

FROM INTERPRETATION TO ADAPTATION  
(Working on Strindberg, Arias and Dostoyevsky)  
MA Thesis by Ida Kat Balslev  
Examiner's assessment by Julek Neumann

Ida's thesis is composed of four chapters; first two relate to her productions as director of Strindbergs *Miss Julie* and Arias' *Revolver Trilogy*, the third is about her stage adaptation of a crucial chapter of Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (it's not clear from the thesis whether the adaptation was produced or not) and finally of an essay about working with actors in an alien language context.

The first two chapters go into many details, often repetitive, both about Ida's interpretation and her work process. There seems to be some confusion in her mind about the relative terms of dramaturgy, interpretation and adaptation. Especially the longest and most detailed work on *Miss Julie*, based on superimposing a modernising directorial matrix onto a classical work of the Naturalist tragedy, fails to provide the starting point for such a radical departure; more importantly it does not explain dramaturgy of some of the choices. The lack of Strindberg's festive occasion and explanation of total lack of Miss Julie's sexual inexperience at 26 and of the sexual drive and provocation behind the plot are minimised. The character of the Father, made into the Disco/Mafia boss, did not (and could not without more text changing) come across to the audience, as the threat was not really there. Leaving out Miss Julie's final suicide made everything that went before kind of pointless. By claiming Ida was trying to attract younger audiences (using disco, video and so on), from my point of view she was avoiding her dramaturgical analysis responsibility.

On the other hand, she achieved with her adaptation a degree of stage energy, especially in the first half, that would have worked if the analysis and interpretation were clearer cut or presented: the poison in the liver was not very well visible, substituting a unicorn for the original bird moved the play too far over to a fairy tale land and looked unbelievable.

And of course, in the thesis, the ideological explanation for the choices taken (Capitalism, money as the overall drive) is far-fetched, as is the comparison of Miss Julie to Vera Chytilova's late 1960's Daisies movie taken for a critique of capitalism which just seems contrived for the purpose of the text.

More interesting is the way Ida describes her second production, *The Revolver Trilogy*, and the adapting/directing process she went through both in preproduction and production process. She started from the theme of solitude and isolation; she then describes the choices she made both at the preparation stage and in rehearsal. These included removing visuals of the child in the first part (replacing it with sound and creating space both connecting and dividing the two protagonists of a phone conversation, while using a typewriter as a rhythm defining factor), cuts in part two, and moving it partially from Argentina context to that of the Czech Republic (replacing the labels for different Mafias); and most of all in part three where she re-invented the "suicidal talk show" in the rehearsal process, keeping mostly the monologues but improvising the rest with the actors. The ideological passage against Capitalism makes again its appearance in the thesis and seems to be

a major theme for her.

On the theatrical side, Ida never explains how she made the three timescales (past, future, present) for the three plays visually work, although she spends a lot of time explaining the way the actors, the scenographers and the director worked together.

The process of adapting the chapter of Raskolnikov's confession from *The Crime and The Punishment* is quite straightforward; we all saw countless adaptations of the famous novel. Ida's adaptation, while competent, does not transcend the original text - it would be interesting to see her working on staging the script, especially if she went for her more radical ideological idea of cutting all the religion from Dostoyevsky's text.

Referencing Peter Brook and Ann Bogarth, the crux of Ida's thesis in the fourth chapter are the reflections on the work with the actors. Here she discuss individual choices for acting and the obstacles (language, acting culture in the individual countries, including acting in English for Czech audiences) and interactions with actors. She reflects about how the same show plays differently in a small space, and in a large one as they both affect the tempo rhythm (a term she's quite fond of). She divides actors in passive and active and says she learned to work with both types. The passive actor is not able to get suggestions from fellow actors, the active one "plays the ball". Some of Ida's observations about the actors are worth looking at as they seem to be original and coming from personal experience.

I definitely recommend Ida Kat Balslev's thesis for the closing MA examination.