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Adaptations of Chekhov's *A Boring Story* in Polish Cinema

> "A Boring Story", for it is my favorite among all
> Chekhov's stories, an outstandingly fascinating work
> which for gentleness, sadness, and strangeness
> has no equal in the literary world.
>
> Thomas Mann, "The Stature of Anton Chekhov" (Mann, 1955)

> Changes are inevitable the moment one
> abandons the linguistic for the visual medium.
>
> George Bluestone, "Novels into Film" (Bluestone, 1957)

Introduction: The concept and problems of film adaptation

Literature and cinema are two inextricably linked art forms, since screen images have been based on literary works since the very beginning of cinema. In this regard, the problems of film adaptation attract the attention of both film and literary critics.

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The most common interpretation of the process of film adaptation of literary works in modern science is a translation from the language of literature into the language of cinema. For example, T. F. Efremova's *Новый словарь русского языка* [New Dictionary of the Russian Language] defines film adaptation as "the creation of a film or television film based on a literary work" (Ефремова, 2000, p. 1047). A. N. Bulyko's *Словарь иностранных слов* [Big Dictionary of Foreign Words] gives a similar definition: "Screening is the embodiment on the screen of any work of theatrical art or fiction that is not intended specifically for cinema" (Булыко, 2008, p. 675).

Georgetown University professor L. Fedorova understands the term "screen adaptation" in a narrow sense, believing that it reflects the binary relationship between the source text and its screen version and is therefore a kind of illustration of a literary text. This researcher uses *adaptation* and *interpretation* as broader terms that imply different types of interaction between text and film (Федорова, 2022, p. 8).

However, a different point of view has recently become widespread, according to which the adaptation of literary works is not just a *translation* from literary to film language but a new, separate type of artistic creativity that is a specific type of interaction between the arts (Арутюнян, 2003, p. 14). Researchers believe that film adaptation is distinguishable from interpretation, which N. N. Maslova calls "a special type of secondary text of artistic discourse based on a literary source". She proposes defining it as *film retelling* (Маслова, 2010, p. 59). According to Professor V. I. Mildon, a film adaptation helps the viewer discover new, unknown meanings in a well-known literary text, hence art becomes entertainment art (Мильдон, 2011, p. 11).

Each type of art has its own system of images, ideas and concepts, directly related to the *code* according to which the artist creates. This fact largely determines the complexity of the comparative analysis of the languages of literature and cinema.

Let us discuss the general problems associated with the film adaptation of a literary work.

Firstly, there is a contradiction between a literal illustration of the original source and the director's departure to greater artistic independence from the writer's intention, a point on which there remains no consensus among film critics today. For example, the famous film adaptation theorist, prof. Robert Stam of New York University, believes that the task of adaptation is not to exact the most accurate transfer of a literary source possible:

The adaptation is automatically different and original due to the change of medium. Here we can take as our own Fritz Lang's response (in Contempt) to the producer Prokosch's accusation of infidelity to the script: "Yes, Jerry, in the script it's written, in a film it's images and sounds […] a motion picture it's called" (Stam, 2000, p. 55).[1]

Secondly, the growing commercialization of cinema. Today, the commercial goals of most films largely subordinate the artistic objectives. Commercialization takes the film further and further away from the book. As S. N. Ilchenko writes, "the modern practice of transferring famous texts to the screen is a clear illustration of the principles of show civilization. This is manifested in the visual image of the era reflected in the classics that is formed in their television versions" (Ильченко, 2015, p. 88).

Thirdly, the difference in epochs. The screen adaptation of the classical literary heritage is a special kind of cinema that involves a new look at the works of past eras. At the same time, adaptations also apply new aesthetic criteria and impose modern ideological views on man and society. All this leads to an inevitable distortion of the author's intention

Fourthly, ethno-cultural features, if we are talking about a situation of cultural dialogue in which one country films the literary works of another country. The film adaptations of Russian literary classics by foreign directors are often perceived to fail by Russian-speaking audiences, since "only national adaptations of classics are expected to be considered classics in Russia"[2] (Федорова, 2022, p. 12). Attempts by foreign directors to make films based on works of classical Russian literature are usually not enthusiastically received. At best, they are met with condescending irony, bewilderment, and sometimes outrage. This may indicate the "sacred status of Russian classics". For example, the release of D. Wright's Anna Karenina caused public discussion to flare up based on ideological rather than aesthetic motives. Perhaps, indignation is caused by *strangers'* very attempt to master *one's own* Russian classics, in which the *classic* turns into a spectacle.

