://www.jstor.org/stable/30037914

Gilroy, M., & Parkinson, B. (1996). Teaching literature in a foreign language. *Language Teaching, 29*(4), 213-225. https://doi.org/10.1017/S026144480000851X

Hirvela, A. (1996). Reader-response theory and ELT. *ELT Journal, 50*(2), 127-134. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/50.2.127

Hirvela, A. (2001). Connecting reading and writing through literature. In D. Belcher & A. Hirvela (Eds.), *Linking literacies: Perspectives on L2 reading-writing connections* (pp. 109-34). University of Michigan Press.

Hirvela, A. (2004). *Connecting reading and writing in second language writing instruction*. University of Michigan Press.

Kohanova, B. A. (Ed.). (2011). *Technologii in metodiki obuchenia literature. Uchebnoe posobie dlja bakalavrov* [Methodologies and strategies of teaching literature. A study manual for bachelor students]. Flinta.

Korotkina, I. (2014). Academic writing in Russia: Evolution or revolution? Social Science Research Network, https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2435130

Kosheleva, I. N. (2013). *Anglijskij Jazik: Uchebno-metodicheskoje posobije po domashnemu chteniju po romanu A. Hailey's Airport* [English: Reading guide to A. Hailey's *Airport*]. MGIMO University.

Kostareva, N. L. (2012). O formah i vida vneauditornoj samostojateljnoj raboti v kursah disziplin po zarubeznoj literature. [Types and forms of independent study in foreign language literature courses] In M. M. Murtazaeva, S. G. Filipova, A. U. Sapoznikova, U. P. Bolotina, O. D. Ermakova, & N. L. Kostareva (Eds.), *Sovremennie metodiki in technologii* o*buchenia inostrannomu jaziku i literature v shkove in v vuze* [Contemporary methodologies and techniques in teaching foreign language and literature in school and at a university] (pp. 68-76). Lema.

Manis, S., (2009). Writing as performance: Using performance theory to teach writing in theatre classrooms. *Theatre Topics*, *19*(2), 139-151. https://doi.org/10.1353/tt.0.0072

Margolin, D. (1997). A perfect theatre for one: Teaching "performance composition." *The Drama Review, 41*(2), 68-81. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1146625

Moscow State Linguistic University. (2020). *Bachelor degree program: Linguistics 45.03.02. Theory and methodology of teaching foreign languages and cultures.* Moscow State Linguistic University. https://linguanet.ru/en/studies/programmes-courses/bachelors/linguistics-45-03-02-theory-and-methodology-of-teaching-foreign-languages-and-cultures/

Murtazaeva, M. M., Filipova, S. G., Sapoznikova, A. U., Bolotina, U. P., Ermakova, O. D., & Kostareva, N. L. (Eds.) (2012). *Sovremennie metodiki in technologii obuchenia inostrannomu jaziku i literature v shkove in v vuze* [Contemporary methodologies and techniques in teaching foreign language and literature in school and at a university]. Lema.

Pope, R. (1995). *Textual intervention: Critical and creative strategies for literary studies*. Routledge.

Rokossovskaya, N. K. (2006). *Anglijskij Jazik: Uchebnoje posobije po domashnemu chteniju dlja studentov vtorogo kursa fakuljteta mezdunarodnih ekonomicheskih otnoshenij* [English: Reading guide for second-year students of international economic relations]. MGIMO University.

Smetannikova, N. N. (2005). *Strategialjnij podohd k obucheniu chteniju* [Strategic approach to teaching reading]. Shkoljnaja Biblioteka.

Tarverdjan, A. S., & Ustinova, E. V. (2013). *Anglijskij Jazik: Uchebnoje posobije po domashnemu chteniju. "Rage of Angels" by S. Sheldon* [English: Reading guide to "Rage of Angels" by S. Sheldon]. MGIMO University.

Tarverdjan, A. S., & Zueva, V.V. (2012). *Anglijskij Jazik: Uchebnoje posobije po domashnemu chteniju к sborniku rasskazov "Crime never pays"* [English: Reading guide to the collection of stories "crime never pays"]. MGIMO University.

