An exploration of the creative approaches to stage adaptations in the field of theatre for young audiences; working from selected novels for young adults

Focus of the original adaptations:
Patrick Ness / Siobhan Dowd: A Monster Calls
and
Zsigmond Móricz: Orphalina

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A study submitted in part fulfilment of the requirement for the award of

Ph.D.

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of PhD is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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Digital links to Creative Projects and Performance Repositories

Notes: Before engaging with the written component of the thesis, examiners will find it useful to first watch the recorded versions of the two theatre productions: *A Monster Calls* and *Orphalina* (links below). Along with the associated scripts, these productions form the core artefacts of this PhD project. Both recordings have English subtitles, which can only be seen with the Caption turned on. Both productions focus on young people who are dealing with trauma; in the case of *Orphalina*, extreme actions (e.g., sexual abuse) are also part of the adaptation. How to present this for young audiences is part of the discussion of the thesis.

A Monster Calls

To view the stage recording of *A Monster Calls*: https://youtu.be/VLRrsI7WlJM
The performance was recorded on the 18th of January 2022 at Weöres Sándor Theatre, Szombathely (Hungary).

Orphalina

To view the stage recording of *Orphalina*: https://youtu.be/cTrHkCpYlR8
The performance was recorded on the 28th of October 2023 at the Ariel Theatre for Youth and Children in Târgu-Mureş (Romania).

Repository of performance materials

To see the repositories of the creative works in DCU DORAS Repository.

The source contains two main folders (A Monster Calls and Orphalina) which lead to further subfolders. The structure of both contents is similar: 1) Adaptation drafts; 2) Rehearsal material; 3) Reviews and 4) Visual materials. The Adaptation folder contains all the previous drafts and versions of the final script. In the Rehearsal material is collected pictures and videos of the rehearsals. A selection of reviews can be found in the Review folder. The Visual folder contains pictures of the design and production shots.

Abbreviations

AMC-N	*A Monster Calls* (novel by Patrick Ness / Siobhan Dowd)
AMC-OS	*A Monster Calls* (original adaptation by Adam Peck, dir: Sally Cookson, Old Vic Theatre, London, 2018)
AMC-F	*A Monster Calls* (film version by Patrick Ness, dir: J.A. Bayona, 2016)
AMC-GV1	*A Monster Calls* (first draft of the adaptation, 2020)
AMC-GV2	*A Monster Calls* (second draft of the adaptation, 2021)
AMC-GV3	*A Monster Calls* (third draft of the adaptation, 2021)
AMC-GVF	*A Monster Calls* (final version of the adaptation, 2021)
AMC-SR	*A Monster Calls* (stage recording, 2022)

O-N	*Orphalina* (novel by Zsigmond Móricz, 1941, translated by Virgina L. Lewis, 2020)
O-F	*Orphalina – Nobody's daughter* (film version dir: László Ranódy, 1976)
O-GV1	*Orphalina* (first adaptation, 2006)
O-GV2	*Orphalina* (second adaptation, 2010)
O-GV3	*Orphalina* (third adaptation, 2023)
O-SR	*Orphalina* (stage recording of the current production, 2023)
O-SR/1	*Orphalina* (stage recording of the first production, 2006)
O-SR/2	*Orphalina* (stage recording of the second production, 2010)

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ABSTRACT

Title of thesis: An exploration of the creative approaches to stage adaptations in the field of theatre for young audiences; working from selected novels for young adults

Focus of the original adaptations: Patrick Ness / Siobhan Dowd: A Monster Calls and Zsigmond Móricz: Orphalina

Author: György Vidovszky, BA, MA

The central research of this thesis concerns the translation of literary works written specifically for young people into the language of theatre. A further layer of analysis is added by a research interest in the different ways in which the age group of the audience frames and directs creative practice. The thesis records and is the result of my work as a theatre practitioner working specifically with material designed for young audiences. In particular, the research at the centre of this PhD project related to my adaptation and subsequent production of two novels that deal with trauma for young adults. The thesis records not just the creative practice associated with these productions but also the critical analysis and research that has informed my work in the theatre. At the centre of this thesis stands my original theatrical adaptations of *A Monster Calls* by Patrick Ness / Siobhan Dowd and *Orphalina* by Zsigmond Móricz. The second half of the thesis presents the material (design work, draft scripts, and final production script) and productions (high-quality video recordings) relating to this adaptation work.

The first section of the thesis provides an overview of theatre for young audiences (TYA) and its dynamically changing place among theatre genres of the recent period. The research here focuses on the importance of age classifications within the genre and the inseparable educational and teaching labels of TYA. Subsequently, the thesis examines the strong relationship between children's literature and TYA, touching on aspects such as the role of taboo and censorship. Developing the analysis of the nature of this relation, the thesis thereafter offers an exploration of the established healing effect of literature and the arts, with particular regard to children's literature. Finally, in this section of the thesis, there is an analysis of adaptation theories and the key proposal that transmedia adaptation should be considered at least as original as the source work due to the unavoidable and inherent change of artistic expression.

Finally, the thesis weaves together my research findings with the aspects that arose during the process of adapting *A Monster Calls* and *Orphalina*, focusing on the possibilities and the challenges of creation.

INTRODUCTION

Scene-setting: contexts for writing and performance

In this first section, I seek to outline the various contexts for my research project, to delineate its two main components (analysis and production), and to establish the links between them. My overarching research area is titled 'An exploration of the creative approaches to stage adaptations in the field of theatre for young audiences' and focuses particularly on my work with selected novels for young adults that deal with trauma. At the centre of my creative work for this project has been the creation of original stage adaptations of *A Monster Calls* by Patrick Ness / Siobhan Dowd and *Orphalina* by Zsigmond Móricz. The development of the scripts and stage performances from these two novels and the associated analysis and research represent a crystallisation of more than 30 years of experience as a theatre practitioner.[1] During this time, I have not only worked as a professional theatre director creating productions for mainly young audiences (children and young adults), but I have also gained valuable experience as a drama teacher. Over those many years as a drama teacher, I have confronted various key adaptation issues, such as the question of fidelity to the original work and how to translate literature into the language of the theatre. These are creative issues that continue to stand at the heart of this doctoral project. The basis of my adaptation practice throughout has been to adjust the source material to the abilities and interests of the given group and audience.[2] For example, dependent on the material and performance context, I have often radically shortened the text and/or merged characters of the novel, with a view to highlighting the parts that were important to the young people who would be our main audience. I have also often incorporated improvisations as a way of drawing out a text's unconscious possibilities. Hence, in my experience, youth/student productions (productions performed by students) enjoy much more freedom in the field of

[1] For more overview, see: https://vidovszkygy.hu/; https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vidovszky_Gy%C3%B6rgy

[2] Among many others we created adaptations based on Dezső Kosztolányi's *Sweet Anna*; Boccaccio's *Decameron*; Cervantes' *Don Quijote*; Garcia Marquez's *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*; Akutagava's *Rashomon*; Péter Esterházy's *Seventeen swans*; Bertolt Brecht's *Caucasian Chalk Circle*; W. Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

adaptation as they are not bound by the expectations of the audience in quite the same way as a production for an adult audience. In my experience, in addition to each student/participant finding the role and task that best suits them, only one aspect matters in such productions: the *complex operation of the theatrical language*. This creative mindset focuses on the result/outcome, seeking to create a valid and complex totality for *young audiences* in which any piece of art or inspiration can be used in a context-specific manner. Therefore, the main element of a theatre adaptation, in my view, should not necessarily be the words taken from the literary work, as I will demonstrate with my research, but its *performability*. My extensive experience in the field of adaptation with and for young people has confirmed my conviction that the 'source material' during the adaptation can be completely transformed, as it serves a different art form, an independent system of expressions. Thus, the outcome (the new work of art) can be as original as the adapted work. With my research and practical work, I want to test the validity of this statement and, thus, the theoretical considerations informing this process have framed the research for this project.

The focus of the adaptations

The artefact section of the PhD includes the two scripts of the stage adaptations of selected novels (both translated into English)[3], as well as the stage productions themselves.[4]

The source material of my first adaptation is *A Monster Calls (2011),* which is a 'fantasy' novel written for young adults by Patrick Ness (1971-)[5] based on an original idea by Siobhan Dowd. It is a compelling story about a boy dealing with his mother's imminent death. It is a surreal inner journey about guilt, passing, and letting go, about finding a way out of the maze of lifelong trauma.

[3] See the final version of both adaptations in the Chapter 4 – Evaluation of the creative work.
[4] The recordings of the production with English subtitles are available online: A Monster Calls »»; Orphalina »».
[5] Patrick Ness is an American-British author, who won the Carnegie Medal in 2012 for *A Monster Calls*.

The source material of my second adaptation is Zsigmond Móricz's (1879-1942) *Orphalina* (1941), a poignant, poetic novel about a little girl without a proper name. She is raised by peasant foster parents for money: she is made to work and starved, her clothes are taken away, she is not allowed to go to school, she is beaten, burned with coals, and abject men sexually abuse her. She lives in worse conditions than animals, yet her very vulnerability provokes her foster parents to be ever more abusive. *Orphalina* is considered to be one of the cult novels of Hungarian literature; its author, Móricz, is a well-known portrayer of injustice and contradictions in society, and countless of his works are part of the Hungarian literary canon.[6]

Location of the performances

In early 2020[7,] I was invited to create an original adaption and direct a production based on *A Monster Calls* in Hungary in one of the best regional theatres for young audiences (Mesebolt Bábszínház, Szombathely[8]). I started to work on the adaptation in January 2019, recording the process during the different phases of the script adaptation and, in particular, noting the various aspects under consideration while writing and trying it out on stage. Rehearsals began on 24th August 2021; the opening night was on 7th October 2021 in Weöres Sándor Theatre, which was the coproduction partner of Mesebolt Puppet Theatre[9]. As of June 2024, the show has been in the theatre's repertoire for two seasons, with a total of 25 performances to date. The production returned to the repertoire of the Mesebolt Puppet Theatre in the 2024/2025 season. The performance was invited to various festivals in Hungary[10], including the 10th Kaposvár ASSITEJ Biennale of Theatre for Children and Youth in 2022, where it received the 'Glass Hill' Award – Main Award for the best production for young adult

[6] For a more extensive overview of Zsigmond Móricz see: https://www.britannica.com/biography/Zsigmond-Moricz

[7] The production was postponed due to COVID 19 to Autumn 2021.

[8] Szombathely is known for its connection with James Joyce's *Ulysses*: Rudolph Bloom is from Szombathely, which literally translates as 'Saturday Place'.

[9] The adaptation is performed in Hungarian.

[10] 10th Kaposvár ASSITEJ Biennale of Theatre for Children and Youth in 2022; Zsinór nélkül – Független Felnőtt Bábos Fesztivál, Budapest 2022 (Without strings - Independent Puppet Festival for Adults); eSzínház Festival (Online Theatre Festival); THEALTER Nemzetközi Színházi Fesztivál, Szeged, 2022 (THEALTER International Theatre Festival); Magyarországi Bábszínházak Találkozója, Kecskemét, 2024 (Festival of Hungarian Puppet Theaters); MOST FESZT, Tatabánya, 2023 (MOnodrama and STUDIO THEATER FESTIVAL)

audiences.[11] At the eSzínház Festival (Online Theatre Festival), it won the award for the best theatre adaptation for young audiences in 2022.[12] A number of positive reviews were published, many of which highlighted the adaptation's sensitive approach to the heavy topic and its formal complexity:[13] 'The direction of György Vidovszky and the performance of the actors guides the audience sensitively through the stations of the mourning process known from psychology: from rejection to acceptance, without becoming didactic. It is not an easy performance for either the actors or the audience. There is a tacit silence for a long time after the dark - the doors are already opened when someone applauds.'[14] 'First of all, I can only say: I haven't seen a performance in a very long time that has tormented me so much with its weight, has lifted my soul with its catharsis even if I am so far beyond the target age group, and had experienced many personal passions before.'[15] Besides reviews and studies, the production has also served as the subject of a university MA thesis.[16]

In the spring of 2022, I was contacted by the University of Arts Târgu-Mureş (Romania) to direct the final exam production of the graduating puppeteer students. From the outset of this project, I was looking for material that is not part of the puppetry canon but still could be suitable for puppetry, so I chose one of the most significant authors of Hungarian literature in the early twentieth century, Zsigmond Móricz, and his canonical text *Orphalina*.[17] We started the rehearsals on 3rd January 2023, and the opening night was the 24th January.[18] The performance was co-

[11] See the link: https://www.dcu.ie/english/news/2022/apr/monster-calls-gyorgy-vidovszky
[12] Link to the awards of ESzínház »»»»
[13] See selection of reviews in Repositories, Available from: DCU DORAS Repository.
[14] Turbuly, Lilla: *The key to puppetry*, spirituszonline.hu, 2021 ('Vidovszky György rendezése és a színészi összjáték érzékenyen és empátiával vezeti végig a főhőst és vele a nézőt a gyászfolyamat pszichológiából ismert stációin az elutasítástól az elfogadásig, anélkül, hogy didaktikussá válna. Nem könnyű előadás sem színésznek, sem nézőnek. A sötét után sokáig néma csend van – már az ajtókat is kinyitják, mire valaki bátortalanul tapsolni kezd.')
[15] Asztalos, István: *This is not a fairytale, child!,* SÉD, 2021. 6. p 33 ('Mindent megelőzve csak azt mondhatom: nagyon régen nem láttam előadást, ami súlyával ennyire meggyötörte volna, katarzisával ennyire magasra emelte volna korhatáron messze túli, személyes passiók útjait szintén megjárt lelkemet.')
[16] Tóth Marcell: *Szólít a szörny: könyvben, filmen, színpadon* (*A Monster Calls in book, on film and on stage*) Rippl-Rónai Institute of Arts and Theatre of Kaposvár Campus, Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences, 2024.
[17] More about him and the novel in Chapter 4 – Evaluation of the creative work.
[18] https://www.dcu.ie/english/news/2023/mar/gyorgy-vidovszkys-adaptation-orphalina-arvacska-premiers-university-arts

produced by the Ariel Theatre for Youth and Children in Târgu-Mureş, which later added the production to its repertoire for the 2023/2024 season.

