

“Telling My Side of Things”: Tolstoy Novellas into Monologue Drama
Zsuzsanna Csikai

HJEAS

Two adaptations of Leo Tolstoy’s works, Nancy Harris’s *The Kreutzer Sonata* (2009) and Peter Reid’s *Desire* (2014),¹ are recent additions to contemporary Irish theatre’s abundant number of new versions of modern European classics. This paper assesses the adaptation strategies used by the two Irish playwrights’ reworking of Tolstoy’s novellas, “The Kreutzer Sonata” (first published in 1889) and “The Devil” (published posthumously in 1911), and it aims to explore how contemporary authors Harris and Reid engage with these nineteenth-century works so that the old narratives are endowed with new relevance for their new audience.

An omnipresent form of rewriting, adaptation, has now been acknowledged as a significant shaping force in culture. While Christopher Innes contends at the turn of the millennium that “over the last couple of decades the remaking of modern plays has become such a common practice that it almost counts as an identifying mark of contemporary theatre” (248), Linda Hutcheon in her influential book on adaptation goes as far as to say that “adaptation has run amok” (xiii) in our postmodern world, noting “the ubiquity and longevity of adaptation as a mode of retelling our favourite stories” (xx). As for adaptation’s role in constructing culture, Margherita Laera claims that “transferring pre-existing material into another language, culture, or medium involves an exercise in self-definition through an act of appropriation of the foreign, which raises issues around a given society’s self-representation” (9).

Irish theatre has been engaged traditionally and fruitfully in the processes of translation and adaptation, and the impulse to rewrite and rework earlier material in the Irish context is often explained by Ireland’s colonial past and language shift. The shift from Gaelic Irish to English made the Irish a translating as well as translated culture since “Irish cultural and intellectual history [is] itself the product of multiple translations” (Cronin 2). Irish culture’s tendency to rewrite is accounted for by a certain revisionary sensitivity, and the metaphor of palimpsest is sometimes used to describe such rewriting, that is, the process of “superimpos[ing] one story or discourse on to another,” which is “a constant factor in Irish writing” (Murray 100). While the Irish rewriting of Russian literature, mainly Chekhov, in the 1980s served as a means of resisting British cultural influence through the reappropriation of Chekhov for Irish audiences, the Tolstoy adaptations

produced in the 2000s display no such resistant urge. In the post-postcolonial, globalized setting, the Russian works are rewritten by Harris and Reid without such a public agenda and instead they focus on private issues of individual lives.

The two plays based on Tolstoy's works enrich not only the long list of theatrical adaptations of Russian classics, but are recent additions to a growing number of male monologues in Irish drama. When rendering Tolstoy's late-nineteenth-century novellas into dramatic form, both adapting playwrights, Harris and Reid, opted for the theatrical monologue, a form that has a notably high recurrence in contemporary Irish theatre to such an extent that theatre critic Eamonn Jordan claims: "monologues increasingly became a staple of Irish drama" (125). The choice of the monologue is understandable first of all because the two Tolstoy novellas readily lend themselves to such a narrowing of focus that employing a single narrating character on stage involves. Both "The Kreutzer Sonata" and "The Devil," although wrapped in a conventional narrative form, in essence are close to a treatise discussing the narrator's (and ultimately the author's) passionate and rather orthodox ideas about male-female relationships and the various issues involved ranging from premarital sex, sexuality in marriage, the effects of pregnancy and child rearing on married life to women's personal fulfillment and independence. The intensely personal events and the characters' often insightful, but sometimes disturbing, ideas in the novellas are conveyed with a proselytizing urge, a situation that successfully translates into the intimate context of the monologue when one single onstage character is speaking in a confessional mode—"telling their side of things"—to a faceless audience in the dark.