In this article, we will attempt to identify the specifics of the film adaptation of A. P. Chekhov's *A Boring Story* in Polish cinema. The material for this study was the film *Nieciekawa historia* [A Boring Story] by W. Has (1982).

[1] J. D. Connor outlined interesting judgments on the problems of adaptation in his article "The Persistence of Fidelity: Adaptation Theory Today" (Connor, 2007).

[2] This largely concerns the perception of foreign adaptations of Russian classics in the territory of Belarus as well.

There are many film adaptations of Russian literary classics by F. M. Dostoevsky, A. S. Pushkin, L. N. Tolstoy, I. S. Turgenev, etc., of which the stories and novels of A. P. Chekhov occupy the leading position. Between 1909 and 2020, Chekhov's works were screened almost 600 times (not only movies, but also television plays, operas, ballets, and animation). Besides Russia, Chekhov's works have been screened in England, Argentina, Hungary, Germany, India, USA, Romania, Turkey, Finland, France, etc.

The name Chekhov occupies a special place in the screen culture of Poland. Researcher Grażyna Pawlak provides information about 64 television performances based on Chekhov in her book *Literatura rosyjska w Teatrze Telewizji Polskiej w latach 1953–2003* [Russian Literature in the Television Theater 1953–2003].[3] These performances were shown as part of the Television Theater project – a unique national project that was very popular in Poland (see Majcherek, n.d.).

FilmPolski.pl, the internet catalog of Polish Film, contains information about 84 film adaptations of Chekhov's works in Poland between 1951 and 2000 (see "Antoni Czechow", n.d.). In addition to those mentioned above, information is also provided on thirteen short films (mostly student films) and three animated films. According to this catalogue, the first film adaptation of Chekhov in Poland dates back to 1951, when Andrzej Wajda, then a student at Lodz film school and a future classic of world cinematography, made his first (educational) film *Zły chłopiec* [The Evil Boy] (Wajda, 1951), based on Chekhov's story *The Evil Boy*.[4]

A Boring Story by A. P. Chekhov

A Boring Story was written by Chekhov in the village of Luka (Sumy district, Kharkov province), where the writer's brothers and sister lived. Chekhov spent three summers there: 1888, 1889 and 1894. In addition to *A Boring Story* and *Trouble*, he also wrote *Name Day* in Luka. Moreover, Anton

[3] The study contains many important details about Polish television productions of classical Russian authors and presents a general picture of the reception of Russian plays on Polish television. The structure of the book allows the reader to view Russian literature in this medium from at least two different perspectives: chronologically, and regarding the reception of the most popular authors in Poland – Chekhov, Dostoevsky, Gorky, Gogol, Bulgakov, Pushkin, Turgenev, etc. (Pawlak, 2014, pp. 74–84).

[4] A six-minute black-and-white silent sketch is one of three short films shot by A. Wajda during her time studying and directing at the Łódź Film School. It was supposed to be a thesis,

Pavlovich worked on *The Story of an Unknown Man* there. In the summer of 1889, Chekhov's brother Nikolai died, which deeply affected the writer. Thoughts about the true purpose of human life haunted him. Then Chekhov had the idea to write a long, serious story about an elderly professor of medicine who is going through a serious internal crisis. As a result, in 1889, the nature of Chekhov's work changed. He started out as an author of humorous sketches under various pseudonyms (for example, Antosha Chehonte, *The Man without a Spleen*, etc.) Then he began to write serious prose under his real name.

The original title of the story was "My name and I". Thus, Chekhov wanted to emphasize the separateness of the inner essence of a person from his outer, visible to everyone, shell. The name of the professor is synonymous with a happy fate, prosperity and talent. However, the owner of this name, Nikolai Stepanovich, is lonely and unhappy.