Tierney, R. J., & Pearson, P. D. (1983). Towards a composing model of reading. *Language arts, 60*(5), 568-580. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41961506

Vandrick, S. (2018). Reading and writing connections in writing about literature. In D. Belcher & A. Hirvela (Eds.), *The TESOL encyclopedia of English language teaching* (pp. 1-6). John Wiley & Sons.

Werry, M., & Walseth, S. L. (2011). Articulate bodies: Writing instruction in a performance-based curriculum. *Theatre Topics*, *21*(2), 185-197. https://muse.jhu.edu/article/449857/pdf

Williams, R. (1961) The achievement of Brecht. *Critical Quarterly*, *3*(2), 153-162. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8705.1961.tb01157.x

Zvjagintseva, A. V., & Borisova, E. Y. (2019). *Raspisanie uchebnih zanjatij instituta inostrannih jazikov na 2019–2020 uchebnij god* [Course schedule of the Department of Foreign Languages for school year 2019–2020]. Moscow State Pedagogical University. http://mpgu.su/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Расписание-английское-отделение.pdf

Appendix: Excerpts from students' theatrical adaptations (Assignment #3)

Sample 1

Salome

(an adaptation of Oscar Wilde's *Salome*)

Notes*:*

In "STOP" moment the sound of the cassette rewinding appears. The sound is annoying and short, presenting "interruption" in its most direct and explicit form. It is important that a preceding action may be reversed and played one more time in a "distorted" version.

Our aim is to "overfeed" a spectator with contemporary allusions and distortions, to create a feeling of the cumulative "awkwardness" with each new director's insertion. Increasing discomfort eventually evolves in so-called "catharsis" both on spectators' and actors' side.

– The director sits on the side of the scene at the table. She is creating a new play. The scene with the actors illustrates the flow of her imagination.

– Black screen with white text on the background:

Salome

well-known contemporary director.
DIRECTOR. *(hectically, stands up)* I am a contemporary director. I need to write a play. I want my play to be contemporary**.** I want my play to be eternal**.** I want my play to be relevant. I want my play to be experimental.
– *Leans on the table*
I have a deadline in a month!
Herodias, Herod, Salome . . . Ok, ok . . . the setting—the moon, the palace.
– *Sits at the table, dreams*
– Herod, Herodias, and Salome appear, sit on three chairs. They wear blankets, under the blankets are casual contemporary clothes (not seen).
HEROD (imperatively, expressively acting). Dance for me, Salome, I beseech thee. If you dance for me you may ask of me what you want, and I will give you thee. Ask of me what you wilt, and I will give it thee. Yes, dance for me, Salome, and whatsoever you shall ask of me I will give it thee, even the half of my kingdom.
SALOME. (standing up). Will you indeed give me whatsoever I shall ask of you, Tetrarch?
HERODIAS. I will not have her dance.
HEROD. Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, even the half of my kingdom.
STOP (cassette rewind). Characters freeze up.
Director: This will not work. The costumes, I should change the costumes. The costumes must be contemporary. I want the young audience to relate.
– Characters take blankets off. Stay in casual clothes.
– (cassette rewind)
HEROD. Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, even the half of my kingdom.
SALOME. You swear it, Tetrarch?
HEROD. I swear it, Salome.
HERODIAS. Peace. Let her alone.
SALOME. By what will you swear this thing, Tetrarch?
HEROD. By my life, by my crown, by my gods. Whatsoever thou shalt desire I will give it thee, even to the half of my kingdom, if thou wilt but dance for me. O Salome, Salome, dance for me!
SALOME. You have sworn an oath, Tetrarch.
HEROD. I have sworn an oath.
SALOME. Whatever I wish, be it even the half of your kingdom?
HERODIAS. I do not want her dancing.
SALOME. I will dance for you, Tetrarch.
HEROD. You hear what your daughter says. She is going to dance for me. And when you have danced for me, forget not to ask of me whatsoever you want.
And I have never failed of my word. I am not of those who break their oaths. I am the slave of my word, and my word is the word of a king. The King of Cappadocia had