Monologue theatre in its many forms seems to gain momentum in contemporary theatre, at least in part, owing to the fact that the form has the potential to challenge aspects of conventional theatre that might appear exhausted including the lack of immediacy of performer-spectator relationship, the tension between illusion and reality onstage: in general, the artificiality of realist theatre conventions. As Brian Singleton claims, monologues "reveal an anxiety about theatre as a medium for communication" (n. pag.). The monologue can offer a kind of rejuvenation of theatre, as it is a form able to create immediacy, direct intimacy with the audience, rendering the experience of the individual self the monologue conveys more tangible, more readily accessible and credible. In Mária Kurdi's words, the monologue "engages the spectators in an unconventionally vivid dialogue with the performing narrator on stage, which enhances their role in

the production of meaning at the same time” (130). Monologue theatre, as Clare Wallace points out, “plants the self . . . at the heart of the spectacle” (16).

Both monologue and adaptation work towards revitalizing theatre as an art form, the former in part with its offering the pleasure of being intensely involved with the stage events and characters and a focus on the self, and the latter with its offering the pleasure of sophisticated recognition and the enjoyments of revisiting old themes with a twist. But while the popularity of the monologue form and the attractions of adaptation are easy to understand, the choice of these particular Tolstoy novellas for adaptation might not seem so obvious. The two novellas, besides reflecting late-nineteenth-century social thinking and customs and offering topics bearing relevance for contemporary audiences, become challenging to rewrite for twenty-first-century audiences due to the fact that the protagonist in each advocates ideas and a kind of moral teaching swamped in a religious ideology that was considered extreme even by the standards of Tolstoy’s own contemporaries. “The Kreutzer Sonata” and “The Devil” are two of Tolstoy’s later works dealing with the theme of sexuality, which the author saw as a formidable force that corrupts the relationship between men and women, destroys their lives through debasing them and leading them to committing heinous crimes, even murder. For Tolstoy, sexual attraction, desire, is the devil itself, and through his mouthpieces, the two male protagonists, he preaches the idea, among other things, of total abstinence from sex as the only redeeming solution.

How to approach late-nineteenth-century Russian works like these and how to make them speak to their new audiences? The immense distance between nineteenth-century Russian and early twenty-first-century European culture needs to be bridged in some ways in order to present the receiving audiences with credible characters whose psychology that motivates their emotions, ideas, and actions would speak to them. In other words, the originals need to be transformed so that they have something to say about the human condition in a way that audiences can relate to today. Evidently, “a shift in language, culture or medium always entails a refocusing or repositioning of the adapted work and consequently of its emphasis on specific issues” (Laera 8). Examining such shifts can reveal the underlying adaptation strategies used to reinvent the old material, and in this case such an exploration shows that despite the many features the two novellas share, Harris and Reid in their adaptations went in two very different directions.

When looking for the relevance for our times of Reid’s and Harris’s monologues, we see that both adaptations seem to be depicting a crisis in terms of the male protagonist’s ability to function in a relationship, whether

it is the socially sanctioned relationship between man and woman, marriage, or a sexual relationship outside it. Both in Tolstoy's "The Kreutzer Sonata" and "The Devil," the tragic outcome (the male protagonist murdering his wife/lover) is triggered by the male protagonist's obsessions, and these obsessions seem to originate, especially in the eyes of twenty-first-century readers armed with the teachings of modern psychology, in a serious lack of emotional intelligence and total inability to interpret women's behavior properly, and to bond with them emotionally. However, in their contemporary rendering of these male characters and their stories, the two adaptations differ greatly in the direction of the journey they take their audiences on. While *Desire* updates and relocates the original Tolstoy novella firmly in Ireland providing a glimpse at twenty-first century Irish society, *The Kreutzer Sonata* does not seem to explicitly offer any actualization or specific cultural or temporal relocation closer to its audience but rather takes them back to Tolstoy's time and, more importantly, to the world of a mind promoting his unique and extreme moral philosophy. The question is in what ways these different takes on the originals prove to be fruitful and meaningful engagements for their new audiences.

Nancy Harris's adaptation of Tolstoy's novella was commissioned by Natalie Abrahami, the artistic director of The Gate Theatre, London, and was a collaborative work between the playwright and the artistic director, whose idea it was to feature the music behind the novella, Beethoven's violin sonata no. 9, played by live musicians on the stage. Harris recalls how she was approached by Abrahami, who "was interested in trying to do something with ["The Kreutzer Sonata"] but she wasn't sure what form it would take. She just knew that she wanted to do it with live musicians playing Beethoven's *Kreutzer Sonata* onstage and she wanted a writer to collaborate with" (Interview, n. pag.). Harris was gripped by this "unsettling, disturbing piece about a man who murders his wife" (Interview, n. pag.), and she decided on the challenging format of monologue drama.