Work on the story was difficult; Anton Pavlovich did not like much in it. One day he wrote to his publisher and friend A. Suvorin that the story "turns out to be boring" and "uninteresting", so Chekhov gave it a new and final title, "A Boring Story (from the Notes of an Old Man)", sending the finished text to the editor of Severny Vestnik magazine, A. N. Pleshcheev. At the same time, he ironically remarked in the covering letter: "The most boring thing in it, as you will see, is long arguments which, unfortunately, cannot be thrown away, since my hero is writing notes that he cannot do without. They characterize the hero and his mood" (Чехов, 1976). Pleshcheev, who greeted the story enthusiastically, responded, but questioning the title: "Why did you call it *A Boring Story*? Call it something else. Why give yourself a reason for the cheap wit of scoundrel reviewers? The crowd will find the story boring – due to the lack of a template plot and an abundance of reasoning" (*Плещеев А. Н. – Чехову А. П.*, n.d.). But Chekhov did not change the name – so it accurately determined the state of mind of the protagonist while at the same time defining the illness of a whole generation.

In 1889, the story was published in the 11th issue of *Severny Vestnik*, and in 1890 it was included in the *Gloomy People* collection.

To some extent, the famous Russian histologist Alexander Ivanovich Babukhin served as the prototype for the hero, whose brilliant lectures Chek-

but the director was not satisfied with the result and refused to submit it for defense. The film is available at the following link: https://filmpolski.pl/fp/index.php?etiuda=32178

hov had listened to when he studied at Moscow University. Chekhov indirectly confirmed this idea: "This is a collective person, although much is taken from Babukhin" (Яковлев, 1986). It seems that a lot was taken from Chekhov himself, although he warned that one should not look for his own opinions in those expressed by the professor. But the reader immediately felt the author's genuine interest in the issues that his hero is trying to solve.

As the first reviewers of *A Boring History* noted, Chekhov's *Notes of an Old Man* echoes the "Diary of an Old Doctor" – the suicide notes of the famous surgeon N. I. Pirogov, who served as one of the predecessors of Chekhov's hero. But Pirogov, also at the end of his life and absorbed in thinking about the main issues of life, comes to God, while Chekhov consciously endowed his hero with a different choice. The highest manifestation of love, which Tolstoy saw in religion, Chekhov's Nikolai Stepanovich finds in science.

In our opinion, the professor is a collective image in which the *voice* of Chekhov can undoubtedly be heard, painfully looking for his true *I* and attempting to understand the meaning of human life.

While the story was a huge success with readers, literary critics expressed themselves in different ways. In general, criticism of the story was positive, but it cannot be called unambiguous. Pleshcheev wrote to Chekhov that he "had never had anything as strong and deep as this thing" (*Плещеев А. Н. – Чехову А. П.*, n.d.). The story was highly appreciated by many other literary critics and publishers. Leo Tolstoy liked it very much. However, some critics (A. I. Vvedensky, N. N. Nikolaev, etc.) saw in *A Boring Story* allusions to Tolstoy's story "The Death of Ivan Ilyich", published three years earlier. It is interesting that, many years later, V. B. Kataev considered *A Boring Story* to be Chekhov's peculiar protest against the self-deprecating reflections of Tolstoy himself, who at the end of his life experienced bitter disappointment in himself and in his work (Катаев, 1989).

A Boring Story is rightfully considered one of Chekhov's best prose works and is on a par with the masterpieces of world literature. Written in the first person, the story contains the reflections of the protagonist – an elderly man and famous professor of medicine, Nikolai Stepanovich – on himself and his life. Despite the successes and regalia, his brilliant scientific achievements and fruitful pedagogical activity, he is depressed and oppressed by thoughts about his life. He is annoyed by household members and colleagues – everything they say and do seems vulgar and banal to him. The situation is aggravated by an incurable disease. A ghostly ray of light in

the dark realm of the hero's soul is Katya – a young girl, the daughter of his deceased friend, whose guardian he is.

A Boring Story in theater and television

As the basis for a movie or a theatrical production, the fate of *A Boring Story* was not easy. Due to its form, style and themes, the novel rarely attracts the attention of theater and film directors. Let's take a look at some of the most notable works that do exist.