ever a lying tongue, but he is no true king. He is a coward. Also he owes me money that he will not repay.
STOP (cassette rewind).
Director (highbrow speech). No Cappadocia here, it is not relevant. My play must be relevant. I want politics here. As Brecht said, "Art is not a mirror with which we reflect reality, but a hammer with which we shape it" (expressively admires herself while quoting Brecht. Yes, more politics.
– (cassette rewind)
– On the screen: the photo of "United Russia" (leading political party). The photo is intentionally awkward and obviously does not fit the play.
HEROD. The King of Cappadocia had ever a lying tongue, but he is no true king. He is a coward. Он должен знать, что будет уничтожен. А мы, жертвы агрессии, мы как мученики попадем в рай, а они просто сдохнут, потому что даже раскаяться не успеют.
HERODIAS. (a bit confused after Herod's speech, still not showing confusion explicitly). Do not dance, my daughter. I will not have her dance while you look at her in this fashion. In a word, I will not have her dance.
HEROD. Do not rise, my wife, my queen. I will not go till she had danced. Dance, Salome, dance for me. I will not go within till she hath danced. Dance, Salome, dance for me.
SALOME. I am ready, Tetrarch.
– Salome takes a veil, puts it on.
– Salome starts performing "Dance of the Seven veils", taking the veil off.
STOP (cassette rewind).
DIRECTOR. Ok, why does Salome take off her veil? It must have a sense! A deep social sense is indispensable in my play. She is taking of her veil, because . . . it is warm, because of . . . global warming! This is definitely missing! (expressively presses the cassette rewind button)
– (cassette rewind)
– On the screen: melting ice, poor polar bears and penguins, stock posters about global warming with "Go vegan" calls
Salome. I am ready, Tetrarch. It's warm here.
First, how warm? (change in tone)
If we act NOW, the worldwide temperature increases will be kept to 2 degrees Fahrenheit per year, and the damages—though significant—will be manageable. But if we don't act, and the temperature increases by 9 degrees by the end of the century, the damage will be CATASTROPHIC and IRREVERSIBLE (expressively).
Our biosphere is being sacrificed to our needs. We need to keep fossil fuels in the ground. And if solutions within the system are so impossible to find, maybe we should change the system itself.

[inciting the audience, frantically] We have run out of excuses and we are running out of time. I'm here to state that change is coming, whether you like it or not. The real power belongs to the people.

. . .

STOP (cassette rewind).

Director. Something is missing here. I need more . . . something . . . I had ecology, feminism, philosophy . . . But the play is still not contemporary enough! I want to be an innovator! The time for innovation has come, the time for fear is over!

My Salome will be experimental! My Salome will be a . . . MAN!

– Herod takes Salome's place, repeats her words and tries to kiss Iokanaan

– (cassette rewind)

HEROD[SALOME]. You didn't want me to kiss your mouth, Iokanaan. Well! I will kiss it now. I will bite it with my teeth as one bites a ripe fruit. Yes, I will kiss thy mouth, Iokanaan.

– Herod stops, realizing that something goes wrong.

HEROD. What is going on here? Does anybody understand?

HERODIAS. Not really.

SALOME. I do not know.

HERODIAS. Do not you think that everything became senseless?

HEROD. Yeah, it was too much.

SALOME. I feel that I lost myself.

Herodias. I feel that someone distorted our personalities, interfered the whole story.

HEROD. Alas, poor Wilde! I knew him, Herodias: a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy.

SALOME. Here hung those lips that I have kissed I know not how oft.

HEROD. Now everything is wasted, everything is ruined . . .

HERODIAS. BECAUSE OF HER (notices director, points at the her)

– Characters start screaming simultaneously. They approach the director, who is still sitting at the table on the side of the scene.

SALOME. YOU RUINED MY PERSONALITY!

HEROD. WHAT DID YOU DO TO US!

HERODIAS. I HATE YOU!

– The director anxiously presses the "cassette rewind" button, the sound plays, but the characters do not stop.

– The characters come close to the director, slam her with the plaster bust and kill her. The director falls from her chair and silently pronounces her last words.

DIRECTOR. I just wanted to be contemporary . . .

– The characters silently put the blankets on, sit on their chairs and take their initial positions. Herod starts . . .

HEROD. Dance for me, Salome . . .