The theatrical monologue does not generate a significant shift from the original narrative fiction's *telling* the story to performance's *showing* it; instead, what we have is a more intensely focused recounting of a story from the single perspective of the main character, Pozdnyshov, whose name and nationality is not altered. Transposed from page to stage, the novella's frame story, together with all the numerous minor characters, is eliminated. The train journey, where the passengers' initial, highly charged discussion of the topic of love triggers a confession from one of them, is only hinted at through the stage setting. As even the framing story's narrator, who intensely listens

to Pozdnyshov's confession, is discarded, the focus instantly zooms in on the protagonist. On stage we have only Pozdnyshov sitting in a "dimly lit interior of a train carriage" (17). The lack of potential listeners to his words generates the sense that it is the theatre audience to whom Pozdnyshov's long narrative, metamorphosing into a shocking confession, is addressed. Thus the audience are forced to place themselves into that role and, consequently, are drawn into a bond with the character onstage.

Harris's play can rely on a knowing audience; the act of adaptation is acknowledged and emphasized through the preservation of the original, well-known Tolstoy novella's title. The introductory scene of the play, Harris's ingenious invention, is rich in elements that foreshadow for such a knowing audience the play's central themes, while those not so familiar with the original plot can enjoy the pleasures of discovery when the significance of these elements is revealed gradually while the narrative unfolds. "Forgive me" (17) is Pozdnyshov's very first utterance, and at this point it is merely meant as a superficial phrase of politeness. However, in hindsight, it becomes quite ironic, as this phrase of asking for forgiveness sets the situation for the confession we are about to hear, hinting at the underlying theme of crime and forgiveness. The maniac manner in which Pozdnyshov is emptying his pocket, and his comments while exhibiting the contents, have a similar function. His words, "That's it. Nothing further to declare" (16), ironically foreshadow what is coming—an emotionally exhausting retelling, or declaration, of what led him to murdering his wife. His description of each object in his pocket, too, in a subtle way introduces the theme of obsession and the destruction obsession can cause: his addictive playing with the yoyo (one of his children's toys, as it turns out at the end of the play) signals his being prone to obsessive behavior. "Once it gets under the skin, it's difficult to stop" (17), he explains his playing with the yoyo, but his words could be understood as a reference to his pathetically obsessive sexual jealousy he failed to contain. His other possessions kept in his pocket all have a hint of decay about them: the gold stop watch from Switzerland that "doesn't tick anymore" (17); the silver cigarette case, a present from someone he cannot remember (18); the silk handkerchief that "hasn't been washed for a year" bearing "the red lipstick print of a woman" (18)—his dead wife's lipstick, as it is revealed later. These objects—the watch, the yoyo, or the handkerchief—are not mentioned in the Tolstoy novella; Harris's creating a scene focusing on these symbolic objects is a powerful means to successfully introduce themes and topics as well as to build an atmosphere of suspense.

That we should not expect a radical revision of the original is signaled by the fact that Harris's *The Kreutzer Sonata* does not change the time or the place of the action: it is, according to the stage directions, "1889. Night." Also, the main character's name is Pozdynyshchev, the original Russian name. These details, of course, are seen only in the published text or the program notes, but they do not allow the audience to lose sight of late-nineteenth-century Russian society's values governing the ways marriages were made, sexuality was thought of, and men and women were able to interpret each other's behavior. Pozdynyshchev's words describe a society where marriage was the primary goal of a woman's life as an important means to financially secure her future. "Their mothers groom them, the dressmakers clothe them, the tutors teach them—to the highest of standards, but it's all towards the same end is it not? . . . To attach themselves to men" (21). In line with nineteenth-century religious morality that seeps through the original story, he describes sexually active young men's life before marriage as a "life of degradation" (21); he bitterly complains that his wife learned about contraception, which brought about some measure of independence for her entailing a thirst for personal fulfillment other than raising children: "they taught her too, those brilliant medicine men . . . how to have a full married life with her husband at no further cost to her body" (32), which he condemns as a source of knowledge that makes her a self-assured, beautiful, and sexually attractive woman triggering immense jealousy in him. He does not "trust doctors. A doctor is a man. A man in the presence of a woman in a nightdress is never an unaffected entity" (32). Although these ideas and attitudes might have some residual existence in our twenty-first-century Western societies, they appear to be rather anachronistic, so instead of representing contemporary values, they seem to serve to underline the protagonist's delusional personality traits.