In the USSR in 1968, Pavel Reznikov made a television film entitled *A Boring Story* (Резников, 1968). *From the Notes of an Old Man*. The newspaper *Советская культура* [Soviet Culture] called it an outstanding event, and the leading actor Boris Babochkin was labelled a great television actor who "becomes a revelation and holds the screen like a magnet, giving rise to a feeling of longing from any impending separation from him" (Шах-Азизова, 1969).

In France in 2009, a performance by Marc Dugen was successfully staged at the Parisian Theater De Atelier. The leading role was taken by the excellent French theater and film actor Jean-Pierre Darrusin, who had appeared repeatedly in Chekhov's plays.

In 2010, the play Secret Notes of a Privy Councilor, based on the novel *A Boring Story*, opened the Moscow International Chekhov Theater Festival. This festival was timed to coincide with the 150th anniversary of the writer's birth. The director and screenwriter was the artistic theater director Mikhail Levitin, who admitted that the impetus for this work was the shock of the great Boris Babochkin's performance in the TV show. The role of the professor was played by the famous Russian actor Mikhail Filippov.

In 2015, the French-language Canadian drama film *The Diary of an Old Man*, directed by Bernard Aemon, premiered at the Critics' Week at the Berlin Film Festival. Paul Savoy played the role of the professor (his name is Nicholas in the film).

In 2017, Russian director Vasily Skvortsov staged a performance of the same name starring Leonid Zverintsev at the Stanislavsky Experimental Electrotheater in Moscow.

Wojciech Jerzy Has and his *Nieciekawa historia*

Wojciech Jerzy Has (1925–2000) is an outstanding Polish director who is an artist with his own special, inimitable style and winner of numerous prestigious national and international awards. Critics called him an outsider of Polish cinema as he was always so alien to politics and commerce. According to A. Garbicz, Has's films are "always special, always intimate, based on halftones, spoken in images", and each creation is a journey into a once seen or fictional world (Garbicz, 1981).

B. Waligórska-Olejniczak wrote about the *literary-centric* nature of the work of the Russian director Andrey Zvyagintsev (Waligórska-Olejniczak, 2022, p. 12). Perhaps the same can be said of the work of Wojciech Has. It is no coincidence that film critic Tadeusz Sobolewski once called W. Has a "virtuoso of creative arrangements"[5]. Indeed, out of the director's fifteen films, thirteen have a literary source. One of these *arrangements* was the film adaptation of Chekhov's *A Boring Story*, which Has made in 1982, having held onto this idea since the 60s.

The film stars Gustav Holoubek, a brilliant Polish actor who rose to prominence in 1957 when starring in Has's first feature film, *The Loop*, which is based on the short story of the same name by rebellious writer Marek Hlasko (1957)[6].

Nieciekawa historia has something in common with other films by this director. For example, the sounds of crows cawing at the end of the film unites it with film *Lalka* [The Doll] (1969). Like the professor, the protagonist Stanislav expresses an existential stalemate when he whispers under his breath, "A pointless struggle for nothing". Elżbieta Ostrowska considers Has's deep distrust of progress and change to be what distinguished his view from the paradigm that dominates Polish post-war cinema, which sees history as a linear chain

[5] Full quotation: "Wojciech Has was a virtuoso of creative arrangements, perhaps the most original and significant director of Polish cinema. He filmed three masterpieces – Jan Potocki's *Manuscript Found in Zaragoza* (1965), Bolesław Prus's *Doll* (1969) and *Sanatorium Pod Klepsydrą* by Bruno Schulz (1973)" (Потапов et al., 2006).

[6] Subsequently, Holoubek played several roles in other productions, which were also based on the works of Russian classics: Woland in the television series *The Master and Margarita* based on the novel by M. A. Bulgakov (1988), and Luka in the television play *At the Bottom* based on the play by M. Gorky (1994).

of events leading to a specific goal (Ostrowska, 2013, p. 76). Indeed, the incessant movement of the machine invented by Stanislav in *The Doll* is a symbol of Has's understanding of both society as a whole and the individual: instead of going forward, a person (society) can suddenly go in the opposite direction: he can suffer from his own development – from himself. Today we can say with confidence that Has's prophecy is coming true.