Sample 2

Nora's House
(an adaptation of Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House)*
Space is separated in two parts, one has a bench or chairs and a kitchen table with a lamp on it (Torvald's room, far from the door), one has nothing but a chair and a table.
SCENE 1.
[Enter NORA, well-dressed woman, dressed as a business lady, powerful, practical, a bit sentimental. She has a small red book in her hands, military ID. She is checking her phone.]
[On the screen appears twitter account of Torvald with an avatar of Russian bear, he has twitted something related to the celebration and patriotic with lots of Russian flag smiles and stuff.]
NORA. [Coming to the door of Torvald.] Is that my lark twittering there? [No answer.] Good, he is still not here.
[She's putting the pass to the drawer, going to Torvald's room, putting a cover to the table, putting drinks and food there. She is about to take a selfie for her husband, but the doorbell rings.]
NORA. Oh, he's coming! [She runs to the door, opens it, hesitates and steps back a bit surprised].
[ENTER CHRISTINA, a woman (possibly played by a man), dressed fancy, tastelessly and weirdly, with lots of make up on her face.]
MRS. LINDEN. [Screaming and acting actively.] How do you do, Nora?
NORA. [Doubtfully.] How do you do?
MRS. LINDEN. I see you don't recognize me!
NORA. No, I don't think—oh yes!—I believe—[Suddenly brightening.] What, Christina! Is it really you?
MRS. LINDEN. Yes; really, I!
NORA. Christina! And to think I didn't know you! But how could I—[More softly.] How changed you are; Christina!
MRS. LINDEN. Yes, no doubt. In twenty years after graduation—! Skin got a bit wrinkly; voice got a bit lower, but all in all it's still old crazy me, remember? [*Shows NORA photo on her phone, on the screen photo of young NORA with a good looking, young girl, on the background NES signs.*]
NORA. Yes, now I can see the dear old face again. It was only at the first glance—But you're a little paler, Christina—and perhaps a little thinner.
MRS. LINDEN. And much, much older, Nora.
NORA. Yes, perhaps a little older—not much—ever so little. And now you have come to town? You were in Norway, as I remember. All that long journey in mid-winter! [*She suddenly checks herself; seriously.*] Oh, what a thoughtless wretch I am! Here I

sit chattering on, and [*Softly.*] Poor Christina! I forgot: you are a widow.
MRS. LINDEN. [*Recklessly.*] Yes; my husband died three years ago.
NORA. I know, I know; I saw it on Facebook. Oh, believe me, Christina, I did mean to write to you; but I kept putting it off, and something always came in the way.
MRS. LINDEN. I can quite understand that, Nora dear.
NORA. No, Christina; it was horrid of me. Oh, you poor darling! how much you must have gone through! So utterly alone! How dreadful that must be!
MRS. LINDEN. He left me nothing, we had no children, and I had not even a sorrow or a longing to dwell upon. I didn't really care about him.
NORA. [*Looking at her incredulously.*] My dear Christina, how is that possible?
MRS. LINDEN. [*Smiling and stroking her hair.*] Oh, it happens so sometimes, Nora. You know, it's so horrible in that place Norway. I was going there for a brawny, handsome, bearded Viking, who would be a proper man, and you know what? All the men there are just pussies. Women, and I say it again, women should do all men's job, women should start flirting in a bar [*she's making NORA sit down and acting out everything she's saying*] buy them drinks and so on. And men are just hesitating, pretending to be shy, putting on an act, and you literally need to do all the work, can you imagine that? And if I come there dressed up fancy, you know, in my best possible outlook, all shining and glimmering, none, none of them wouldn't even try to talk to me, I'm not talking about flirting or something.
NORA. Now tell me, is it really true that you didn't love your husband? What made you marry him, then?
MRS. LINDEN. Oh, he was some old minister who adored Russian women. He was so brilliant and popular, I thought, he would be perfect. And of course, money and residency, it is all important. But he turned out to be a fraud, he signed some important papers with fake signatures and sold to a Stock Exchange speculator a Cabinet secret. Then, it all was published because of some sort of lady [Cheveley] or something, and he died of a heart attack, not such a big deal.
[*Pause.*]
MRS. LINDEN. Anyway, I want you to tell me—[*Pause.*] How is your life going?
NORA. I have three of the loveliest children. I can't show them to you just now; they're out with their nurse. And I love my husband very much. He sa—
MRS. LINDEN. [*Interrupting.*] I've seen your Instagram post last week, about your great stroke of fortune. That you became a manager in BCG.
NORA. In McKinsey. And a partner, not a manager.
. . .
NORA. Yes indeed. But now let me tell you, Christina—I, too, have something to be bothered with.
MRS. LINDEN. And what is that?
NORA. My family might be torn apart.