The production received many festival invitations[19] and has served as the subject of several university MA theses.[20] It has received a satisfying number of reviews, many of which highlighted how puppet theatre as a genre refined the presentation of the traumatic theme for young audiences:[21] 'The cruel actions of the step-family are presented to the audiences extremely sensitively through the specific, abstract in its own way, yet the very readable language of the puppet theatre. At the same time, the indirect method of conveying – that this genre uses – makes the impulses received from the stage much more modest - if you like, more tolerable'.[22] 'Orphalina – with its stage performance rich in transformations and the lyricism of its music and visuals – belongs to me as one of the longest-lasting theatre experiences. A warning sign, a clear message, it is a very conscience crying out at the moment of its birth.'[23]

[19] THEALTER Nemzetközi Színházi Fesztivál, Szeged, 2024 (THEALTER International Theatre Festival); Ördögkatlan Fesztivál, 2024 (Ördögkatlan Arts Festival); HolnapUtán Fesztivál, Nagyvárad (Romania), 2023 (AfterTomorrow Festival, Oradea); UNSCENE Művészeti Egyetemek Fesztiválja, Csíkszereda (Romania), 2023; UNSCENE Festival of Art Universities, Miercurea Ciuc (Romania).

[20] Vén Evelin: *A színpadi képteremtés és plasztika szerepe a bábszínházi alkotófolyamatokban* (*The role of stage image creation and plasticity in the creative processes of puppet theatre*), University of Arts Târgu-Mureş, 2023; Nagy Tímea: *Kapcsolatok az animációs színházban* (*Relationships in animated theatre*) University of Arts Târgu-Mureş, 2023; Berecz Boglárka: *A drámai szöveg és az adaptáció szabadsága* (*Freedom of dramatic text and adaptation*) University of Arts Târgu-Mureş, 2023.

[21] Selection of reviews in Appendix. One of the criteria for PhD by Artefact is that the research should be of outstanding quality. One widely accepted measure of this is professional critical response. This does not, of course, replace my findings regarding audience reactions.

[22] Stoian, Toni: *The horror of reality in a beautiful fairytale*, Látó, May 2023 ('A mostoha család kegyetlen cselekedetei a bábszínház sajátos, a maga módján elvont, mégis nagyon olvasható nyelvezetén át rendkívül érzékletesen kerülnek a néző szeme elé.Ugyanakkor a közvetett közlésmód, amivel ez a műfaj él, sokkal elviselhetőbbé – ha úgy tetszik, fogyaszthatóbbá – teszi a színpadról kapott impulzusokat.')

[23] Nagy Székely, Ildikó: *The embers of the defenseless*, Népújság, 2023 ('Az Árvácska – átváltozásokban gazdag színpadi játékával, zene- és látványvilágának líraiságával – számomra a hosszú életű színházi élmények közé tartozik. Egy intő jel, hótiszta üzenet, maga a születése pillanatában felsíró lelkiismeret.')

Research area

In coordination with the creative practice and artefact elements of my doctoral project, I also engaged in a critical exploration of its various contexts and how these have informed my work. In this regard, I examined aspects of three main critical strands: i) theatre for young audiences as an independent discipline; ii) writing for young people in light of the relationship between children's literature and TYA; iii) originality and fidelity in adaptations.

The starting point for my research in Chapter 1 (Enduring and varied impact of theatre for young audiences) has been the belief that theatre for young audiences (TYA) deserves to be examined as an individual aesthetic category among other theatre genres based on its unique approach to the target audience. A separate analysis is also well-founded by the fact that, despite the TYA's widespread disdain for adult productions, it 'is a vibrant art form in many countries around the world' (Water, 2012, p. 1). Notwithstanding the significant aesthetic and thematic development and recognition experienced in the past decades, TYA still struggles to get rid of the compulsive educational intention (Falconi, 2015, pp. 159-165), to handle taboos (Water, 2012, pp. 59-79; Elnan, 2009, pp. 39-47), and with the small degree of real involvement of young people's opinion (Maguire, 2021, pp. 18-25). However, 'no individual fits exactly into any set of categories' (Goldberg, 1974, pp. 80-84); I believe the separate analysis of young people according to their psychological development is necessary and useful – especially from the point of view of creative practice. What kind of theatre form and theme is 'suitable' and what is 'beneficial' for the young audience are among the fundamental questions of TYA, as well as the appropriate presentation of difficult topics and taboos. Believing that 'one remarkable performance has the potential to "cause" positive, social changes in children's minds, hearts, and behaviour' (Klein, 2005, p. 41), it is vital for theatre practitioners to deal with topics relevant to young people, and this is precisely what distinguishes it from theatre for adults: it takes into account the age group related and socio-cultural embeddedness of the target audience. I have summarised the above-mentioned aspects in the light of my practical experiences of the two adaptations for young people.

In the next chapter (Writing for children or youth), I extend my investigation to the longstanding connection between children's / young adult literature and TYA. Among many others, my focus was to highlight the most relevant similarities from the creators' and the recipients' points of view: namely, how to reconcile the dissonance regarding their age and interest differences between the authors and the young readers (Ní Bhroin & Kennon, 2012, p. 1). By examining the original reception context, it can be stated that many classic children's books like *Pinocchio* by Collodi or *Peter Pan* by J. M. Barrie were not initially written for young people per se (Rose, p. 1). In other words, who the book is written for does not exclusively determine the readership or the category (children's literature) of the text. Zsigmond Móricz, to give another example, did not intend *Orphalina* to be a book for young readers, yet it has become part of the YA literary canon and compulsory reading in Hungarian schools. In addition to its indisputable literary value, this is assumingly due to the fact that an eight-year-old child is the protagonist of the novel, with whom the young reader can readily identify. The dominance of adult thinking in children's and YA literature often leads to didacticism because it fulfils the never fading educational expectations of parents or teachers (Cullingford 1998, p. 54). This can be manifested not only in the educative intention of the books – similar to TYA – but also in the topics from which young people are shielded. Censorship conducted by changing ideological and political aspects affects not only the thematic selection of children's and YA books but also their linguistic layer. Banned content, like taboos in some countries, includes topics related to sexuality, especially the representation of LGBTQ. Such restrictions are not based on the psychological or pedagogical aspects but reflect the moral standards of adult society. Explicit censorship seems to be a response to the fact that children's and YA literature – rightly – deals with more and more important but often perilous topics that deal with trauma like death, grief, humiliation, abuse, and bullying, which may be of interest to young readers. This intention applies perfectly to the novels based on my adaptations. They take their young readers seriously by talking about challenging topics in impeccable, layered literary form. Behind such works is the belief that art can have a therapeutic effect especially for young recipients (Buechel, 2018, p. 32). In children's and YA literature, similarly to TYA, it is therefore extremely important that the creators give as much space as possible to the 'voice' of young people and incorporate their points of view more extensively.

After the examination of some relevant aspects of TYA and children's and YA literature in connection with my creative work, I focus on analysing certain questions of *intermedial adaptations* in the next chapter (Theoretical analysis of adaptation as an independent work of art). The essential premise of my research is that an adaptation can be an autonomous, original work that is not only to be evaluated in the context of the initial material. I attempt to support my statement from two points of view, namely with a closer examination of *fidelity* and *originality* in art. One of the most frequently examined aspects of adaptation is the level of *fidelity,* namely, whether the adaptation transfers every detail or should preserve only the reading of the original work (Kelly, 1979, p 207). I believe fidelity will inevitably be compromised during intermedial adaptation, even if the adaptor takes maximum account of the artistic intentions of the original work. This is partly due to the differences in the means of expression of the various art forms and the discrepancies between the *meaning* and *understanding* of the original work. Consequently, an adaptation is necessarily an interpretation of the source material and, as such, differs from the original because it places it in a new context (Hutcheon, 2012, p. 39). The other main aspect raised in connection with adaptation is *originality*, which should not be mistaken for authorship (Robert MacFarlane, 2007, p. 7). Originality in a *thematic* sense has not always been the central aspect of artistic creation; that is why the artist's originality was embodied primarily in the *how* and not in the *what* for centuries. Re-creating well-known, culturally relevant themes – especially subjects belonging to Christianity – was predominant in fine arts and literature. On that ground, I claim that originality is not necessarily supposed to cover a *thematic* innovation, but it can be a formal variation that adds *novelty* to an existing topic. Therefore, I believe – in close connection with my adaptation work – that a transmedial adaptation that handles the source material freely by giving a new interpretation can result in an autonomous, *original* work of art.

CHAPTER 1: ENDURING AND VARIED IMPACT OF THEATRE FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES – THEATRE FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES AS AN INDEPENDENT DISCIPLINE

In what follows below I reflect on the broader contexts within which my practice is situated. As noted above, the two adaptations and theatre productions, which are the basis of my research, were created specifically for young audiences. To establish the broader grounding of this particular aspect of my creative work, I consider it essential to examine the genre characteristics of theatre for children and youth and to refer to the most significant thematical and aesthetical changes in this area over recent decades. The intellectual work represented by what follows has not only indirectly but often directly influenced my creative work in terms of how to deal with emotionally weighted topics in TYA that are still typically considered best avoided despite the potential healing effect of art. I must emphasise that my research was primarily based on European theatrical traditions, as the source and realisation of both adaptations were born in this cultural circle. My examples, references and conclusions, therefore, mainly refer to European TYA, with a particular focus on Hungarian-language practice.

In this chapter, I outline the ways in which theatre for young audiences represents a separate aesthetic category that requires a specific approach exactly because of the target audience. It opens with an exploration of some of most important differences between theatre for adults and young people, focusing on the issues that shape the thematic features of productions for young audiences, as well as the questions of interactivity and audience involvement. I here also briefly examine the relationship between TYA and children's psychological and social development, and its potential to help shape their aesthetic formation. All of this is presented in the context of constructing a theoretical basis for my adaptation work as a theatre practitioner.

1.1. The shifting acceptance of TYA

As a theatre practitioner who has been working in the field of theatre for young audiences for more than twenty years, one of the major aesthetical and practical

questions is whether theatre for young audiences (TYA) can be interpreted as an independent and individual discipline within the performing arts at all. Is it possible to examine any artistic expression separately on the basis of the kind of audience it is for? In other words, are there particular aspects that the creator takes into account when devising a production for young people? It is not only my professional conviction that artistic expressions created for young people (literature, theatre, fine arts) operate based on special considerations, especially seeing the emotional and educational impact of these artistic products on the target audience. As Wolfgang Schneider rightly states: 'Theatre for young audiences helps to recognise the differences and similarities in life, develops the capacity of judgement, promotes understanding of reality presented in multi-level artistic images, develops taste, makes it suitable for young people to receive the real aesthetic values' (Schneider, 2012, p. 5).[24] If we accept that theatre can have such an effect on the development of young souls (subjectivities), we can find an important starting point for treating TYA as a discrete artistic endeavour and one that deserves *particular attention and analysis* quite apart from the art of adults, both in terms of content and aesthetics.

If we examine the field from the perspective of theatre structure and professional recognition in Europe – which is the wider context of my research – TYA has remained secondary in a theatre structure, which is largely based on serving adult audiences. Even among theatre practitioners, it is a generally accepted opinion that TYA is equivalent to the cheap and simplified staging of well-known tales, repeating hackneyed theatrical and acting solutions. In short, TYA is commonly associated with a *lack of theatricality* and *innovation,* 'theatre-but-not-theatre' (Water, 2009, p. 16). However, recent TYA in Europe demonstrates a much broader range of aesthetic and thematic innovation, for which my two adaptations can serve as solid examples.

The tension at work here might be seen as primarily originating in the question of genre. It is common to associate theatre for young audiences only with *pantomimes*, *fairy tales* and *classics from the canon* performed for second-level students. Attending a performance of a classic from the second-level curriculum (in Ireland: Shakespeare,

[24] Wolfgang Schneider, Honorary president of ASSITEJ International, (International Association of Theatre & Performing Arts for Children & Young People / Association Internationale du Theatre pour l'Enfance et la Jeunesse).

O'Casey or Synge) is often the main – if not the only – professional theatre experience of young people in some countries, even if classics from the canon rarely deal with any of the issues most *relevant to the adolescent*. Classics on stage attract young adult audiences mainly because of the school curriculum. This direct educational aspect of theatre-making often results in poor, unimaginative theatrical representation, thereby inevitably creating the impression that theatre is merely a performative illustration of literature. It is my hope that my adaptation of *Orphalina* provides a strong counter-example to this idea, which is why the performance would not straightforwardly replace reading the novel if anyone were to watch it for that purpose.

Notwithstanding the importance of certain other popular genres like *musicals* or *pantomimes*, the so-called 'arena-style participation theatre' (Klein, 2005, p. 40) which undoubtedly reaches huge masses, especially young people, I do not directly address the artistic and pedagogical examination of these products simply because they are business-oriented manifestations that consider young people only as consumers to be entertained. My research focuses exclusively on artistic products made *specifically* for young people, considering the *psychological*, *emotional development,* and the *social-cultural* embeddedness of the targeted audiences.

Even with this narrowing, it is difficult to formulate general statements about TYA since significant differences can be experienced by continents and countries. Focusing on the European theatre tradition in this research, a significant change can be observed in the recognition of theatre for young audiences over recent decades. Its ever-increasing importance in this area is shown by the number of leading playwrights who have written dedicated works for this audience. As well as Irish writers such as Enda Walsh, Marina Carr, Mark O'Rowe and Stella Feehily, in this regard, we might also note Simon Stephens, Nigel Williams (English), Lutz Hübner, Holger Schober (German), Selma Lagerlöf, Anders Duus (Swedish), István Tasnádi (Hungarian), among many others. Renowned directors – for example, Sebastian Nübling, Nick Hartnagel, Andrea Gronemeyer (German), Árpád Schilling (Hungarian), Jimmy Fay, and Louis Lovett (Irish) – have also created work in this field and, beyond the artistic endeavour, the educational and pedagogical impact of this theatre-practice is increasingly recognised for its value and importance. This is also reflected in the

appearance of many sub-genres, such as ‘Theatre-in-Education’, ‘Drama-in-Education’ or ‘Process Drama’, ‘Outreach-programmes’, or ‘Classroom-theatre’, areas which I examine only secondarily.