Anette Insdorf writes that "Has made his own adaptation of Anton Chekhov's story, deepening the sadness of the late 19th century with post-war despair" (Insdorf, 2017a, p. 160). However, despite the sophistication of style and the authenticity of the transfer of the Chekhov era, the film then remained almost unnoticed by a wider audience and failed to resonate with film critics. Several reviews of this film were published in the fourth issue of magazine *Kino*, 1983.[7]

Calling the film "a model that can serve as material for academic discussions about directing and adaptation", T. Sobolewski writes about the common motives that were characteristic in the works of both Chekhov and Has and were reflected in the film adaptation *Nieciekawa historia*. The common motives here are the hero's flight, his loneliness (misanthropy), and the painful search for the meaning of life. In addition, irony as a feature of style and the lack of moralizing unites Chekhov and Has. The critic pays special attention to the scenography, which he considers insufficiently reliable and thoughtful, not having its own special, independent existence, as it had in other films by Has. This may be because making a movie based on Chekhov is an exceptionally difficult task, especially for a foreign director. The well-known Soviet literary critic and Chekhov scholar A.P. Chudakov wrote:

> If the narrative is presented in the form of a road, then Chekhov's narrative will be a road that, after the next sign, suddenly breaks off. Nothing further helps the reader; he must rely only on himself. Depending on their resources, people either travel further or stay closer, or they remain at the end of the tornado road, not stepping where the paths are vague. (Чудаков, 1971, p. 273)

W. Has was not afraid to step "where the paths are vague", into the depths of Chekhov's reflections on the meaning of life.

The film narrative begins with *music* – Jerzy Maksymyuk's detached, as if otherworldly, melody organically falls on the footage of the protagonist's apartment slowly floating in the twilight: solid chairs, a large table, paintings

[7] See: *Rzeczywistość nieudana* by Tadeusz Sobolewski (1983, pp. 9–12); *Scenopisy Hasa* with a preface by Maria Kornatowska (1983, pp. 12–15).

in heavy frames, clocks, candelabra. Dark, a little gloomy, but faithfully serving the professor for many years – the whole atmosphere of this apartment gently leads the viewer into the study of his master, like an obliging butler. Thanks to the introduction – a slow-motion visual sequence accompanied by quiet music – the viewer gradually enters the hero's space, both external (located in his office) and internal, spiritual (through his thoughts).

Suddenly, Nikolai Stepanovich's off-screen monologue is interrupted, and a lovely female voice is heard, as if continuing a long-ago conversation. This is Katya. She talks about art, about the fact that she and Nikolai Stepanovich "sing from different operas"; she speaks passionately, agitatedly, her voice fading. That's how people talk to those they love.

So, it is early morning after another sleepless night. The professor is having an endless conversation with himself, trying to understand how he ended up at a complete spiritual impasse. His day begins with a visit from his wife, who has long turned from a beloved woman into part of the familiar environment that causes only dull irritation in the hero. In Has's film, the wife (played by Anna Milevska) does not look at all like the "raw and clumsy old woman" that Chekhov describes (Чехов, 1985, p. 112). We see a middle-aged, slightly faded, but slender woman with regular features.

Has changed not only the appearance of the hero but also her name – from Varvara to Veronica. Her life is a truly boring story, filled only with household chores. An expression of boundless despondency, as if from a tooth that has ached for years, tightly ingrained into her once attractive features, figure, even clothes, turning a living woman into a dry shell.

Gradually plunging into the spiritual world of the professor, the viewer *catches* his every word. At the same time, the internal plan of the professor's speech coexists in parallel with the external, generated by the real interaction of the hero with other characters: his wife, daughter, Katya, and colleagues. What Nikolai Stepanovich says to others is banal; what he really thinks is deep and exciting. For example, in the dinner scene, although he is seated with everyone at a large table, in reality he is separate, at the opposite end, even physically opposed to the rest of the household. The professor exchanges on-duty remarks with them, while a real, lively dialogue takes place inside his head. In this impossibility of a conversation with another, which gives hope for understanding and acceptance, lies the main dramatic conflict of the film.

The internal narrative of Nikolai Stepanovich is full of inescapable sadness: his name has had nothing to do with him personally for a long time; it lives its own external life, while his own loneliness is total and insurmountable. Even neat flirting with Katya does not save him.