One, and practically the only significant, instance of updating the original work for its new audience lies in a shift in tone: Tolstoy's earnest discussion of matters ranging from sex before marriage to childbearing and contraception, and culminating in a vehement argument for total sexual abstinence, is given a layer of intense irony. Irony, obviously unintended by the narrator, bubbles up repeatedly. Irony is a crucial element of the rhythm and fabric of the monologue, and it is rather refreshing that the audience are allowed this ironic perspective not found in the original.

The tone of irony appears at the very beginning of the play in the already mentioned first sentence of Pozdynyshchev's long, detailed confession: "Nothing further to declare" (16). Also, it is ironic to see the double standards

of his words he is unconscious of when speaking about who starts the attack in a row with his wife: He says to her, “Your playing isn’t bothering me in the slightest. Your behaving like a whore though . . . that is.” His perception of his wife’s reaction to this attack is rather self-centred: “I expected her to flinch. . . . Instead, my wife stood up, crossed her arms and steadily launched her attack. Yes, *she* attacked me. First” (45). Or, indeed, the bitter irony of his summing up his escape from being sentenced for murder: “Wonderful to be an innocent man in the world again” (25). His justification for feeling innocent despite murdering his wife is also rather ironic: “If a jury twelve men strong, men with money, men with power, if those men declare a man like me—a man like them—provoked, he was . . . provoked” (41). In addition, the play’s twenty-first-century-audiences cannot but enjoy the irony inherent in the allusion to the “male gaze” in the protagonist’s words, whereby men are considered to be the victims of women’s desire to be looked at: “Women want to be looked at. . . . And men are ensnared into marital bonds by their pathetic desire to look” (33).

Pozdynyshchev’s unrestrained monologue discloses the personality traits of a man whose approach to love between man and woman verges on being extremely naïve, which, a hundred years after the birth of modern psychology and psychotherapy, would feel rather incongruous if not interpreted as the author’s attempt to draw a portrait of a man who is seriously dysfunctional emotionally. Although it is hard not to agree, for instance, that “we all want to find *true* love” (24), Pozdynyshchev’s words betray his total lack of insight or self-reflexivity when he explains that his reasons for settling on that particular woman as his future wife was that “[t]his one had something—more. A certain—understanding, it seemed to me, of every thought and feeling that I had ever had. . . . my future wife with her trusting eyes and shapely figure, she knew, she saw, she understood—everything. Me. It had to be love” (20).

It is also a sign of emotional immaturity that he confuses, or equates, sexual desire for, and possession of, a woman with the feeling of love. “Still I loved her: This—bounty of new contours and curves. I alone could watch her as she dressed or undressed . . . only I—I—I could have put her in a glass box and gazed at her all day . . .” (26, 27). In our beauty-obsessed times, when artificial enhancement of beauty surrounds us, the sentiment that “[b]esides, she was beautiful. Beautiful always means good” (20) sounds rather naïve, again. Pozdynyshchev’s character as an emotionally dysfunctional, self-centered man with not much empathy for the woman he lives with is further illustrated by his surprise at his young wife’s finding his adventurous sexual past

appalling and repelling: “[a]s it turned out, there were some things about me she didn’t want to know. . . . it is one thing it seems, to contemplate the *idea* of your betrothed with another, it is something else entirely to read about a stranger’s nipple in his mouth as he loosens his trousers” (24).