Hand in hand with the development of children’s literature, it has become increasingly important in theatre not to treat children *as a homogenous mass* to whom it is enough to provide simplified morals. Besides ‘incorporating the voice of children within the TYA sector’ (Maguire, 2021, p. 21), contemporary theatre for young people has been characterised by taking the concerns of young people seriously through the breaching of taboos and locating topics that can help address the anxieties, traumas, or questions of adolescence, in the recent decades. Theatre for young adult audiences has been found to nurture understanding and empathy towards reducing the tension, mental and physical pressure, disadvantages and conflicts arising from different social situations in adolescence (Brice Heath, 2003, p. 11). Thus, TYA has become a significantly more conscious field in terms of age grouping and introducing challenging topics, which regards its target audience with increasing responsibility. This aspect was particularly important in my adaptations’ thematic selection and aesthetic shaping, considering the psychological development of the audiences, which I will demonstrate in more detail later.

1.2. Subtle yet significant differences between TYA and theatre for adults

Taking as a starting point the sense that TYA has become more mature thematically and aesthetically, in the following, I aim to examine some significant differences that remain between TYA and adult theatre. According to Moses Goldberg, ‘“Children’s theatre” is basically the same as “adult theatre”’ (Goldberg, 1974, p. 82). Even if we acknowledge that specific youth-targeted productions can be aesthetically as comprehensive as any production for adults, there should ideally be a distinction between, for instance, a production of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* for adult audiences and one created especially for young people. However, as Suzanne Osten, the highly acclaimed Swedish theatre director, puts it: ‘You should not be able to notice that it is

theatre for children!' (Elnan, 2009, p. 39).[25] The difference I am trying to prove with my research is not the aesthetic and content elaboration – which Osten claims too – but that creators' awareness of the audience's age-related and socio-cultural engagement to the play.

Theatre-makers for adult audiences are driven primarily by artistic aims, which ideally reflect back on the adult society in which they live. Since every theatre production should ideally reckon with the context in which it is produced, theatre can only be interpreted as a 'present tense' contemporary artistic expression, which is intended for viewers living in that age. Given that any theatrical performance ends at the moment of its realisation, theatre has no 'past tense': the live experience cannot be revisited. Consequently, the real potential of live theatre, compared to, for example, the literary text, is that it must not speak to eternity but exclusively to the audience of its time. This confirms the concrete social embeddedness of a theatre work not only on the part of the spectators but also on the part of the creators.

The motivation, for example, to put *Hamlet* on stage yet again – apart from commercial or educational reasons – should ideally come from an artistic need, which finds it important to show a *new representation* of the well-known story in the artist's time and social context. If we exclude the possibility that the production is not a substitute for reading the literary canon for young people, then the difference ideally should mean finding reference points in the play that make it *pertinent to young people* in the time and context they are living – not to mention its *fresh theatrical interpretation*, which is also imperative, in my view. As Tamás Vekerdy, the highly acknowledged child psychologist, states: 'Children should get the same [quality] in the art that adults get, only a better one and in a better way' (Vekerdy, 1987, p. 76).[26]

This is what I intend to prove with my research: one of the most important aspects of TYA is making the topic *valid and interesting* for young people. There is a very

[25] Suzanne Osten (1944-2024), Swedish film director, stage director and screenwriter. She is a pioneer in developing theatre for children, known for staging taboo subjects for children, including divorce, suicide, eating disorders, and schizophrenia.

[26] Translated from the original quote: 'A gyerekeknek ugyanazt kell kapniuk a művészetben, amit a felnőttek kapnak, csak még jobbat és még jobban.'

narrow line to walk between unbounded artistic self-expression and over-simplification and between education and didacticism. In my two adaptation works, which form the practical basis of my investigation, I am specifically trying to test the following proposition: that taking the target audience into account does not come at the expense of the artistic formulation but rather opens up a new, uncompromising path. This distinction doesn't mean that TYA cannot be assessed or enjoyable for adults. On the contrary, as Sarah Keating points out: 'Children's theatre in Ireland has developed such a strong aesthetic identity over the past ten years that it has its own committed adult audience, who are happy to attend with or without age-appropriate companions' (Keating, 2014, p.12).

It is speculative to decipher what lies behind the above-mentioned experience beyond the aesthetic formation of quality productions for young audiences – in this case, in Ireland – that attract adult audiences too, but one characteristic can be mentioned here: the *mobilisation of fantasy* and *playfulness* are essential aspects of theatre for young audiences. As Eszter Kiss correctly states: 'Children do not expect to be played for, but they want to play themselves. And the partnership between the actors (theatre) and the children can only be created through joint play' (Kiss, E. 1982, p. 22).[27] This can be manifested not only in the form of incorporating a series of direct theatrical *interactions* into TYA productions, but also relying on young viewers to understand the aesthetics of theatre as a medium. Although, as Ric Knowles emphasises, it is almost impossible to know anything for sure about how theatrical signals are received by spectators[28], instead of unnecessary plot illustrations, the precise and multi-meaning theatre signs can make the audience almost a co-creator if their imagination gets inspired.[29] Alongside the meaning of the whole play, the interpretation of the scripts on stage and the motivation of various characters arises through the theatrical representation of the text: diction, gestures, actions, and stylisation, the choice of signals and expressions can function as an opportunity for a fantasy-freeing effect.

[27] Translated from the original quote: 'A gyerekek nem azt várják, hogy játszanak nekik, hanem ők maguk akarnak játszani. S a színészek (színház) és a gyerekek partnerkapcsolata is csak a közös játékban jöhet létre.'

[28] For more on this, see: Ric Knowles: *Reading the Material Theatre* (2004)

[29] For more on this, see: Sandra Jane Gattenhof: *In the Mouth of the Imagination: positioning children as co-researchers and co-artists to create a professional children's theatre production* (2008)

Such productions automatically regard theatre as a creative game of mutual attention between performers and the audience, which is one of the key elements of TYA – in my view. This concept builds on what Rancière argues, 'Being a spectator is not some passive condition [...] We also learn and teach, act and know, as spectators who all the time link what we see to what we have seen and said, done and dreamed' (Rancière, p 17). The *Orphalina* adaptation can serve as an ample example of this, something I discuss more thoroughly in the Chapter 4.6. 'Notes on work in progress of the adaptation of *Orphalina'*.

On the contrary, productions based on simple script illustrations, highlighting the verbal transmission of the narrative content[30], often depict the primary and self-evident intentions of the characters without deeper connections or arcs. These productions often forget about the visual layers of theatre and the mimetic elements of narrativity, engaging little of the spectators' imagination and little of the interaction between the audience and the production itself. What is forgotten in such instances is that spectators should ideally be active creators using their intelligence to find their own meaning in what happens on stage (Water, 2012, p. 65).[31] This also determines the approach to acting, which I address later, together with the question as to whether 'what we have put on stage [is] worthy of [the audience member's] attention?' (Levy, 1987, p. 1).

1.3. The threatening dominance of pedagogical and educational aspects in TYA

All that said, underpinning Osten's proclamation that 'young audiences deserve theatre art, not just theatre for amusement or educational purposes' (Elnan, 2009, p. 39) is a clear sense that it is almost inevitable that theatre for children – as well as for young adults – has an educational aspect. In fact, my experience suggests the risk in this sphere is the potential dominance of the educational aspect over the artistic one. To this end, Gill Robertson rightly warns that: 'We need to make sure that the work we put in front of children is exceptional, [and that] it's not a teaching tool, and it's not message-driven' (Robertson, 2016, no page number). In both adaptations, I

[30] For more on this, see: Gerard Genette: *Narrative Discourse Revisited* (1983)

[31] Water's work is indebted to that of Jacques Rancière's – for more on this concept, see: Jacques Rancière: *The Emancipated Spectator* (2009)

deliberately tried to avoid didactic solutions while always taking into account that the performances will inevitably have an ‘educative’ effect, considering the age of the target audience. In the first instance, I strove to find the correct artistic solutions rather than the forced delivery of the ‘message’ or the ‘moral’.

However, it cannot be ignored that despite significant artistic achievements in this field, creators, just like viewers (not only young people but their parents and teachers), have undefined pedagogical expectations while watching a production for young audiences – many times ‘kidnapped school audiences’ (Klein, 2005, p. 44) – which can impede them from relating freely to the production simply as a piece of art. It is a general parental belief, as David Buckingham puts it, that ‘children’s leisure time is expected to be occupied with activities which adults define as ‘educational’ and ‘improving’’ (Buckingham, p 132). Maria Falconi accurately perceives this trap when she ironically repines on behalf of the TYA creative community that: ‘We MUST have a message, we MUST have a lesson, we MUST teach, we MUST, in the end, establish from the stage what is good and what is bad’ (Falconi, 2015, p. 159). This kind of (mis)interpretation of the purpose of art for young people has often simplified stories to messages that are attached to moral aspects, whilst creators in this field often avoid raising other questions which might be important for children or young people because they may be uncomfortable for adults (i.e. parents): ‘little to no works spoke of situations that are painful or sensitive but are present in a child’s daily life, such as death, sexuality, violence, discrimination, etc’ (Falconi, 2015, p. 160). Much of this stems from the fundamental contradiction that ‘judgements [in TYA] exercised by adult gatekeepers in deciding what children should be allowed to see’ (Maguire, 2021, p. 19) and the involvement of the target audience in the creative process and the choice of topic are still rare.

Falconi’s statement is accurate not only because of the misplaced adult audience expectations but also because the range of taboos is constantly changing and varies from country to country. All this, unfortunately, is not primarily due to the development of child psychology but to the current cultural and political leanings of adult society. As Water states, taboos ‘are rooted in moral and/or religious belief structures, which make them ideological constructs’ (Water, 2021, p. 60). Through my two examples of adaptation, I examine the possible approaches to such ‘difficult’

topics, in which I have taken into account the aspects discussed here (age and cultural context). To briefly summarise: *A Monster Calls* talks about death and the complicated, often contradictory feelings related to it, while *Orphalina* describes, without compromise, children's vulnerability to mental and physical abuse.

In recent decades, theatre for young audiences has developed greatly in this regard, and today, its educational aspect more often resonates with *childhood and adolescence-related issues* than simple moral or practical learning questions (Klein, 2005, p. 40). Still, didacticism remains one of the greatest threats to the best praxis of TYA. The child is always in the process of learning as his or her personality develops and shapes; thus, a theatrical performance can have an 'educational' impact even without explicit pedagogical intent. This vortex may be reinforced by the fact that the venue for TYA performances has moved towards schools over the past fifty years. The direct, pure theatrical forms such as Theatre in Education (TIE), Drama in Education or Process Drama were refreshing at first compared to the illustrative big-theatre clichés; still, at the same time, the pedagogical expectation began to intensify - in the absence of large-scale formal solutions. As Matt Omasta states: 'Practitioners of TIE usually aim explicitly to teach or change students' perspectives and often prioritise assessment of student learning' (Omasta, 2011, p. 33). Nevertheless, the growing importance of these sub-genres increased the inseparability of TYA from the educational intention while, at the same time as it is freeing traditional theatre forms from explicit pedagogical manifestation. This process has greatly strengthened the recognition of TYA as an *independent discipline* in my view. My two adaptation examples also demonstrate that presenting relevant and important content to young people in a layered, didactic-free form is possible.

Recently, more explicit pedagogical activities have been connected to productions that take place in traditional venues (including the two adaptations that form the creative component of my project). While drama pedagogical outreach programmes exist in various forms and subjects – not only connected to theatre or performing arts[32] – the theatre outreach programme is a creative way to deal with *issues raised by*

[32] For broader discussion on this, see: *Applied Theatre: International Case Studies and Challenges for Practice* – edited by Monica Prendergast and Juliana Saxton (2019); Christine Ann Redington (1979)

a theatre production for young audiences. These programmes are not part of the artistic manifestation, they can happen before and/or after the show, led by drama facilitators with the active participation of the audience members. Usually, these programmes take place in the schools of the audience members in order to prepare or evaluate the theatre experience: the pupils are able to reflect on the moral/social problems or other issues proposed by the performance. 'Our goal is for the young audiences to become more reflective and self-reflective about human behaviours and decisions after the program' (Vidovszky, qtd. Golden, 2017 p. 81).[33] The biggest challenge in outreach programmes is to avoid didactic questioning and schematic answers or clichés. These programmes 'allow students to build their own interests, topics, content into the context and the drama itself within the structure offered by the facilitator' (Bethlenfalvy, p 69). Both of my productions are connected to outreach programmes, which I describe more fully below in Chapters 4.4.1 and 4.7.1 (Audience experience and feedback).

The vast range of pedagogical genres and activities surrounding TYA can have the advantage that the productions themselves do not have to be explicitly pedagogic because the accompanying programmes take on this task; on the other hand, it carries the risk that TYA will never stand apart from the 'B-list' of secondary cultural products made for educational purposes. One of the surest ways to avoid didacticism in TYA may be the starting point of the creative process: issue or story. Does it begin with an issue that the performance wants to discuss or with the material (story) considered important and worthwhile? I explore the dynamics of this question in the reflection on the creative process of my adaptations below.

Theatre in Education – A historical and analytical study; Dániel Golden (2017) *Színház és nevelés Magyarországon*; *Youth Theatre Ireland* – Resources »»

[33] Translated from the original Hungarian: 'A mi célunk az, hogy a fiatal néző a találkozás után reflektívebb, önreflektívebb legyen a látott és tapasztalt emberi viselkedésekkel, döntésekkel kapcsolatban.'

1.4. The difference between ‘suitable’ and ‘beneficial’ according to the psychological development of young people

The unavoidable pedagogical aspect of TYA also reinforces the need to break down young audiences into age groups. This aspect – namely that audiences have different needs and interests by age group – points out clearly the most significant difference between TYA and adult theatre, which I will analyse in more detail below. Good TYA practitioners not only take into account the general receptive habits of their viewers but consciously incorporate their development stage into the performances by studying their audience, knowing that ‘individuals then decide how much mental effort they are willing to invest in making sense of the performance’ (Klein, p. 45). Some of the principles based on the following psychological observations are of course general, since in addition to age, the cultural environment and gender of the young viewers, ‘their personal preoccupations and experience’ (Grady, 1995, p. 382) can also strongly modify these findings.