The love line of the professor and Katya can be traced throughout the film, turning into a love triangle. This also highlights the difference between the film and the book, where the romantic relationship between Katya and Professor Chekhov is only hinted at. In Has's film, Katya loves him, loves him openly, passionately, with all the ardor of youth. Sometimes it seems to the viewer that Nikolai Stepanovich also loves her and would like to say more than his high (lifeless) status as guardian, professor, friend, and married person allows. So, these two very different people form a strange couple: they are opposites, but they need each other. Exquisite, full of allegories and symbolic signs, their communication gives rise to an amazing kinship of souls – a spiritual closeness, without which true love is unthinkable. W. Has skillfully gives the viewer a shaky hope for their possible happiness, in order to take it away just as skillfully.

In the evening, the professor, as usual, visits Katya, and she, rightly noting that his family has long ceased to be his real home, suddenly offers to have him move in with her. For some reason, in response, Nikolai Stepanovich speaks of his school years when the foretaste of happiness pressed his chest. Katya only says with a gentle smile, "Every day you are more and more *boring*".[8]

The cinematographer Piotr Sobociński, who worked with the best directors in both Europe and America (but, unfortunately, lived a very short life), keeps our attention with close-ups and enables Hanna Mikuts, who plays Katya, to accurately convey the richness of her character's feelings. She is full of truth, depth, charm and, at the same time, disappointment – with life, with Nikolai Stepanovich, with herself. Meanwhile, the professor's gaze is directed inward, even when he is talking to others. He seems to peer into his soul and searches painfully for answers to the eternal questions of being: "Who am I? Why do I live?"

Katya makes one last attempt at rapprochement, unexpectedly appearing on the threshold of his hotel room in Kharkov, where the professor has been sent by his wife to discover details about their future son-in-law. She asks him, as her only friend, for advice on how to continue to live, while bitterly and furiously conjuring

[8] See detailed information about the film on the website: FilmPolski.pl – NIECIEKAWA HISTORIA ("Nieciekawa historia", n.d.). The film is available for watching at the following link: https://my.mail.ru/mail/shel57/video/4/487.html

images of love. However, Nikolai Stepanovich cannot say what she so obviously wants to hear. Although he speaks to her, the words are addressed to himself and are, perhaps, the results of Chekhov's own painful reflections: "I am defeated […] The absence of what my fellow philosophers call a general idea, I noticed at home only now, and you will not know peace all your life, all your life" (Has, 1982, 1:41:10). Nevertheless, this is not why Katya came to him. She leaves, and both characters are left alone with their unresolved internal problems: the professor with his fear of life, covered by a fruitless search for its meaning; Katya with the bitterness of disappointment and an unquenched thirst for love.

The abundance of close-ups, accompanied by lyrical, slightly disturbing music, is of particular importance in revealing the main characters. Close-ups focus the viewer's attention on the eyes and facial expressions of the characters. This is especially evident when the characters interact with each other without words. Close-ups show and emphasize the emotional state of a character, helping the actor to express it and the viewer to feel it. The alternation of individual fragments which vary in size sets the rhythm of the on-screen action. For example, in the scenes between the professor and Katya, where long close-ups and short medium shots alternate, the rhythm always slows down. In addition to the effect of presence, this approach gives a sense of space between the characters.

Color plays an important role in film. "The first condition for the reasonable participation of the color element in film is that color enters film primarily as a dramatic and dramaturgical factor", S. Eisenstein wrote about the role of color (after: Познин, 2021, p. 430). It not only gives the object an additional and attributable characteristic but can also act as one of the characteristics of the character.

It must be said that W. Has started shooting on black-and-white film for movies such as *Petła* [Loop], and *Jak być kochaną* [How to be Loved], both of which are fundamentally different from the creation of a film in color. *Niecie-kawa historia* is not Has's first experience with color film, so the film has rich but not catchy visuals. In all the scenes shot in the studio, the light is masterfully set so they acquire incredible, almost photographic, depth. The richness of the depth of light can be traced not only in the talent of the illuminator but also in the use of saturated filters (often dark blue or saturated magenta), giving the actors and the interior a special visual expressiveness.