These lines illustrate not only Pozdynyshchev’s emotionally dysfunctional personality, but also the playwright’s attempt at somewhat updating the original’s style using more explicit language than a nineteenth-century author would have. But just like talk of “a stranger’s nipple in his mouth as he loosens his trousers” (24) would not have earned Tolstoy the same outcome of the court case whereby the judge ruled that Count Tolstoy’s “Kreutzer Sonata” “is not liable to the charge of obscenity or indecency” (“Count Tolstoy,” n. pag.), such explicit lines in themselves do not earn the adapter the success of updating the play. The predominantly nineteenth-century feel of the world of the original is retained in the play, and though briefly interrupted with such utterances, it is not changed and updated, but instead there is a risk of creating a slight measure of disharmony and anachronism.

Along the infusion of irony into the narrative style, it is the poetic quality of the text that sets the adaptation apart from the original. Tolstoy’s stark, matter-of-fact, realistic style is, at points at least, taken over by poignant poetic style. Pozdynyshchev describes the effect of exquisite music on himself in powerful images:

It sucked me in. It spat me out. My temperature soared, my blood chilled, my soul roared, my heart . . . it seemed as if the whole room might at any moment burst open or swallow us up. . . . It was as if the armour of my very being had been seared and cast aside and for one stupefying instant I looked on the world not as a man, but—as maker and felt there were no limits to my life. (49)

A strong sense of poetry is endowed to the language of the play through repetition and parallelism: “My wife. My wide-eyed wife from that night on the boat by the water. My wide-eyed wife who’d looked and laughed and held her children and felt warm against my skin so many times. My wide-eyed wife who’d played the piano” (63). The highly charged atmosphere is further intensified by the ambiguity of Pozdynyshchev’s words “she deserved that” (63) towards the end of the play, as the phrase can refer to the ever obsessive and controlling husband’s carefully wiping away the too harsh lipstick from the lips of his dead wife in the coffin indicating that he cares for

the wife, or it can be interpreted to mean that she deserved to be murdered.

Pozdynyshv's portrait as a psychopath is powerfully drawn especially in the passage where he relates in a cold and detached manner the minute details of the moments he murdered his wife. After a lengthy and detailed description of how the fabric of her clothes, her corset, and her bones yielded to the blade, he says:

My wife didn't make a sound when the knife cut into her. I listened. I watched. I—hoped. But apart from the widening of her already wide eyes—she gave me . . . nothing. Not even when I pulled the blade back out. It was as clean—only the faintest scarlet residue on one of its sides. I looked at the spot once more—below her breast—and wondered what could be expected from a wound like that. . . . I watched it grow and seep, watched it cover her entire chest, watched until she fell—gasping to the floor, and then I left her to it. (61)

This passage is a very close rendering of the original, but Harris intensifies the horror of it all by creating a chilling image of the murderer sleeping in the bed where his youngest son is fast asleep right after murdering the boy's mother. "Put my arms around his tiny breathing body, my nose against his neck—and I slept" (61).

Transposing the novella from page to stage, Harris employs ingenious and sensitive adaptation strategies that create a language that is powerful and has the intensity of poetry, while providing the audience with access to the innermost world of a murderer driven by obsession. However, the audience of Harris's play still witness the inner world of a male character from the late nineteenth century, and apart from the genuine and clever irony that permeates and animates the play, the audience are not closer to being able to relate to the psychology and morals underpinning the actions and ideas of this person. What is gained is an understanding of the workings of the mind of a madman from the nineteenth century, but something is lacking that would speak to twenty-first-century audiences on the topic of sexual desire, relationships, and marriage. Instead, the experience of time travel is offered by the adaptation, although it is colored with a sense of anachronism at points.