Although there is huge divergence across topics, aims, and in theatrical forms and dramaturgy across age groupings, distinguishing between age groups in theatre for young audiences has only recently been treated as an important issue. The adaptations that form the basis of my research were made for teenagers; *A Monster Calls* is recommended for people over 14 years old, and *Orphalina* is recommended for people over 16 years old. I will write about the specific artistic decisions later, here, I will explain the general concept of the age group classification, for which it is essential to see the whole picture.

Even if good TYA treats its audience as ‘human being not a human becoming’ (Maguire, 2021, p. 18), according to their psychological and emotional development, TYA usually can be divided into three broad age categories: theatre for *early years* (0-6 years), *children’s* theatre (4-12 years) and theatre for *youth* (13-18 years). Although these sets may differ slightly in practice, as there is no strictly uniform system that theatre professionals would apply, these groups correspond to the generally accepted classification of child development: infants and early childhood (0-

5 years), middle childhood (6-11 years), adolescent (12-18 years).[34] Theatres introduce specific age categories primarily to inform audiences (typically parents and teachers) but this separation also helps deepen the specialised/diverse creative process. It is important to distinguish between divisions in age groups in theatre and in film. Films classify their viewers based on *suitability* for certain audiences with reference to their content (like violence, language, and sex). The rating in films is basically a legal term that is rooted in ethical censorship like the 'Hays Code' (1934) in the USA. On the contrary, theatre age grouping is based not on suitability or appropriateness but on *relevance* and *beneficialness*. This means that while a film is allowed to be watched by people – for example – *over* the age of 13, it does not necessarily mean that its content is relevant or even comprehensible to young viewers. This only means that the film contains material that may be *inappropriate* for children *under* 13. In TYA, the age group over 13, for instance, means that the production was created specifically taking into account the interest and the cognitive-emotional development status of that age group.

Although the adaptations that form the basis of my research were intended for youth (14 years and older), I find it is important to put the examined age group into context by briefly characterising other age groups. One of the biggest benefits of considering the psychological development of audiences in theatre is that it has created the opportunity to play for even the youngest of children, for those who have not been treated as theatre-goers before. As a result, one of the most exciting forms of theatrical manifestation has emerged: non-verbal productions that lack traditional, script-based storytelling. Thus, babies under three years of age perceive their environment as 'pre-episodic structures' (H. Ilgaz, A. Aksu-Koç, 2005 p. 535), which means they cannot follow *complex narrative compositions* yet. They see the world as separate events without their context. Even in the episodic phase, children watch theatrical events at their own value, not as 'a sequence of temporal–causally related events' (H. Ilgaz, A. Aksu-Koç, p. 527). Therefore, performances for this age group (infants) do not deal with stories but purely with theatrical effects. This theatrical approach favours the use of *performative theatre forms* in productions for the early

[34] For more on this, see: The comparison of different cognitive stages by Piaget, Bruner and Vygotsky in Katherine Nelson: *Language in Cognitive Development: Emergence of the Mediated Mind* (1996)

age group (Novák, 2012, p. 5). In the mimetic stage, toddlers mark an event with a series of movements and sound signals. Therefore, body language and movements are the basic expressions of all children's performances. It is particularly interesting to observe that such performances 'pre' storytelling and literature use the most ancient, ritual means of expression of the theatre. The quest for such free, theatrical articulation in the shadow of literature will be one of the pivotal points of my adaptations.

Returning to the age groups, children in the narrative stage 4 years and above – develop the ability to exchange meanings and evoke autobiographical memories through language (Popper, 1987, p. 96). The age group of 4-13 years can be further fragmented: children aged 4-6 are happy to engage with fairy tales, simple *stories with contrasting characters* and theatrical expressions. They learn how to orientate between *clear emotions*, such as sadness or happiness, and behaviours, such as good or bad (Vekerdy, 1987, p. 69). This age group is still seeking to find *harmony and comfort* in stories and in theatre. That is why tales presented to this age group must convey a clear and well-founded set of values in which the good is rewarded and the bad is punished. This is the stage of magical thinking, discovering the world as a universal unity in which causality is recognised: everything is connected to everything else, and every action has a consequence.[35] All this does not mean that fairy tales should represent the world as a harmonious unity in which there is no place for evil.[36] The presence of bad forces in fairy tales can fulfil a function that is important in the development of the child, who within their family – in the best case – experiences the world of adults as safe and harmonious. Through fairy tales, the child learns about the concept of evil and, moreover, is strengthened through the belief that evil can be defeated. It is no coincidence that the main protagonists of fairy tales are usually the smallest children, whom no one believes in, whom no one respects: the young spectators can easily identify with these characters. Fairy tales help in this way; their

[35] For more on this, see: Eugene Subbotsky (2010) *4 Magical Thinking and Children's Cognitive Development*

[36] It cannot be left without mentioning that fairytales have not lost their popularity to this day, even if many of them depict problematic, sometimes outdated moral issues, parent-child relationships, and out-of-date dynamics between girls and boys. For example, Collodi's classic work, *Pinocchio*, carries some problematic, 'outdated' moral messages about the 'bad child' who repents for his sins and makes amends.

healing effect is extremely important because they can reduce the anxiety with which every child naturally struggles. It is, therefore, a misconception that the presentation of scary things has a harmful effect on children; on the contrary, if evil can be defeated during the story, it gives strength. As Jack Zipes states about the power of fairy tales: 'It tells us what we lack and how the world has to be organised differently so that we receive what we need.' (Zipes, 2012, p 14). The *A Monster Calls* adaptation – following the novel – contains tales (stories) that the main character, Conor, considers childish because he has already outgrown the world of fairy tales (13 years old). However, none of the 'fairytales' gives him a simple 'moral', as their structure and twists go against the expectations of children. Chick, the eight-year-old protagonist of *Orphalina*, does not come across fairytales in her life; she only encounters the 'story' of Jesus as something she identifies with, just as a child of a similar age does with the characters of fairytales.

The 'magical thinking' of children of this age is not yet so connected to reality; they experience dreams and events created by their own fantasy as equally real to life (Popper, 1987, p. 52). So, it is much easier for them to accept associative, poetic images and characters than at older ages. Therefore, one of the biggest challenges in stage representation of fairytales is how well they can build on small children's soaring imaginations. Since 'the narration of fairy tales contributes highly to the development of children's creative imagination, which is fundamental to their psycho-emotional health' (Koutsompou, p 217), a theatre adaptation of a tale shouldn't replace that experience with a simple visual illustration. Good theatre for children, through its visual concept, should also stimulate the child's inner imagination with original and associative images. Klein describes 'the imaginative "aesthetic experience" as an internal cognitive-affective process of intra- and interpersonal meaning making' (Klein, 2005, p. 42). Puppet theatre offers a lot of potential due to its varied technical and visual possibilities in this sense, and puppets themselves – because of the limitations in their gestures and facial expressions – work only with the completion of the young spectator's imagination. Puppetry works exactly like a child's imagination when it brings 'dead' objects to life while playing. This is the key to the birth of a 'miracle' on stage, too, which is stronger and more powerful if it is created by building on the imagination of the young spectators and not by constructing a perfect realistic illusion. As Matthew I. Cohen asserts, 'they [puppets]

stimulate spectators and performers to fill in details in their imagination and project expressive qualities upon the objects in motion' (Cohen, p 2). A child of this age is characterised by analogical thinking; that is, everything that is *similar* is the *same*. For that reason, anything can become anything in children's fantasy while playing; the logic of the theatrical representation can also rely on this freedom, which is rooted in the 'semiotic process between the performers, the performed, and the audience' (Water, 2009, p. 19). For these psychological and artistic reasons mentioned above, I decided to use puppetry in both adaptations, even though the age group of the audience traditionally do not approve of this. I was convinced that the weight and darkness of both subjects could be shaped more sensitively by involving the audience's imagination – even if the target audience of the productions is older than the age group discussed here. Therefore, in both cases, the protagonists struggling with trauma appear in the form of puppets, which allows the spectators to identify themselves while retaining a certain distance from the main character at the same time, because, as Margaret Williams claims, it operates 'in the collapsed boundaries between the living and the inanimate' (Williams, p 14). The use of this diversity of theatrical signs is usually lost when staging more complex narratives because the need for storytelling comes to the fore. In both of my adaptations, I made an attempt to preserve this against the literariness.

Returning to the psychological analysis of age groups, those aged 7-10 are looking for *adventure and heroes* who usually possess ethereal power and search for some secrets. This is a phase of *confirming* fantasy and imagination with a new aspect, which helps children to reach a clearer *self-definition*: who I am and who I can become (Popper, 1987 p. 103). Stories can play an important role in this stage of development in which heroes, although they have special, fantastic qualities, are already strongly connected to reality. The credibility of the illusion of the environment and the theatrical characters who exist in it is combined with nuanced and detailed elaboration, even if it can be entirely a product of a non-existing world. The 'mature' desire to explore the facts of the real world is connected with the 'naive' belief in supernatural qualities and worlds. This is the stage of mythological thinking, in which the need for a rational understanding of the world, in the absence of sufficient knowledge, is supplemented by the logic of an imagined, desired world. This is the same need that created myths in the history of mankind because it was

necessary to find explanations for inexplicable phenomena. The protagonists of both adaptations perfectly support this thinking. By 'creating' the Monster, Conor invites help from the fantasy world to accept the facts, while Orphalina 'follows' her imagined mother from the horrors of her life.

This is the age at which children start to show interest in their own age group, and that is when stories that emphasise peers and friendship come into view. This is an important change because younger children accept parents as an absolute authority; they are loyal to them since they are always 'right', while children in this age group (8-10 years) begin to question this hierarchy and prefer to ally with their peers against adults. Therefore, performances that depict this on stage meet the real interests of young viewers more easily.[37]

Due to hormonal and neurological development, the evolution of a young person's brain into an adult starts around the age of 9. For that age group, it is difficult to make decisions and recognise themselves within the rules of the adult world, as well as their own emotions, as well as those of other people. For the age group of 10-13 years of age, everything seems to be more confusing than ever before. They are not children anymore, but not yet adults either. This temporary emotional state is reflected precisely in the behaviour of Conor (*A Monster Calls*): he still clings strongly to the existence of monsters, characters that are known from the world of fairytales or fantasy, but meanwhile, he is tormented by 'grown-up' thoughts and challenges that he cannot bear alone. While he believes in the irrational existence of the Monster, he looks for a rational explanation for it.

In this age group, the dominance of rational thinking begins to prevail, and the world of imagination or magical thinking free from the logic of reality recedes into the background. In the search for self-identification, idols become an important reference point. These paragons are often real people who – considering their circumstances – live fabulously, like athletes, singers, stars, and celebrities. That is why this age group reflects more strongly on stories embedded in reality or lifelike circumstances.

[37] This issue is more fully explored in: Katherine Nelson: *Language in Cognitive Development – Emergence of the Mediated Mind*; Merlin Donald: *Precis of Origins of the modern mind: Three stages in the evolution of culture and cognition.*

Besides the idealised adult image that appears as a future possibility in stories created for pre-teens, other adult characters (fictional persons) - who these young people often meet within their immediate environment, e.g., teachers and parents – are to be rejected or are not present at all. These adults are portrayed as ridiculous, or even dull, stubborn, or easily fooled – and that's okay because it is in line with the confrontation process that early teens experience in relation to the contradictory world of adults. Grown-ups are no longer the absolute, unquestionable authority for them (Popper, p. 96).

At last, we arrived at the age group of the target audience of the two adaptations. Teenagers aged between 14 and 18 years deal with lots of confrontations: they often experience *complicated emotional relationships* with their parents and cannot discuss the problems they face as they grow into adult life (responsibility, hierarchy, love, sex) with their friends because their peers are likewise struggling with the same problems (Vekerdy, 2015, p. 88). Theatre can have the potential to have a hugely positive impact on this age group if its topics are relevant to the questioning of teens and young adults. That is why the choice of topic is so crucial: it is a unique opportunity to represent themes in an artistic form – through the medium of theatre – that may affect many teenagers, but because of their weight and complexity, it would be difficult to talk about directly, as they might make young people feel desperately alone (Omasta, 2011, p. 41). Such themes can be death, grief, abuse, and vulnerability, which serve as the basis of the two adaptations.

While the sense of rationality of teenagers is not disturbed by the schematic representation of adults on stage, the portrayal of their own age group is much more challenging. Whereas in performances created for younger children (thanks to their analogical thinking), it is not necessary for the young theatrical characters to be played by children on stage because the viewer's imagination can easily see a child's behaviour in the portrayal by an adult actor, on the contrary, teenagers are usually more critical when an adult actor pretends to be a young character. My experience in this regard can be confirmed by the psychological assertion that for teenagers, rational thinking becomes dominant in how they discover the world around them, and the 'lie' of theatrical representation completely contradicts that, especially when it is so unreasonable: teenage viewers can hardly abstract from the 'irrationality' of what they

see as an adult behaving like a child. Rather, they see this as ridiculous and alienating.

In order for the young spectators to identify themselves easily with fictional characters belonging to their own age group, there are usually two approaches – in my view: Either young actors play these roles, or the form (style) of the performance creates a framework so that the external characteristics (age) of the actor do not hinder the experience. While young actors can easily be plausible for young spectators because of their cultural verisimilitude, a more stylised ('poetic') theatrical solution can feel real to the young viewers because it has a generic verisimilitude.[38] For example, the audience can accept one actor playing several characters, including across age, gender, and other differing physical characteristics. On the one hand, this results in not burdening the teenage spectators with having to believe something that is not real (the illusion of the world of the drama as reality on stage), and on the other hand, it makes the theatre experience more immediate. W. B. Worthen describes this distinction 'as the difference between the fictive "action" of the drama, and the present activity of performance' (Worthen, p 100) This was particularly relevant during the creation of the two adaptations since it is fundamentally related to the reception habits of young adults, as I will discuss in more detail. I wanted to test the assumption that the use of puppets could be easier for young audiences to relate to because of the stylisation that offers a clear attitude for the spectators: they know that it is not 'real', it does not want to pretend to be a young person, it only *represents* the young protagonist. Consequently, in the case of *A Monster Calls* and *Orphalina*, I chose this formal solution: Conor and Orphalina are portrayed by puppets, which offers the viewer freedom in terms of identification with the young characters.[39]

In line with the above-discussed reception habits of young spectators, I have experienced another unproved aspect that I wanted to test with my adaptations, namely, that for young adults, the experience of being capable of interpreting an unusual realisation in theatre can be revelatory. They like to be thrown off and surprised – but only if they are given a hint or a tool to decode what they see. Due to their sense of rationality, teenagers usually don't like unclear, ambiguous symbols;

[38] More on cultural and generic verisimilitude: Tzvetan Todorov (1990): *Genres in discourse*, Cambridge University Press

[39] This question is more fully discussed in Chapter 4: Evaluation of the creative work.

they prefer straightforward messages. But at the same time, there is nothing that alienates them more than a direct didactic intention and redundant theatrical solutions (Klein, p. 46).