In *A Boring Story*, the color of the interiors, the clothes of the heroes and the landscape are sustained in one common range of muted natural shades: brown, dull green, beige, gray, and milky – the colors of the earth, of trees, foliage, water, night, fog, and a cloudy sky. The color emphasizes both the emotional

fullness of the characters and the drama of their relationship. The predominance of deep, dark tones maintains an atmosphere of oppressive uncertainty. It seems that there is also a stylization of colors reminiscent of the picturesque manner of Renaissance artists. The cinematographer creates the soft lighting typical of Renaissance paintings from a single light source and uses a color scheme dominated by muted earthy browns, greens and blues in a narrow tonal range. Only in the scenes with Katya does a bright red spot appear on the dark greenish background. For example, at home, during a conversation with Nikolai Stepanovich in which Katya speaks passionately about art, we see her in a dark dressing gown against a red wall, and the professor, dressed, as always, in a dark frock coat, is sitting in a red armchair. When Katya arrives at the professor's hotel, she is dressed in a bright ruby velvet jacket, in stark contrast to the gray dullness of the setting. The color of the jacket has been chosen for a reason: the professor should want to both look at and touch her. However, the hero avoids love, hiding from it behind long, correct phrases.

It is interesting to follow the evolution of color throughout the film. If, at the beginning of the film, the visual range is sustained in expressive natural shades, with the development of the action, the colors gradually lose their former brightness: they fade, as if erased. Moreover, in the final scene, when Katya leaves the professor, taking all his hopes and dreams with her, we see him sitting in his dimly lit hotel room. The final shots are more reminiscent of old black-and-white photographs, which depict a lonely elderly man who has only a gray series of identical days stretching into the future. It is no coincidence that L. I. Shestov, after reading *A Boring Story*, called Chekhov a "singer of despair" (Шестов, 1905/2002).

A Boring Story is an autumn film that begins with burning leaves, which the professor often watches from the window. A. Insdorf notes that, "despite the fact that the film retains the tone of hopelessness that resounds from the Russian writer, Has's film is filled with a much stronger sense of tragic loss"[9]. Death plays a significant role here, returning in the form of corpses displayed during a lecture at the university, in the mention of Katya's dead child, and in Nikolai's reflections: "Los wydał na mnie wyrok śmierci" (*Fate gave me a death sentence*) (Insdorf, 2017/2017b).

According to A. Kugel's apt definition, all Chekhov's heroes are *anemic*: there is no desire, no will, no colors, everything is, by definition, bad and

[9] The quote is from an excerpt from Annette Insdorf's book *Intimations: The Cinema of Wojciech Has* (Insdorf, 2017a), translated into Polish by M. Szubartowska. See: Insdorf (2017/2017b).

bleak (Кугель, 1904, p. 520). The professor is overwhelmed by boredom and a sense of the meaninglessness of his own existence. However, in our opinion, if Has wanted to remove Chekhov's hopelessness, then Holoubek did not allow him to; his eyes shine too brightly and mischievously. In addition, his intellect and sense of irony, combined with the depth of acting, create the image of a Russian intellectual of the 19th century, but without the seal of fatal hopelessness. Nikolai Stepanovich, performed by Holoubek, does not at all look like a dying old man: he is cheerful and imposing. Perhaps that is why, despite Chekhov's denouement, Has's professor, unlike Chekhov's hero, remains undefeated, and the film does not leave the impression of hopelessness.

The French director and film critic Louis Delluc once wrote, "You need to create what is called an atmosphere. Our historical Italian and French films are obviously sheer nonsense precisely because of the complete absence of this atmosphere. I think that the day will come when our films will have this atmosphere, the air that every era breathes" (Деллюк, 1920/1924, p. 98). The director's concept, the plasticity and speech of the actors, the harmony of color, the landscape, the camera decisions of Piotr Sobociński, the music of Jerzy Maksymyuk, the editing rhythm – all the components of the film act in artistic unity, giving rise to what L. Delluc called atmosphere. Chekhov's atmosphere is in many ways boredom as a chronic Russian disease, dissatisfaction with others and oneself, an inability to enjoy life, and an unwillingness to see meaning in life itself. Has was able to reliably convey "the quest of the Russian intelligentsia" and "the mystery of the Russian soul" in the film, bringing his own unique creative style to it (Деллюк, 1920/1924).