MRS. LINDEN. What? Your family?
NORA. Yes, by our damned government and its damned regulations.
MRS. LINDEN. But how is that possible?
NORA. Last week I have found out an email from the recruitment office where it was stated that according to a new law, my husband should immediately come to the office and serve in the military.
MRS. LINDEN. Oh, this law that forces every man, who is younger than 60 and unemployed, to serve in the military for five years.
NORA. Exactly. And you know, the demand on the military ID is extremely high because of that, they are really strict with all the fake IDs, and in order to get one, you need to spend a fortune on it, even for me it's unaffordable.
MRS. LINDEN. Yes, that must be really expensive. So would he go to the army then?
NORA. No, I wouldn't allow that, my family is sacred for me.
MRS. LINDEN. How do you want to prevent it?
NORA. I did. It's already done.
MRS. LINDEN. Of course you couldn't bribe them.
NORA. No? Why not?
MRS. LINDEN. A person of your position can't bribe others as it might put all your career under threat.
NORA. Yes, it's true. But what can I do if they want to take my husband from my family. Should I just silently agree to all the decisions of those idiots who are sitting up there?
MRS. LINDEN. So you did . . .
NORA. I never said that I bribed somebody. But using some connections, making some Agreements of Cooperation. There are many ways I may have got it. I may have got it from some admirer. When one is so attractive as I am—
. . .
SCENE 2
[*ENTER TORVALD AND RANK. TORVALD is played by a woman.*]
RANK. You know, I want to be honest with you. When I was in a soviet army, it was exactly as you described: the army was a forge of masculinity, it was strong, it was prestigious, it made a man out of a boy, it disciplined you and gave you a military spirit. If you said something wrongly, you would always get your face punched. But now, let me tell you something, now, it's completely different. It's all corrupt, dirty, older generations are humiliating younger ones, and one just returns from there lacking all the skills he was supposed to get.
TORVALD. General, you're wrong. Our army is still strong, we showed them all who is dominating in the world. Everybody has seen our new tanks and weapons, and that it's better to not play around with us.
RANK. Dominating? Sending couple of generals and some weapons to Syria is dom-

inating for you? In former times, people were dying as heroes. They were fighting against bloody fascists, and we still sing praises to them. When we won the war, we were happy. And what the point in the army now? People have nothing to fight against. There's no proper war, Hitler is dead, nothing. With whom are you fighting now?

TORVALD. All our western enemies, States, they all want us to be weak, terrorists in Syria and—.

RANK. It's all crap. They are all made up and exaggerated as hell. What is going on now, can you tell me?

TORVALD. [*Angrily.*] Our soldiers are the bravest—

RANK. [*Interrupting.*] I'll tell you what's going on now. This government is as much corrupt as the army. Sick and old people who are supposed to die are not dying, look at me. So the government can't afford to keep everybody anymore. They perfectly understand that our people would do everything to protect their home and families, though they can't do practically anything in case of the potential attacks, and there's nobody to defend against. And that's why we have all these new rules about sending men to the army. They simply hope that they would die there, meaninglessly, like some sort of animals. And then they would call it a heroic death.

Sample 3

Waiting for Promotion

(an adaptation of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*)

Text on the screen:

"Office of an Invest Bank.

Two analysts: Vladimir and Estragon"

The dialogue from Chekhov's *The Three Sisters*:

ESTRAGON (puts his head on Vladimir's chest): придёт время, все узнают, зачем все это, для чего эти страдания, никаких не будет тайн, а пока надо жить . . . надо работать, только работать! Завтра я опять посплю 4 часа, буду работать в банке и всю свою жизнь отдам тем, кому она, быть может, нужна. Теперь осень, скоро придет зима, засыплет снегом, а я буду работать, буду работать . . .". Боже мой, не то что человеком, уж лучше быть волом, лучше быть простою лошадью, только бы хоть иногда поспать, чем человеком, который заканчивает работать в 2 часа ночи, 2 часа едет до дому, 2 часа спит а потом судорожно пьет кофе чтобы быть в форме.