As theatre creators, we start from the above – maybe simplified – guidelines, not forgetting that young people can be very different depending on their generation and socio-cultural environment, but still, we believe in the 'romantic' idea that our productions have 'social and moral "effects"' (Klein, p. 41) on young audiences. Underlining that no artistic effort has an unambiguous reading in itself, the subject of my research is how young audiences 'produce meaning through the "discursive work of an interpretive community and through the lived, everyday relationships of people with texts and performances"' (Knowles quoted by Water, 2012, p. 5).

CHAPTER 2: WRITING FOR CHILDREN OR YOUTH

Since the central concern of this study is the process through which strong literary material written for young people is creatively translated into the language of theatre, it is essential to examine the relationship between children's literature and TYA.[40] While there is a large selection in terms of genres, from picture books to poetry books and novels, in the following, I mainly focus on fiction for young adults (YA).[41]

In addition to examining the most essential connections and similarities between children's / YA literature and TYA, I also seek to address some of the contradictions in the definability of the genre. In what follows, I inquire into this based on the following aspects: for whom the authors of children's and YA fiction write, why they write, and how they write. Authors of children's and YA literature – similar to the creators of TYA – ideally have to consider these three questions. First, I briefly examine the question of the author's intention and generic framing: that is, how much is it a trademark of children's literature, and whether the work was written for the target group at all. Next, I will touch on the phenomenon of taboos in children's and YA fiction that vary by time and area. After that, I will discuss one of the pivotal stylistic questions of children's and YA literature, namely the question of the narrator, referring to the age difference between the author and the reader. Finally, touching on the area of the devised productions, in which the 'voice' of the young audiences can be most effectively observed, I will also allude to the increasing popularity of original plays written for young people. Since both adaptations are closely related to traumatic experiences, and my conviction is that the aesthetic power of art can have the potential to help in processing them, in the last section, I will discuss the therapeutic aspect of literature.

[40] *A Monster Calls* is for 11+ years old readers according to the publisher's rating. *Orphalina* originally was not intended specifically for young readers, but as becoming part of the curriculum in Hungary (as mandatory or recommended novel for 13-14 years old students), it is generally considered part of YA literature.

[41] For the age group of 12-18 y.

2.1. The longstanding links between TYA and children's literature: reasons and challenges

The most striking connection can be seen in the vast amount of literary-based stage adaptations for TYA. In addition to the two adaptations that are the subject of my research, my own practice as a theatre creator confirms this remark: most of my theatre works for young people have been created from literary sources. Adaptations of classic fairy or folk tales for children[42], stage adaptations of contemporary young adult novels[43], or newly written, original plays for youth – dominantly devised together with young actors – which were later published in the form of novels[44], make up the majority of the more than 60 productions I have directed in the last 20 years. Despite the quantity of these works, it is not unconditionally true that good TYA is based exclusively on children's literature – not least because the category of children's fiction itself contains many contradictions. We can only establish that the relationship between literature and TYA is clearly close, and this is reinforced, among other things, through the similitudes between the two fields. Examining the alikeness between TYA and children's and YA literature sheds more light on the continuous mutual influence of the two fields, one of this study's areas of interest. An obvious parallel is that children's literature, just like TYA, is not an old genre at all, let alone youth or young adult fiction, which is considered particularly new[45] (Meek, Watson, 2003, p. 26). Both genres and areas emerge from art forms written and performed for adults and have largely existed in their shadows, defining themselves in relation to them (Hunt, 1994, p. 7). By outlining children's literature in comparison to adult genres, we discover relevant similarities with TYA from the creators' and the recipients' points of view, namely, how to resolve the conflict regarding their age and interest differences between the authors and the young readers.

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[42] Among others: *Cinderella* (2014), *Town-musicians of Bremen* (2016), *Pinocchio* (2019).
[43] Among others: *The Paul Street boys* by Ferenc Molnár (2002, 2007, 2012, 2015), *The Lord of the Flies* by William Golding (2004, 2017), *The Butterfly Lion* by Michael Morpurgo (2017).
[44] *Cyber Cyrano* by István Tasnádi (2010); *Withoutfather, withoutmother* by Borbála Szabó (2013, 2016); *double:game* by István Tasnádi and Viktória Jeli (2016).
[45] For more on this, see: Peter Hunt (1994) *An introduction to children's literature;* and Maria Nikolajeva (ed.), *Aspects and issues in the history of children's literature*.

To define children's literature, it seems obvious to investigate the previously mentioned first question, namely, for *whom* do the authors of children's literature write. The evident response refers to a literary concept that is based on age-specific works. Thus, analysis based on the target audience as a sociological category primarily defines children's and YA literature as a product on the market since the text does not necessarily have characteristics of children's literature per se. It may seem controversial, but this category also includes works where the author's original aim was not necessarily to write for young people.[46] One of my chosen adaptation works, for example, belongs to this category: Zsigmond Móricz's short novel *Orphalina* was originally a novel written for adults. Only decades after its publication did the work become part of the YA literature canon, mainly because of the main protagonist, a 9-year-old girl. I will return to this in more detail in Chapter 4.6.1 (Origin of the novel, Author). Among many others, a more well-known example is one of the most acclaimed children's novels, *Peter Pan*[47], whose first version was published as an adult novel, *The Little White Bird* (1902). Moreover, as Jaqueline Rose argues in her seminal study, *The Case of Peter Pan*, this book 'shows what cannot, or must not, be allowed to get into fiction for children' (Rose, p. 5). She refers to the discrepancy between the author's original intention and perception of the novel after its success on stage.[48] Rose's point is that adult society 'colonises' children by writing books that reflect an adult ideal of childhood since children's literature only perpetuates adult perceptions and concepts about childhood (Rose, p. 10). This statement about the dominance of adult thinking can hardly be challenged, and it may be equally true in the field of TYA, even for authors who write specifically with the intention of young people reading their works.

Seeing that, even if – according to the author's intention – a novel is written for children (regardless of whether or not for market reasons), it does not necessarily meet the expectations or interests of the young reader. Authors often feed on the memories of their own childhood and not on the real needs and interests of children.[49]

[46] For example, it is common that the first two parts of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* are mistakenly considered part of children's literature.
[47] J. M. Barrie: *The little White Bird* (1902), *Peter and Wendy* (1911).
[48] *Peter Pan* by J. M. Barrie, premiered in Duke of York's Theatre, 28th December 1904.
[49] This issue is more fully explored in: *Five Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Mistakes in Children's Books* by Margaret Meacham.

The above-mentioned unresolvable tension ('power imbalance' – Rose, p. 72) between the adult author and the addressee in all children's and YA fiction feeds into another well-known problem: according to many researchers,[50] that 'all texts are ideological and that those produced by adults for children are especially so' (Ní Bhroin, Kennon, 2012, p. 1). . As Dan Hade rightly points out: 'Children's literature is the only class of literature not produced by those who read it' (Dan Hade, 2007, no page number). The wishes of adult society reflect and influence what is offered to children, what is believed would be suitable or even useful for them, and what is not. This has often led to didacticism in children's literature because it fulfils the educational demand of adults: children should learn how to behave and acquire all the knowledge through books about the life that awaits them. As Cedric Cullingford parses it: 'the sense of potential responsibility, of the position of teacher in relation to the reader, has been widely shared by children's writers' (Cullingford, 1998, p 54).

Although it is beyond the scope of this study, it cannot be left without mentioning that children's and YA literature is 'threatened' by adult censorship, which materialised by hiding certain contents for young readers. Dealing with important, often taboo topics in literature – similar to TYA – is always risky because this demand can lead to dissection of themes, problems, characters or life events in children's and YA literature, which may be banned in different eras and countries. As Ciara Ní Bhroin and Patricia Kennon remind us: 'The history of children's literature has been bound up with the agendas of various stakeholders to manage children's literature for their respective ideological purposes' (Ní Bhroin, Kennon, p. 6).

It is clearly a complex dynamic when children's or YA literature expresses the vision and needs of adults, which primarily represents the adult ideal of childhood and treats the child only as a naive, pure being.[51] As discussed more fully below, examining this aspect led to important findings and solutions in both the adaptations for this project. The protagonist of *A Monster Calls* is a complex character on the border between childhood and adulthood. By portraying the boy as a non-naive, innocent being, the writer also 'elevates' the young readers and makes them answer complicated

[50] Margot Sutherland (1985); Peter Hollindale (1988); John Stephens (1992)

[51] Rose uses the expressions that authors of children's literature often 'seduce' or 'colonise' the child by writing them (1992, p. 9).

questions. As Giskin Day reflects on it in his analysis: ‘Conor goes beyond fear to serenity in accepting his mother’s impending death, and the reader experiences cathartic compassion through empathising with Conor’ (Day, 2012, p. 119). Móricz, on the other hand, portrays Orphalina as a naive, pure being, but we cannot forget that the novel was addressed originally to adult readers. Although a specific person and events served as the writer’s model, the central character of the novel serves more as a symbol of humiliation and eternal victim, which is further supported by the artistic device that she is called by different names in each psalm, of which the title name – Orphalina – has a metonymic meaning. In each case, these works do not ‘look down’ on the young reader but take them seriously and discuss important issues without compromise.

Examining the tension between adult authors and young readers further, if the author’s explicit goal is to write for young people, the fundamental question that can be asked is: what is its purpose at all; *why* do authors write for children or young adults: entertainment, education, or art? While acknowledging the enormous influence of commercial children’s and YA fiction – as for commercial theatre – I will not analyse these products within the framework of this study. Although it is very difficult to draw a line between commercial and non-commercial children’s literature since the genre has gained a huge market value in recent decades, my focus is primarily on works that are challenging, innovative both in terms of content and form, and that deal with relevant topics instead of stereotypes, and twisty, closed storytelling by ‘unravelling of a problem’ (Cullingford, 1998, p. 19). That is why it is not satisfying to observe that many parents – similar to TYA – mistakenly recognise ‘entertainment literature’ as the only safe literary genre for their children. Generally speaking, the secret of popularity – just like in the theatre – is that it reflects the known expectations of the readers, i.e., it is not intended to be intellectually or artistically stimulating. Even if the best-known star authors of popular children’s literature seem to understand exactly what their readers expect, since children love to devour their books, this should not be confused with the complex and profound experience a recipient (consumer) can demand from a work of art (book, theatre). As Cullingford aptly states, popular literature ‘provides an opportunity for self-indulgence rather than self-exploration, for confirmation rather than discovery’ (Cullingford, 1998, p. 6).

Consequently, at the centre of my interest are literary and theatrical works that firmly take into consideration the psychological development of children and young adults, as is particularly the case in Ness's novel. It considers the young reader as an individual – who grows up with their own problems – as the starting point and not the author's own desires as an adult educator, or entertainer. Such literary works respect their readers. I consider *A Monster Calls*, which is a key subject of my research, to be such a piece of writing that does not put a child (or a young adult) at the centre as an excuse and does not teach something about the acceptance of death with the wisdom of adults but allows an insight into the dark, at times almost taboo depths of children's thinking. The novel deals with 'complex issues relating to bereavement and grief in a manner accessible to its younger readership' (Ghoshal, Wilkinson, 2019, referring to Karen Coats' review). Móricz's *Orphalina* avoids 'moralising', does not offer a solution to the injustice depicted in the novel, and does not use the vulnerable girl's fate as a tool for effect. It raises serious questions about vulnerability and inhumanity by portraying her fate in a literary layered form.

2.2. Who is actually speaking to young readers?

The relationship between narrative voice/point of view and young readers may be considered of particular importance when dealing with such traumatic subjects and situations. In addition to the choice of theme, after all, the manipulative power of the writer (creator) is specifically manifested in the use of language, i.e., in the narrative style of the fiction. As Anna Redcay summarises Rose's argument 'this "someone" who manipulates the language of the narrative is particularly problematic in literature addressed to children' (Redcay, no page number) because while the external adult narrator is a clear reference point for the child reader, it does not hide, its identity is neutral, and it usually describes the events in the third person, but when the narrator of the fiction becomes a child protagonist, the adult writer's identity is transformed. He/she speaks to the reader in the voice of a child – mainly in the first person and not only as a witness but also as a participant in the events. The adult narrator wearing a child 'disguise' is not only a stylistic question but also confirms the importance of the ethical attitude that must always be kept in mind in children's literature and TYA: the creator should not misuse his/her manipulative, influencing superiority (Rose, p. 72).

This issue can be directly linked to the literary theory of the unreliable homodiegetic narrator (character).[52] If an adult author tells the story from the focalisation of a child character, then the narrator is only seemingly *overt*.

The identity of the narrator, from whose point of view the story is presented to the recipient (reader or audience), is one of the most fundamental questions to be asked during a stage adaptation of literary material as well because it is not necessarily achieved by including an overt narrator. Making an artistic decision about the focalisation, the narrative point of view casts light directly on the different means of expression between literature and theatre; in other words, how the story can be shaped on stage without an explicit (homodiegetic or heterodiegetic) narrator so that literalism does not dominate but leaves room for diegetic theatrical means of expression.