Thus, the talented film interpretation of a literary work from one culture by a director from another culture and even era not only made possible contact between cultures of different historical eras, artistic styles and worldviews, but also contributed to the birth of new meanings in a well-known literary work. Moreover, this Polish film provided Polish and Russian-speaking viewers (among others) with the opportunity to comprehend and feel Chekhov's text in a new way.

W. Has's film *Nieciekawa historia* is not just an adaptation or film retelling of Chekhov's story but a new, unique work of cinematic art, which we can rightly call a true adaptation because new meanings have been added to the original due to the peculiarities of cinematic language.

Instead of an afterword

The film *Nieciekawa historia* had its turn: many years later, it received well-deserved recognition. In August 2022, *Nieciekawa historia* was shown as part of the XII International Festival in the Footsteps of Singer, a traditional cultural event named after the Polish writer Isaac Singer. In September of the same year, the film was shown at the Polish Feature Film Festival – FPFF (Festiwal Polskich Filmów Fabularnych), in the Niebyły FPFF category (meaning "Not at the festival"). Therefore, time returns to the masterpiece its rightful place in the memory and hearts of people.

The remarkable Polish film critic M. Kornatowska said that Has does not pursue relevance, he does not allow himself to be deceived by momentary conjuncture, but at the same time his films are connected – and, moreover, deeply connected – with modernity. The film *A Boring Story* confirms this idea, returning to the screen the combined power of theater, cinema and painting.

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Adaptacja opowiadania *Nieciekawa historia* Antona Czechowa w kinie polskim

Artykuł poświęcony jest kwestii specyfiki ekranizacji klasycznych dzieł rosyjskiej literatury w kinematografii polskiej. Przedmiotem uwagi jest opowiadanie Antona Czechowa *Nieciekawa historia* (1889) oraz jej ekranizacja *Nieciekawa historia*, autorstwa Wojciecha E. Hasa (1982). Pojęcie adaptacji filmowej (ekranizacji) jest rozumiane jako coś więcej niż tłumaczenie jednego systemu artystycznego na inny. W artykule zostały przedyskutowane główne problemy tego aktu: sprzeczność między dosłownym ilustrowaniem źródła a decyzją reżysera o odejściu od

intencji pisarza w kierunku większej niezależności artystycznej, rosnąca komercjalizacja kina, różnica epok, różnice etnokulturowe między pisarzem i reżyserem, wykorzystanie kina jako środka propagandy. Pokazano, jak adaptacja dzieła literackiego klasycznej literatury rosyjskiej przez reżysera z innej kultury, żyjącego w innym czasie, rodzi nowe, niezależne dzieło sztuki filmowej, w którym do znaczeń źródła literackiego dodawane są nowe znaczenia i że powstały one właśnie ze względu na specyfikę języka filmowego.

Słowa kluczowe: adaptacja; „Nieciekawa historia"; Anton Czechow, ekranizacja; Wojciech Has; kinematografia polska; literatura rosyjska

Adaptation of Chekhov's *A Boring Story* in Polish cinema

The article discusses the specifics of the adaptation of a work of Russian classical literature in the cinematography of Poland. The object of interest is A. P. Chekhov's novel *A Boring Story* (1889), and its adaptation *Nieciekawa historia* by W. E. Has (1982). The term "adaptation" is broader than the translation of one artistic system into the language of another. The main problems of film adaptation are identified: the contradiction between a literal illustration of the original source and the director's departure into greater artistic independence from the writer's plan; the increasing commercialization of cinema; the difference of epochs; ethnocultural differences between the writer and the director; the use of cinema as a means of propaganda. It is argued that the adaptation of a literary work of Russian classical literature by a director of another culture living in another time gives birth to a new, independent work of cinematic art in which new meanings are added to the meanings of the literary source that have arisen precisely due to the peculiarities of film language.

Keywords: adaptation; "A Boring Story"; Anton Chekhov; film adaptation; Wojciech Has; Polish cinematography; Russian literature

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filmowej adaptacji dzieł literackich, intertekstualność w literaturze i kinie, interpretacja tekstu literackiego.

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