ESTRAGON: The time will come, and all will know what are these sufferings for, there will be no secrets, but now we need to live . . . we need to work, work harder. Tomorrow I will again sleep 4 hours, will work at the bank and will sacrifice my life to those who may need it. It's autumn now, soon it'll be winter with the snow, but I will

be working, will be working. Good God, let alone being a man, it would be better to be an ox, better to be a simple horse, as long as one can sleep, rather than be a young man who finishes his work at 2 in the morning, spends 2 hours on a way back home, sleeps for 2 hours and then convulsively drinks coffee to be in shape.
VLADIMIR: Если бы знать, если бы знать!
Estragon begins to rummage through a huge pile of papers (instead of a boot).
ESTRAGON: (giving up again). We need to work harder.
VLADIMIR: (advancing with short, stiff strides, legs wide apart). I'm beginning to come round to that opinion. All my life I've tried to put it from me, saying Vladimir, be reasonable, you haven't yet tried everything. And I resumed the struggle. (He broods, musing on the struggle. Turning to Estragon.) So, you finished the report.
ESTRAGON: Did I?
VLADIMIR: I'm glad to see you back. I thought you were gone forever.
ESTRAGON: Me too.
VLADIMIR: (hurt, coldly). Where did you spend the night?
ESTRAGON: In the office.
VLADIMIR: And they didn't give you another report?
ESTRAGON: Beat me? Certainly, they gave me another report.
VLADIMIR: The same lot as usual?
ESTRAGON: The same? I don't know. Ah stop blathering and help me off with this bloody thing.
VLADIMIR: Hand in hand graduates of the New Economics School. Among the first in the rating. We were respectable in those days. Now it's too late. They wouldn't even let us up. (Estragon is crying over the pile of papers) What are you doing?
ESTRAGON: For the tenth time redoing the same report, that no one needs. Did that never happen to you?
VLADIMIR: It hurts?
ESTRAGON: (angrily). Hurts! He wants to know if it hurts!
VLADIMIR: (angrily). No one ever suffers but you. I don't count. I'd like to hear what you'd say if you had to do their presentations as I do.
ESTRAGON: It hurts?
VLADIMIR: (angrily). Hurts! He wants to know if it hurts!
ESTRAGON: Why don't you help me?
VLADIMIR: Sometimes I feel it coming all the same. Then I go all queer. (He takes off his jacket, peers inside it, feels about inside it, shakes it, puts it on again.)
How shall I say? Relieved and at the same time . . . (he searches for the word) . . . appalled. (With emphasis.) AP- PALLED. AP- PALLED. AP- PALLED. We need to work harder. (Estragon with a supreme effort succeeds in finishing the first part of his report. He peers inside it, staring sightlessly before him.) Well?
. . .

ESTRAGON: Charming spot. (He turns, advances to front, halts facing auditorium.) Inspiring prospects. (He turns to Vladimir.) Let's go.
VLADIMIR: We can't.
ESTRAGON: Why not?
VLADIMIR: We're waiting for Promotion.
ESTRAGON: (despairingly). Ah! (Pause.) You're sure it was here?
VLADIMIR: What?
ESTRAGON: That we will get a promotion
VLADIMIR: He said in the office. (They look around.) Do you see any others?
ESTRAGON: What is it?
VLADIMIR: I don't know.
ESTRAGON: Where are other workers?
VLADIMIR: It must be dead.
ESTRAGON: No more weeping.
VLADIMIR: Or perhaps it's not the season.
ESTRAGON: Looks to me more like a cage.
VLADIMIR: A prison
ESTRAGON: A cage.
VLADIMIR: What are you insinuating? That we've come to the wrong place?
ESTRAGON: The promotion should be here.
VLADIMIR: He didn't say for sure it'd come.
ESTRAGON: And if it doesn't come?
VLADIMIR: We'll stay here tomorrow.
ESTRAGON: And then the day after tomorrow.
VLADIMIR: Possibly.
ESTRAGON: And so on.
VLADIMIR: The point is—
ESTRAGON: Until it comes.