My work on the stage adaptation of *A Monster Calls* provides a useful case study of this very issue and the tensions involved. As explored more fully in Chapter 4, during the stage adaptation, I chose to create – similarly to the descriptive, third-person narrator of the book an overt narrator who, however, is only seemingly heterodiegetic. With this solution, I did not strengthen literalism on stage but opened up a new dimension of theatricality because the narrator becoming homodiegetic, as a puppeteer, justifies the style of the performance and relocates the story (and the storytelling) into a completely different context to the novel. In my other adaptation work (*Orphalina*), there is no narrator with a definable role. The actors' direct addresses to the audience referring to the titles of the novel's chapters (psalms), as well as the songs used in the performance, are formal, 'alienating' elements known from Brecht's epic theatre, thereby emphasising throughout that the story appearing on stage is a theatrical reconstruction.[53] This corresponds to the quasi descriptive and emotionless 'third person' (heterodiegetic) narrator in the novel. The two adaptations are similar in maintaining the focalisation of the main protagonist throughout, but in

[52] See more on the (un)reliable narration and focalisation: Nünning, V. ed. (2015) *Unreliable Narration and Trustworthiness Intermedial and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*; Goran Nieragden (2002) *Focalization and Narration: Theoretical and Terminological Refinements*

[53] The Brechtian epic theatre is discussed more fully later, in Chapter 4. 6.

such a way that the *external* focalisation gradually becomes *internal* – as I will explain in more detail in Chapter 4.

The quality of language and literary form in children's fiction is highly important because it enables the literary-aesthetic examination of the genre (that is, it is recognised as equivalent to other so-called adult literature) and can free these books from close pedagogical ties. Relating to what Roman Jakobson calls the 'poetic function' of language, the task of the story (or the 'sign') is not to inform the child reader about something but rather to create an effect and trigger a response through the format of the 'message' (Jakobson, 1960 p. 358). In light of this, the phenomenon of stylistic restrictions or modifications in children's and YA literature can be particularly problematic. Simplified language – often seen in children's fiction – can be justified if it results from an artistic decision and is not influenced by market imperatives or overzealous censorship (or self-censorship). A well-known example for the misconception of treating young readers as naive, pure beings is the 'corrected' version of Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (1901), published by Ladybird in 1987, which not only deleted outdated words from the book but also 'protected' the reader from certain content, such as death.[54]

2.3. Theatrical representation of children's literature – Stage adaptations for young people

While *A Monster Calls* and *Orphalina* are different in style, in each case, I sought to achieve a level of literary layering that elevates their chosen subjects above the primary storytelling. One element of this stylistic achievement is the integration of the oldest form of children's fiction, the fairytales, into the narrative. Here, we should once again note that even though plays performed for young people come from very different sources and with widely varying aims, the dominance of adaptation is remarkable. Theatres that stage plays for younger audiences – also for marketing reasons – prefer to adapt well-known literary works, especially fairytales or fantasies primarily sought out by parents based on their childhood experiences. When adapting well-known fairytales to the stage, companies usually create their own versions

[54] For more on this issue see Peter Hunt's *Criticism, Theory & Children's Literature*, esp. pp. 26-32.

themselves, even using previous adaptations, adjusting to the needs and possibilities of the production (and the company). In contrast to the canonised texts of adult theatre, there are very few canonised plays in the field of TYA (Gimesi, p. 8). This is mostly due to the literary source works: many fairytales and stories already exist in different versions, and even within the literature, these stories are treated freely; as Komáromi states, 'Fairytales are 'open works'. They offer endless possibilities for reuse' (Komáromi, 2007, p. 39).[55]

We might view this as part of a remarkable historical cycle in which oral folktales, which were in a variable form but still a manifestation of 'performing art', became part of literature in a fixed, written form and then – in the shape of theatre adaptation – became part of performing art again.[56] It is precisely this cycle that sheds light on one of the most decisive reasons why TYA constantly draws on literature, which is *storytelling*. Every parent has encountered this: when we read a fairytale to children, we involuntarily act it out: we lend voices to the various characters, exaggerating the twists and turns of the tale.[57] From here, it is only a step to help the visual appearance of the story with the toys at hand, to make puppets of the figures. This artistic act is repeated night after night in the family environment: the literary text is brought to life and appears with minor or major extensions to the performance. This also confirms the need for a performative presentation of fairytales and stories taken from literature. However, the theatrical adaptation of these well-known tales – by the very nature of inevitable artistic transformation – has the capacity to update and make these stories valid again with the contemporary point of view[58]; these stage versions are rarely intended to give a new layer to the interpretation, they most often only reshape the physical setting of fairytales. The influence of this ancient genre is tactile in my two adaptations: the stories told in *A Monster Calls* give the appearance of classic tales:

[55]Translated from Hungarian: 'A mesék "nyitott művek". Végtelen lehetőséget kínálnak az újrafelhasználásra.'

[56] Despite the fact that some fairytale collections were already published in the 16th - 17th century, containing the original versions of several oral fairytales canonised since then (*Cinderella, Sleeping beauty, Puss in the Boots* in. *Lo cunto de li cunti* [1634-1636] by Giambattista Basile [1575 -1632], European literature only recognised it as an independent genre in the 19th century – primarily thanks to the Brothers Grimm (*Children's and Household Tales*, 1815–1858).

[57] For more on live storytelling, see: Joanna M. Golden, 1990, p. 131.

[58] One of the rare, but excellent, examples is *Feast of Bones* (by Theatre Lowett, 2013) which is a fresh retelling of the fable *Henny Penny*.

good and evil characters, queens and princes, miracles, and supernatural powers. They exude the atmosphere of Grimm's fairytales: they are dark, full of secrets, often cruel and full of unexpected twists and turns. Conor also has the same expectations regarding the stories he hears from the Monster as he is used to with classic fairytales: what does it teach, what is the moral to be said, because that is what fairytales are usually for .[59] The tales in *A Monster Calls* are subversive, because they follow the narrative of the classic fairytale, and their endings are surprising; that is, their 'morals' are challenging for Conor. The introductory condition of *Orphalina* gives the appearance of a children's tale: an orphaned girl experiences life alone in the big world. While taking in the story, the reader has the expectation again and again that her fate will eventually – like in the fairytale – turn for the better, and those who did evil against her will receive their deserved punishment.

In addition to classic fairytales as an inexhaustible source of TYA, one of the most dubious areas of the connection between literature and TYA – as it was adduced previously – is bound up in the *compulsory literature* taught in schools. This area raises several problems: the selection of literary canon takes shape and changes based on different aspects in different countries, but it is the result of the current ethical-ideological and cultural politics first and foremost. As a result, the canon has primarily an educational role in the teaching of literature and less an aesthetic one.[60] That is why it rarely happens – especially in the case of classic compulsory works – that young readers are able to engage with the book or perhaps get answers to the questions that preoccupy them. The second problem feeds on the first one: since these literary classics are only considered as part of education, the stage version of the canon rarely applies aspects of developmental psychology and the reception theory of young people. Unfortunately, the practice – which is based on stressing the 'authorially intended reception-perspective' (Gruić, p 35) – is that the original works are often boiled down to the basic story of the deservedly important literary works, which only occasionally meet the real interest of young people anyway.[61] The stage

[59] "Your stories never made any sense to me." (ACM-N, p. 224)

[60] For more on this, see: Jan Gorak's *The Making of the Modern Canon: Genesis and Crisis of a Literary Idea*.

[61] It is still a common practice in many countries (e.g., Hungary) to teach literature in chronological order in high schools, and accordingly, students only encounter classics. In comparison, the curriculum

'illustration' of old, classic literary works, which are created with educational purposes, does not highlight the contemporary values and meanings found in the works but primarily just replaces the action of reading, thus giving the impression that theatre is an elite artistic expression suitable for conveying outdated, 'museum' values, and does not keep up with the times[62]. In other words, the theatrical embodiment of canonised literature preserves the theatre as a manifestation of the culture of the past and reduces its contemporary, reflective power. This exhausts the concept of 'Deadly Theatre' as described by Peter Brook; such productions concentrate on the act of imitation, relying on old schemes instead of exploring the deeper meaning of the text (Brook, 2008, p. 12).[63] Not to mention that making theatre a mandatory experience strengthens the educational side of TYA. In addition to the 'obligatory' book as educational material, the theatre experience is also burdened with the 'mandatory' adjective; thus, for many spectators, such performances can easily become not only their first but also their last theatre experience. All of these – apparently external – aspects also determined one of the subjects of my investigation, the adaptation of *Orphalina*: how can one ignore the expectation that the theatre manifestation of mandatory literature should not be a substitute for reading but a performative, transmedial rethinking of the work.

While TYA is almost inexhaustibly nourished by literature (most often, classics or literary adaptations make up the programmes of theatre for young audiences, as Marah Gubar states, 'neither the fame of the source text nor the popularity of the theatrical version has saved such plays from obscurity' (Gruber, 2012, p. 9). Presumably, this explains why, in contrast to theatre for adults, there are far fewer stand-alone, original plays written specifically for the stage in the Anglo-American and European context.[64] Every creator faces the challenge: how can an adult author speak the language of young people and how to find topics relevant to the age group

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in Ireland has long since diverged from this and typically introduces literature through contemporary works that are closer to the students' interests.

[62] For instance, Second Age Theatre Company (1989-2013) was established as a response to the demand from Second Level schools to present curriculum-based texts, especially those of William Shakespeare.

[63] For more on this, see: Peter Brook's *The Empty Space: A Book About the Theatre: Deadly, Holy, Rough, Immediate*.

[64] For more on this, see: Marah Gubar: *Introduction: Children and Theatre* (2012)

that are still universal? The primary level of language used in stage plays can easily become 'obsolete', but if the theme of the piece is strong enough, the language, the way of speaking, or the slang can be updated during the contemporary stage adaptation – thanks to the actors and direction. From the creator's point of view, it is essential thorough scrutiny of the target age group is essential to avoid superficial and well-rehearsed clichés about imagined juvenility based on adult speculation[65]. In addition, the absence of real market demand makes it even more difficult for fresh contemporary works consciously made for young spectators to reach realisation. Playwrights discussed above (Chapter 1.2.) – due to the narrow range – have great international success in the territory of TYA, and their original pieces are performed in many countries.[66] It cannot be denied that the freshness, courage, thematic novelty, and stylistic innovation of these authors gave a strong precedent for the completion of the two adaptations. Namely, these contemporary plays use the tool of open dramatic structure, avoid explicit didacticism, and explore topics considered taboo without prearranged meanings.

It is common to ask young people's opinions about what they want to see in production or what they think about an issue[67], but authors and directors rarely devise a whole production with the group of young people concerned.[68] Unfortunately, the two areas, TYA (theatre *for* young audiences) and Youth Theatre (theatre *by* young people), operate as completely separate entities in most countries. The end result is that, while the TYA could receive strong inspiration from YT, primarily in terms of themes and stories that can be brought to the stage, this rarely happens in practice. One of the most exciting but still little-noticed manifestations of YT is when young

[65] Good examples are Simon Stephens' plays, like *Herons* (2001), *Punk Rock* (2009) or Denis Kelly's plays, like *The Children's Monologues* (2010)

[66] A few titles from the hits that have been touring Europe since the beginning of the 2000s are Lutz Hübner's *Das Herz eines Boxers* (1999) and *Strich* (2000), Simon Stephens's *Herons* (2001) and *Punk Rock* (2009), István Tasnádi's *Cyber Cyrano* (2010), Enda Walsh's *Chatroom* (2005), and Maria Wojtyszko's *SAM, or Preparation for Life in a Family* (2014).

[67] This issue is more fully explored in: Lundy method or The Ark's Children's Council (Maguire, 2021, pp. 21-25).

[68] An internationally renowned example is *The Hamilton Complex* (HETPALEIS, 2016) Directed by Lies Pauwels. In my practice in addition to the large number of productions, the final text of which we created together with the actors, here are some examples that we devised based on the ideas, improvisations, and stories of young people: *Nightmare* (2018), *Mondj egy mesét!* [Tell me your story] (2018), *Majdnem 20* [Almost 20] (2016), 99 (2015), *East Balkan* (2011)

people write or devise plays.[69] Although the creative process is more important than the scripts and the performances made by young people, they give an instructive impression of the thinking and thematic approach of young people – in this case, mainly teenagers. One thing can be said for sure: these never-published texts bravely approach taboos and are not 'prudent' in processing challenging topics. In my first adaptation of *Orphalina*[70], which was created with youth theatre students, it was an essential part of the creative process that we selected the scenes of the novel for the stage version based on the interests and decisions of the young actors. The current adaptation, which is the subject of this research, largely retained the same scene selection as it discussed more detailed in Chapter 4.6.4. (Antecedents of the adaptation process).

2.4. The representation of traumatic experience in the selected adaptations

My research deals with a closer examination of two works of fiction in which protagonists, particularly children or young adults, are facing trauma. As I mentioned above, the presentation of traumatic experiences in children's or YA literature – and in TYA – is rare because this issue is still treated as unsafe, from which young readers are often kept away. The nature of the traumatic experiences processed in *A Monster Calls* and *Orphalina* are quite different. Conor (*A Monster Calls*) has a double trauma experience: on the one hand, the early loss of his mother, and on the other hand, his contradictory feelings about it, which he cannot admit – and therefore cannot verbalise – to himself. Chick (*Orphalina*) is a victim of constant mental and physical abuse, which she can barely understand and verbalise due to her young age and social incognisance. In both cases, an important emphasis is placed on the fact that the young people at the centre of the novels are unable to process the traumas that have happened to them, thus, these works of fiction psychologically accurately depict the attitude of their potential readers to possible trauma experiences.

[69] For more on this, see: Dublin Youth Theatre's 'One Act Festivals' Available from: (https://dublinyouththeatre.com/workshops/dyt-writers-group/).
[70] The production was created in 2006 with drama students of Vörösmarty Mihály Secondary School, Budapest.