"The Devil," the Tolstoy novella Peter Reid adapted under the title *Desire*, is very much akin to "The Kreutzer Sonata" in many ways: similarly to Pozdynyshv, the male protagonist, Jevgeny, is also driven to murdering a woman, his lover. He is revealed to have similarly obsessive attitudes toward

sexuality, and is prone to similar moralizing on such issues. Tolstoy's story, written late in his life, seems to be the author's attempt to come to terms with his own youthful sexual adventures. The novella was never published in his lifetime, although Tolstoy wrote "The Devil" in 1889, in the year of the publication of "The Kreutzer Sonata." Similarly to "The Kreutzer Sonata," the short story advocates the commandment "do not lust," one of the cornerstones of Tolstoy's personal Christian beliefs. The novella demonstrates the extreme dangers of giving oneself over to sexual desire, the temptations of the devil.

In his transposition of the story to the stage, Peter Reid introduces various significant alterations, all of which serve an important purpose: they transfer the play's themes and concerns into a context that contemporary audiences can relate to and understand. Some of these alterations update the play for the twenty-first century on the surface, like the change in the title. For Tolstoy, sexual desire meant the devil himself, so in changing the title to *Desire*, Reid pronouncedly shifts the focus on the theme of the role of sexual desire moving away from the religious morality embodied in the Russian title. Other elements invoking contemporary Irish society are added, for instance, the play's foregrounding of the political career of the father and Jevgeny, and Reid's turning Stepanyida, the peasant woman in Tolstoy, into a cleaning woman who is an immigrant from Lithuania, called Stephanida.

Through other alterations of the details Reid manages to give an insight into the psychological motives of the protagonist. The changes are, therefore, not just a new, modern decoration for an old story, but actualize the original work, and, most importantly, establish psychological motivation the new audience can interpret and relate to.

First of all, the Irish Eugene is a very different person to the original story's Jevgeny. Tolstoy's protagonist is a "kindly, agreeable and above all candid man" (n. pag.) loved by all around him.

His mother has always loved him more than anyone else, and now after her husband's death, she concentrated on him not only her whole affection but her whole life. Nor was it only his mother who so loved him. All his comrades at the high school and the university not merely liked him very much, but respected him. He had this effect on all who met him. . . .

(n. pag.)

Reid, however, transformed the original story's popular and pleasant Jevgeny significantly. The Irish Eugene is far from being the family favorite:

it is his brother that both of his parents adore while he is a shadow, rambling and roaming the landscape alone to keep away from the others. His image as a lone ranger recurs in the story. Eugene remembers how on school holidays at home, “apart from sleep and meals I rarely spent any time there. I used to walk the surrounding lanes and fields for hours, keeping away from everyone” (n. pag.). At school too, he recalls, “I always walked around the playing fields. I was never the sporty type.” His adult life in London is also bereft of friends and entertainment: “I had never been much of a drinker so I didn’t socialise too often. I had little interest in my work colleagues and they showed little interest in me. I was an exile, safe in the abstract world of investments” (n. pag.).

We also learn of his status in the family when he talks of his brother: “He was three years younger than me, and although we had the same parents and upbringing, . . . we were different, and not just slightly different, vastly different. . . . He was my Mother’s favourite, and my Father’s, everybody’s really . . . He had . . . charm. . . . He lived in Dublin. A celebrity of sorts” (n. pag.).

Later on there is a poignant hint at his loveless relationship with his mother when Eugene observes, “My Mother smiled because there was something she wanted. She only ever smiled when there was something to gain” (n. pag.). This portrayal of Eugene as a lonely, withdrawn person living a friendless, loveless life from his childhood prepares the context for our understanding of the underlying motives for his later actions. His being deprived of love, first and foremost, his mother’s love, as it seems, is the backdrop to the play’s treatment of the disastrous consequences of an individual’s inability to bond, to love, to be selfless.

Another element of the story, the child-motif, merely a minor detail in Tolstoy, gains significance in Reid and functions as another means of depicting the protagonist’s psychology. In Tolstoy, Jevgeny’s wife gives birth to a healthy daughter as a general course of events, whereas in Reid, Eugene’s fantasizing about having a son is a central motif. He is daydreaming about his son being brought up very differently to the way he was brought up, in a sense to compensate for his childhood grievances and make up through his son for the lack of love and happiness he experienced:

I wanted now to protect her. And to protect him, to protect him, my son. . . . In my mind I ran through the future, images, like film, seeing him. Both of us. I couldn’t picture his face, but he was happy. When I saw him in my mind he was like his mother, with her gift for happiness. He wouldn’t walk

the fields alone. That will not happen to him. He would be loved like no other child. He would have everything he wanted. (n. pag.)