Young people – just as the protagonist in both selected novels – don't talk naturally about their feelings, but silence about troubled emotions or trauma often results unconsciously in aggressive behaviour, bullying, bed-wetting, anxiety, nightmares, or a regular state of fear (Sunderland, p 11). Children often choose to bottle up their too-troubled feelings or become self-protectively 'tough' so they don't feel the emotional (or sometimes physical) pain (Sunderland, p. 1). Another typical coping mechanism for young people to escape from their bad feelings is allowing themselves to be bullied or abused by their peers. This is even more so after a traumatic experience; children – according to trauma theories – banish their stress to the unconscious, 'in the dark' (Freud, 1915-17, p. 148), and by acting it out in some troubled way, they repeat the trauma feeling to get used to it, to be able to cope with it. This trap seems even more hopeless if we accept the theory of Cathy Caruth, considered by many to be outdated, that the pain of a traumatic experience is so strong that the sufferer is unable to process it, so they actually 'forget' it so that they cannot recall it verbally. Since language does not help the victim, they are often only able to recall the trauma event through images or stories (fiction) indirectly (Pederson, 2014, p. 334). In both selected novels, the protagonists do this subconsciously, and this is exactly what these novels and adaptations can offer to the readers of these stories (or the audiences of these theatre productions) also: they also have the potential to benefit processing trauma experience through stories.

Adults often cannot reach out to their children because either they get an inaccurate answer ('I am ok') or no response at all; both instances can leave the child the unintended victim of 'confusion of tongues' (Ferenczi, 1931, p. 137). Storytelling can be an indirect way to reach out to children since, as Margot Sunderland rightly states, 'Stories can speak to children on a deeper and far more immediate level than literal, everyday language' (Sunderland, 2000, p. 4). The link is easy to see: in our dreams, we imagine pictures, stories, or some kind of narratives with possible metaphorical meanings, expressing or reflecting our fears and hopes. As Sunderland puts it, 'A story is simply like having a dream while being awake' (p. 5). A good storyteller can enter a child's inner world that he/she probably wouldn't even be able to express verbally. Through therapeutic stories, children can meet their untold feelings or their 'unthought known' (Bollas, 1987), which can give them the feeling of profound understanding and relief. This process and tool is depicted in *A Monster Calls* when

the Monster tells stories to Conor. One of the key elements of the effect of a therapeutic story is that since the listener (or reader) automatically identifies with the main character and through his/her journey and difficulties, the child feels not to be alone anymore with their unspoken emotions. If the receiver (reader or listener) shares the same – or similar – feelings as the protagonist in the story, they can safely observe the main character's behaviour that relates to his/her circumstances without having the fear of being in the spotlight.

Both of my adaptations were created in the hope that the events and thoughts depicted in them have the potential to find a connection with the repressed feelings of the young audiences. A well-known feature of post-traumatic processing is the frequency of *intrusive thoughts* (Király, 2013, p. 6). The sensation of post-stress often affects young people in the form of nightmares, in which memories, events, and feelings associated with the trauma are recalled again and again. Conor's recurring nightmare is one form of *intrusive thoughts* from which he constantly wants to escape. To treat uncontrollable, involuntary memories or thoughts of troubled experiences, in psychology, the most often used method is the conscious recollection of the event or trauma experience (Peterson, 2014, p. 338). *A Monster Calls* captures this healing formula precisely: the Monster first refers to the complexity of Conor's feelings through stories, just as specialists who use stories as therapy. In the end, the Monster forces Conor to consciously recall his nightmare, to deliberately verbalise the traumatic experience that had been unwittingly emerging in him until then. In some respects, the novel *Orphalina* itself is the result of a similar conscious recall of traumatic life experiences. The author, Zsigmond Móricz, encountered an orphan girl in 1936 who told him episodes of her life; these fragments later formed the basis of the novel. The adaptation of *Orphalina* aims to elicit sympathy by showing the infinite vulnerability of human beings. Make no mistake about it: these productions are not psychological aids or tools but primarily works that depict extreme life situations with the help of art and thereby 'provoke' questions in the young viewer. Since art can have a significant role in helping young people process 'difficult' issues (Szilvássy, p. 126). This experience is based on the psychological observation that the reader (or the listener, spectators) enters a state of concentrated attention during the reception, a kind of trance, which is similar to a hypnotic state. This is due to the fact that art gives a mixture of fiction and reality; that is, the receiver experiences the

reality of the story, as Aristotle alluded to, while being aware that he/she sees and reads fiction. This dual state can lead – in the best case – to catharsis. (Aristotle, XVII) The experience of 'purification' through art and storytelling can be linked to Freudian psychoanalysis, in which the conscious recollection of buried trauma experiences reaches the possibility of processing.[71] I will write in more detail about the experiences of the audience reception of the two adaptations in Chapters 4.4.1 and 4.7.1. (Audience experience and feedback).

[71] For broader discussion on this, see: Sigmund Freud, *Zur Ätiologie der Hysterie* (The Aetiology of Hysteria) (1896).

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF ADAPTATION AS AN INDEPENDENT WORK OF ART

The fundamental premise of my research is that an adaptation – with a particular focus on intermedial adaptations (Ellström, 2023, p. 396) – can be an autonomous work, and which thus can be evaluated not only in the context of the 'source' material but by its own value (Hutcheon, O'Flynn, 2006, p. 15). I aim to support this argument with my two stage adaptations, coupled with observations on adaptation and translation theories. In the following section, I focus mainly on adaptations and translations made from literary works of art to stage, with smaller reference to visual art or film and music adaptation possibilities.

Since both of my adaptations transferred literary material to the stage, i.e., one art form was converted into another, they differ significantly from the source novels, they are not 'faithful' to the original works in all their elements. In connection with that, I will first examine the issue of originality and fidelity in art. The analysis of both aspects raises questions that are closely related to the artistic decisions of my adaptations. In this context, I will touch on the most essential gain of adaptation between art forms, namely the relevance of interpretation. Following, by examining the differences between the expressive system of literature and theatre, I reflect on the basic theoretical questions of my adaptation work. With my research, I want to draw attention to how theatrical adaptation based on a literary work can successfully focus primarily on other specific means of expression of theatre (actions, performance, mise-en-scène) in addition to the spoken words (dialogues, monologues) taken from the novel.

3.1 Originality and fidelity in art

The relationship between the work to be adapted and the adaptation is seemingly simple: a recurring approach when judging adaptations is a hasty, often superficial comparison with the initial work, in which the starting piece is usually found to be better or richer (Mendes & Kuortti, p. 504). This generalised criticism is especially

typical for film or stage adaptations of literary works.[72] The original novel usually occupies a higher place in the hierarchy of art evaluation, and this determines the critical value of the adaptation (or translation). For this reason, treating adaptations as independent – or as *original* – works of art is particularly rare. There are – in my view – two main reasons for this: the interpretation of *fidelity* and the interpretation of *originality* in art.

Since both of my adaptations show significant alterations compared to the source works (which I detail more fully in the next chapter), the question arises around the faithfulness, and its necessity or otherwise, of the adaptation to the original work. Despite this being one of the most frequently examined aspects of adaptation, it can be difficult to identify what the concept of *fidelity* should encompass in the adaptation (or translation). Should it be an exact transfer that covers every detail, or is it enough to preserve the central ethos of the original work? As Louis G. Kelly states, 'Fidelity will mean either collaboration or servitude' (Kelly, 1979, p. 207). Many adaptations want solely to be a faithful and accurate 'transformation' of the original work, trapping them permanently in the shadow of the original. Such transcriptions – in the name of fidelity – try to preserve as much of the original material as possible and do not seek out significant differences resulting from the change of genre. If we borrow Dryden's theoretical concepts of translation, then such an adaptation corresponds to a metaphrase.[73] An illustrative example is the early film adaption of Hemingway's classic *The Old Man and the Sea* by John Sturges in 1958.[74] The creators tried to be so faithful to the novel that the heterodiegetic narrator quotes entire parts of the book through a voiceover, telling exactly what the spectator sees in the pictures. In effect, the basic formal language device of the film, the moving picture, was 'degraded' to a mere illustration of text. This adaptation respects the source material to the maximum, yet – in my view – it does not fulfil the most crucial function of adaptation, which is to create a valid, effective, and therefore justified work of art with the exclusive usage

[72] Let us not forget the popular truism: 'Read a good book before Hollywood ruins it.'
[73] Dryden mention in his essay to the edition of Ovid translations his three-fold approach to translation: 'metaphrase', 'paraphrase' and 'imitation'. For more on this, see: John Dryden: *The Preface To Ovid's Epistles* (1680).
[74] American film directed by John Sturges and starring Spencer Tracy. The screenplay by Peter Viertel was based on the 1952 novella of the same name by Ernest Hemingway. (Available at: https://www.tokyvideo.com/video/the-old-man-and-the-sea-1958).

of the 'language' of the changed form. As Ana Cristina Mendes stresses, 'the source material must be modified, even radically modified, to be effective in the new medium' (Mendes & Kuortti, p. 505).

Courageous deviations from the original work are still rare; however, it is inevitable that fidelity will be compromised during adaptation. This is particularly striking during the most common form of intermedial adaptation when translating literary works to stage or film because the image created by the words of a novel in the reader's mind is most likely not the same as the concreteness of the performative manifestation. 'Film narratives (résits) often thwart the imagination' (Metz, 1977, p. 110), as Christian Metz describes the psychological process that readers experience when their imagined vision (borne from the verbal artefact of literature) gets thwarted while encountering an adaptation. Beyond visual and conceptual differences, the discrepancy between the *meaning* or *understanding* of the original work and the interpretation created during the adaptation can be even more drastic. Since the reader's reading and the author's assumed intention – if the authorial intention was relevant to textual interpretation at all – do not necessarily match, the adaptor's interpretation is not necessarily the same as the author's accepted purpose in the source work.[75] As Graham Allen states: 'There is never a single or correct way to read a text, since every reader brings with him or her different expectations, interests, viewpoints and prior reading experiences' (Allen, 2000, p. 6). It follows that it is very problematic to determine what the adapter should be faithful *to*. An evident approach is that the adaptor attempts to be faithful to the *story*: the number and description of the *characters* of the novel. However, the author of a literary work subordinates all these elements (such as locations, characters, and story) to the main expressive means of literature, the *words*, *tropes*, and *phrases*. Since the primary means of expression of a stage or film adaptation is not exclusively the spoken word, the apparent fidelity of the adaptation is often measured by the presence or absence of elements like plot, characters, etc.[76] In both of my adaptations, I handled the story and the characters freely: I subordinated these elements exclusively to the logic of the chosen theatre

[75] For broader discussion on this, see: W. K. Wimsatt Jr. and M. C. Beardsley: *The Intentional Fallacy* (1946)

[76] Examples like the stage versions of Dickens' *Christmas Caroll (1843)* by Seymour Hicks or Barbara Field; F. M. Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* by Judith Armstrong (2010)

form. As I will cover in detail later, in the case of *Orphalina*, I merged most of the characters while creating a 'new' storyline based on some episodes of the novel's narrative. In the case of *A Monster Calls*, I incorporated the fundamental storyline of the book more precisely. Still, I differed significantly from the original in terms of some narrative components and structure, as well as the number of characters.

A logical solution during the adaptation of literary works for the stage is to take over the novel's dialogues or to transform descriptions into monologues, creating a homodiegetic or a heterodiegetic narrator, that is, to transform the prose into a play[77]. This can be an acceptable and successful solution for adaptation, although the dramatic text, i.e., the playscript, is not the same as its stage realisation. If we compare a play with a film script based on the same novel, we see a significant difference: while a play mainly contains the sentences of the protagonists and gives only a few suggestions for the stage manifestation, a screenplay covers all the *cinematic* details: locations, images, actions as well as dialogues. It follows that a theatre performance based on a literary work is not only a mutation of the novel but also an interpretation or, if you like, an adaptation of the novel's stage script. This double genre change may further impact the artistic 'fidelity' due to the realisation of theatrical expressions on stage, such as movement, acting, voice, scenery, and mise-en-scène. As Hutcheon stresses, 'it is up to the director and actors to actualise the text and to interpret and then recreate it, thereby in a sense adapting it for the stage' (Hutcheon, 2012, p. 39). In both of my written adaptations, i.e., in the script versions, a significant emphasis is placed on the description of stage instructions beyond the spoken words.[78] In other words, the mise-en-scène provided the essence of my adaptations. At the same time, these script versions are not equivalent to the stage realisations; they only conduct to the complexity of the performance that unfolds during the direction phase. The next chapter will demonstrate the shifts between the written and performed versions.

[77] A recent well-known example for it is Pauline Thimonnier's stage adaptation of *Moby Dick (2020)* by Herman Melville. The adaptation of this particularly spectacular production is simple: the novel's long, descriptive passages are recited by a homodiegetic narrator, who tells the story interrupted by attractively presented scenes.

[78] See the final script version of *A Monster Calls* in Chapter 4.5, the final script version of *Orphalina* in Chapter 4.8.

In conclusion, I claim that the adaptation can focus primarily on being faithful to the *meaning* or the accepted canon of *interpretation* of the source material. However, meaning or interpretation can vary by age and culture. Considering all this, I believe that the adaptation (and translation) inevitably gives a 'reading' or interpretation of the original work. As such, its relationship with the 'original' work can be described as transformation, implying 'inevitable losses and gains' (Stam, 200, p. 62). Consequently, in my view, the most legitimate motivation for adaptation work is to create an actual *reinterpretation*, an individual, subjective *perspective* on the source material that takes into account the particular cultural context, including the audience characteristics.

A remarkable example of different interpretation possibilities is the novel *Orphalina*. A decade after the book's publication, it was interpreted primarily as a sociographic novel, in accordance with the cultural and political views prevailing at the time (after 1945), without considering its transcendental or poetic motifs. The 1976 film adaptation of *Orphalina* also focuses on the social status of the abusers in the same spirit, thereby containing a hidden social criticism. The scope of the novel's interpretation was modified soon after the Europe-wide political changes of 1989: the socially critical aspect was dwarfed, and the biblical, existential perspective came to the fore. The stage adaptation under the current review also emphasises and puts these more symbolic motifs in the foreground. The two interpretations (film and theatre) are completely different. Still, both can be considered valid and faithful because in their political and cultural context of interpretation, the creators selected from the novel what was/is important at the time of the adaptation and what they intended to resonate with.