But tragically, his son is never born, the baby dies during pregnancy while Eugene is away waiting for and thinking of Stephanida, his lover, wishing his wife dead. The attempt to compensate for his loveless childhood through his son is thwarted, and this frustrated desire and his immense guilt lead him to try to commit suicide. But he does not kill himself, he changes his mind and blames Stephanida for everything: “And I realized, everything I had was nearly gone. And Stephanida was to blame. It was all her. She wanted to destroy me. To take away everything I had. She was jealous of all that I had” (n. pag.). In a total refusal of responsibility he feels, “She possessed me against my will, she had put a spell on me, she was some kind of devil” (n. pag.). Reid makes the protagonist hesitate between suicide and murder, this way including into the adaptation the two different endings that Tolstoy created for the novella.

The devil is evoked merely as a turn of phrase, not as an indication of the religious motif. The shift in the play is not only cultural, temporal, but ideological as well, unlike in Harris’s reworking of the Tolstoy novella. Instead of the protagonist’s relationship to women being explained in terms of religious morality, here we have a person who is our contemporary and whose inner world and emotional life we see as motivated by his childhood experiences. Reid creates a credible portrait of an emotionally dysfunctional man, and gives a background to his dysfunctional personality. There is also a reflection on the impact of political corruption on contemporary society as the protagonist can afford to be totally incapable of feeling responsibility for his own deeds, and can even get away with murder because he belongs to influential political circles who can avoid being held accountable.

Both dramatic adaptations of Tolstoy’s fiction are successful in what Hutcheon considers the hallmark of adaptation: reinventing the familiar and making it fresh (115), but while Harris’s poignant recounting of the events in the life of a murderer remains in the past, Reid successfully relocates the old material both in terms of time, geography, and ideology. Harris’s Tolstoy monologue is an exquisite and powerful period piece while Reid breathes new life into Tolstoy’s gripping story providing contemporary context to its themes and psychological credibility to its protagonist.

Note

¹ I wish to thank Peter Reid for kindly giving me a copy of *Desire*.

Works Cited

- “Count Tolstoi Not Obscene.” *The New York Times*, 25 Sept. 1890. n. pag. Web. 23 April 2016.
- Harris, Nancy. *The Kreutzer Sonata*. London: Oberon, 2009. Print.
- . Interview with Fintan Walsh. “I try to get under the skin.” *Irish Theatre Magazine*, 2011. Web. 11 Dec. 2015.
- Hutcheon, Linda, and Siobhan O’Flynn. *A Theory of Adaptation*. New York: Routledge, 2013. Print.
- Jordan, Eamonn. “Look Who’s Talking, Too: The Duplicitous Myth of Naïve Narrative.” Clare Wallace, ed. *Monologues* 125-56. Print.
- Kurdi, Mária. *Representations of Gender and Female Subjectivity in Contemporary Irish Drama by Women*. New York: The Edwin Mellen P, 2010. Print.
- Laera, Margherita. “Introduction: Return, Rewrite, Repeat: The Theatricality of Adaptation.” *Theatre and Adaptation: Return, Rewrite, Repeat*. Ed. Margherita Laera. London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2014. 1-18. Print.
- Murray, Christopher. “Palimpsest: Two Languages as One in Brian Friel’s *Translations*.” *Brian Friel’s Dramatic Artistry*. Ed. Donald E. Morse, Csilla Bertha, and Mária Kurdi. Dublin: Carysfort, 2006. 93-208. Print.
- Reid, Peter. *Desire*. MS, 2014.
- Singleton, Brian. “Am I Talking to Myself?” *The Irish Times*, 19 April 2001. Web. 17 May 2016.
- Wallace, Clare. “Monologue Theatre, Solo Performance and Self as Spectacle.” *Monologues* 1-16. Print.
- , ed. *Monologues: Theatre, Performance, Subjectivity*. Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2006.