The other main aspect I aim to investigate in connection with adaptation is the excessive and, in a certain sense, vague belief of what the *originality* of works of art is supposed to mean. David Hare sees it rather radically: 'Pure originality in the arts is neither different nor new, it is merely chaos' (Hare, 1964, p. 139). To avoid confusion between 'originality' and 'authorship', I seek to examine the definition of artistic originality that has varied throughout the history of art. I do all of this because it affects one of the essential aspects of my research's plausibility, namely, can an adaptation be original at all? Originality in a *thematic* sense has not always been

treated as a core feature of artistic creation. Right up until the era of Romanticism, artistic manifestation generally meant creating 'only' a variation of stories, personalities, or events rooted in shared culture.[79] Even the 'modern notion of authorship' (Robert Macfarlane, 2007, p. 7) was not recognised until the Renaissance. Moreover, the need for the artist to create something original or new that doesn't repeat' previously known foundations is relatively new. That is why the artist's originality was embodied primarily in the *how* and not in the *what* for centuries. Even the greatest artists are primarily appreciated not because they introduced new themes or topics but because their version of the realisation was original and novel. Re-creating well-known, culturally defining themes was particularly popular in fine arts and literature. If we think only of the artistic aspects of ancient literature or dramatic poetry, originality was manifested in the perfection of variations, not in the invention of new themes or new stories.[80] For centuries, the interpretation of subjects belonging to Christianity has fulfilled the possibilities of artistic self-expression. This is especially true for the recurring visual art representation of biblical themes: frescoes, iconostases, and paintings[81]. All such works of art became 'original' in the uniqueness of the workmanship and artistry, not in the freshness of the subject of the work of art.

It is noteworthy that only at the end of the eighteenth century did the need arise for the artist's *genius* to be independent of all previous artistic achievements. As Edward Young insisted in his work *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759), an original work of art grows out of nature, uninfluenced by ancestors, from pe-existed materials (Young, p. 7). The definition of the originality of genius is seemingly based on thematic innovation, too, which is contradicted by the fact that one of Young's examples of originality is Shakespeare, who often worked on previously existing themes and topics. Besides introducing new themes, his extraordinary originality can be seen in elaborating and enriching the adopted topics, too. Immanuel Kant is also in

[79] For a classic discussion of this intellectual history, see: Edward Young: *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759).
[80] A glaring example: the theme of Oresteia by Aeschylus: *The Libation Bearers* (458 BC); Sophocles: *Electra* (409 BC); Euripides: *Electra* (413 BC).
[81] Biblical narratives from the New and Old Testament (such as the Creation and Expulsion from the Garden of Eden; Moses and the Ten Commandments; David and Goliath; The Annunciation; The Last Supper; The Crucifixion, etc.) appear in Western art from the Middle Ages through the modern era, especially in fine arts.

line with this form of artistic originality, having argued that a genius in art is one who creates a new (artistic) *rule*. For Kant, then, the artist fulfils his originality primarily through formal innovation: 'Genius is the talent (natural endowment) that gives the rule to art' (Kant, 1790, p. 174).[82]

Considering all that, I do not want to suggest that there is no such thing as 'originality' or authorship in art. I am only reflecting on the contradiction of the concept of originality, which is not necessarily supposed to mean a *thematic* innovation, but it can be understood in terms of formal variations, too, that add *novelty* to an already existing theme – as it works in the case of creatively innovative adaptations.

Thinking further about whether it would be possible to create a 'native' work free of any previous antecedents at all is even more challenging to answer in light of twentieth-century art trends, especially those relating to the concept of postmodernism. If we accept the cultural and art-historical embeddedness of works of art, we can say that even the works of art considered original – according to the Romantic ideal of originality – were born from a dialectical (acceptance-rejection) relationship with previously created works of art. Intertextuality is also part of both my adaptations: I used guest texts and musical references (folk songs and contemporary musical quotes). The modern cultural trends explicitly reflect on this interdependence, as Graham Allen points out, '...contemporary literature seems concerned with echoing and playing with previous stories, classic texts and long-established genres…' (Allen, p. 5). The notion and acknowledgement of intertextuality in art significantly shifted the concept of originality to the action of re-establishment.[83] In light of the above – closely referring to my creative work – I claim that the act of adaptation can be evaluated as an *original* artistic achievement if it occurs with the demand for a novel interpretation or 'reading' of the source material and not with its faithful imitation or replication. In other words, an adaptation – if not

[82] For a fuller discussion of this area, see: Gregor Hayn-Leichsenrning: *Die Wiederentdeckung des kantischen Genies* (2011).
[83] This issue is more fully explored in: Graham Allen: *Intertextuality* (2000).

a mere copy – does not inevitably lose the prospect of *originality* simply because another work was its starting point.[84]

Examining adaptations, mutation is an inevitable result of switching between media. As Robert Stam describes it, we may think of adaptation 'as reading, rewriting, critique, translation, transmutation, recreation, transvocalization, transfiguration, actualization, performance, transmodalization, dialogization, cannibalization, revoicing, and reaccuentuation' (Stam R, 2012–13, pp. 177–197). These expressions also accurately convey that adaptation can fundamentally change the motives and the structure of the source work of art, and this intervention is primarily the result of *creative work*. In other words, as Salman Rushdie puts it, 'one thing becomes another' (Rushdie, 2009, no page number). Therefore, in terms of adaptation, while it is still important to keep in mind considerations such as fidelity, authorship, authenticity or intertextuality, the new work of art should more fully be evaluated on its own terms.

With the historical overview of the two aspects outlined above (fidelity and originality), I wanted to justify the context of my artistic decisions during the adaptation work. Namely, I handled the source novels freely, offering an alternative perspective to it, but always keeping in mind the components of the original work. Also, because I created a transmedial interpretation of the original works, the results should be treated as independent, 'original', autonomous pieces.

3.2. The elements of theatre considered by adaptation work

Both adaptations, which formed the basis of my research, transferred literary material to the stage, i.e., one art form was converted into another one. As noted before, in both cases, significant changes were made compared to the original works, which originated primarily from the difference in the specific expressive systems of literature and theatre. Due to the ongoing dependence of theatre on literature – which I examined in the previous chapter – treating words such as monologues or dialogues as an exclusive way of dramatisation is rather typical. With my research, I want to

[84] For more on 'imitation' in art, see: George J. Buelow (1990) *Originality, Genius, Plagiarism In English Criticism Of The Eighteenth Century*.

draw attention to how theatrical adaptation based on a literary work can successfully focus primarily on other specific means of expression of theatre (actions, performance, mise-en-scène) in addition to the spoken words (dialogues, monologues) taken from the novel.[85] Furthermore, I am persuaded that an *original* theatrical variation of a literary work can only be created if the adaptation bravely goes beyond the primary stage illustration of the novel's narrative and focuses on the *performative* elements of theatre art. This can result in significant modification of the storyline, scenes or even words.

The two adaptations differ significantly not only in their working methods but also in their results. In each case, this has been primarily shaped by their relationship to the original works. Since this research aims to provide insight into the process of adaptation work, I will discuss the most important means of expression in the theatre below. These aspects form the theoretical basis of the detailed reflections on the adaptation work discussed in the next chapter.

Since 'telling a story is not the same thing as showing a story' (Hutcheon, p. 52), the 'monomedial' sign system of literature must be transformed into the 'polymedial' system of the theatre (Schulze, 1998, p. 177). In many ways, this corresponds with the shift from the reader's imagination into visual and aural perception. From this point of view, the adaptation work's prime aim is to find solutions for 'performability' (Zatlin, 2005, p. 7).

First, examining the narrative elements of the adaptation, the similarity can be clearly perceived: Novels – just like prose theatre – usually are *plot*-based, i.e., their *themes* (the main ideas the author explores) are mainly presented in a narrative form of *stories* with *characters*. These three elements (theme, story, and characters) also give the basis of a stage adaptation. The two main questions are *how much* and *in what form* the adaptation preserves these elements, and with what combination of theatrical means of expression will these elements be recreated? The fundamental difference usually lies in time: a novel is longer than a performance, and it can contain a more

[85] As Patrice Pavis puts it: 'The emphasis shifted from the author of the text to the author of the mise en scène, notwithstanding that the interpretation of the latter would be decisive in giving a possible meaning to the play.' (Pavis, 2012, p. 35).

extensive and detailed story with more locations and characters than theatre. Even if modern theatre has moved from Aristotle's strict definition of drama in terms of storyline, location and timeframe[86], the strength of theatre still lies in a reduced story with maximum dramatic content, usually with only a few storylines and only the most important characters (Mendes & Kuortti, p. 512). This results in *compression* and *selection* in stage adaptations of literary works; I will outline numerous examples of this in the process analysis of my two adaptations in the next chapter.

One of the most common, conventional means of expression of Western theatre is the *text,* i.e., the spoken speech.[87] The fundamental consideration is to what extent and in what form the words of the novel should be part of the stage version. Adopting the dialogues of the novel unchanged or adopting the descriptions through a narrator on stage seems obvious. However, the function of dialogues and descriptions is entirely different in literature and theatre. The difference mainly stems from the fact that, while in literature, the reader 'hears' the text in their own intonation and imagines the speakers, in theatre, the audience genuinely hears its meaning-making interpretation by real people (actors). This contrast affects the amount, rhythm, and performability of the text. Condensing is also an important part of adaptation because, while the only tool of literature is the text, theatre can also use non-verbal elements, like gestures, intonation, etc., i.e., which are 'intrinsically related to "mise en scène", and therefore as an operation already containing an interpretation' (Bassnett-McGuire 1985, p. 52). In my two adaptation works, to what extent could I reduce the portion of text that played a decisive role, building on the expressive power of the action and deed on stage instead?

One of the most important artistic decisions of stage adaptation is the *genre* of the production, which does not necessarily have to match the intentions of the literary work. The decision on genre affects the implementation of the above-mentioned elements. The genres of the adaptations on which my research is based are significantly different from the source novels. In the case of *A Monster Calls*, puppet theatre as a genre fundamentally influenced the selection of motifs and modified the

[86] This is more fully explored in: Aristotle, *Poetics* (335 BCE).
[87] For more on this, see: Patrice Pavis: *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts and Analysis* (1999).

emphasis of the novel. According to the novel's official genre classification, it is 'fantasy' (Ghoshal1 & Wilkinson, p. 84), mainly because it contains magical elements. However, since the story is focusing on the main protagonist losing his childhood innocence while facing serious grown-up challenges, it can be treated as a coming-of-age novel (Bildungsroman). Although the stage equivalent of fantasy could reasonably be puppet theatre, my use of puppetry was not intended to shape these 'magical' elements of the novel but to frame a performative tool of the main protagonist's psychological struggle. I will analyse this in detail in the next chapter. In the case of *Orphalina*, the theatrical genre (oratorical play) enabled the episodic construction and the inclusion of guest texts in the form of songs. Defining the genre of the novel is difficult because it shows the effects of different subgenres in terms of its theme and stylistic features: sociographic fiction, nonfiction, and biographical fiction, but traces of the folk ballad can also be detected.

The stage convention defines the *structural* and *stylistic* system of theatrical means of expression; it is a sort of rule system, a 'language' that the viewer can 'read' and through which all the elements of the performance are organised into an artistically logical unity.[88] With the two adaptations, I aim to prove the proposition that if the convention is firm and clear, the young audience is more likely to abandon their expectations based on the source novel and can accept the adaptor's selection and interpretation.[89] These conventions can be very simple: for example, the presence or absence of the 'fourth wall', the dramaturgical reason for songs (why actors start singing in a certain situation), or the interpretation of the stylistic elements of acting, including whether an actor can play more than one role in a performance, or the appearance of a puppet on stage. These conventions are conscious decisions of the theatrical creative process. Before I analyse the theatrical conventions of both adaptations in detail in the next chapter, just one example: In *A Monster Calls* stage adaptation, it is key that the spectators connect only one actor to each character's puppet; that is, the actors – although they do not portray characters themselves – do

[88] For more on this, see: Patrice Pavis: *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts and Analysis* (1999).

[89] For broader discussion see Jeanne Klein's model on how young people perceive fictional events. Jeanne Klein, Shifra Schonmann: *Theorizing Aesthetic Transactions from Children's Criterial Values in Theatre for Young Audiences* (2009)

not play multiple roles. In the adaptation of *Orphalina*, the actors constantly change who they represent in the scenes, sometimes even within a scene. Both solutions are closely related to the chosen genres and the artistic decisions of the performances.

The central visual element of the theatrical expression system is the *space*, which not only serves as a *performance space* to conduct the stage play but can also enrich the performance with an extra element of meaning. One of the most exciting artistic functions of the stage space is simultaneity: it can depict the location of the stage situation – giving 'the semiotic functions performed by the actors' bodies in space" (McAuley, p 120) – while concurrently maintaining the relationship between the stage as a physical, real, space and the audience.[90] Suppose the space is more than an illustration of the fictional context of the story; it can complement the complexity of the production with the aesthetical and interpretive visual surplus. As I will explain in detail in the following chapter (Chapter 4), in the case of both my adaptations, the stage design and the theatrical space convey a layer of meaning to the performance that could not be expressed in any other way within the production. In both cases, the set was created based on our aesthetical and content-related decisions and not as an illustration of the locations offered by the novels. Moreover, in both cases, the spatial organisation of the performance has a significant function, i.e., as the set transforms during the performance, its meaning changes. The illusion of the physical environment in theatre can be created not only through the set but also through lighting and sound since stage lighting can complement the scene as an atmospheric or visual effect, similar to the sound that can create the illusion of a location with the use of effects known from reality (e.g., street noise, radio playing in the distance, etc.). Since in both productions, the scenery is not an illustration of the different locations of the story, occasionally, the lighting and sound concretised the physical context of the scene. I will give examples of this in the next chapter.

Music can be of decisive importance among the *acoustic* means of expression in theatre – besides the spoken word. The function of music – depending on the genre – can be vastly different; the complex analysis of this is not part of this dissertation. In

[90] See more on the multiple frames between performers and spectators in *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre* by Gay McAuley (2000)

light that 'sound effects are often regarded as purely informative and music as purely emotional (Kaye, LeBrecht, p 67), I will cover only a few aspects that have all appeared in the two adaptations: music – similar to a film – can describe a mood, age, or situation or help to portray the characters' psychological condition. In these cases, the music blends into the overall effect of the performance, becoming almost 'inaudible', leaving only its impact on the audience.[91] The use of music in *A Monster Calls* basically fulfils the function of portraying psychological conditions. The individual musical motifs were connected to the different situations and characters in a manner similar to the Wagnerian 'Leitmotiv'.[92] In *Orphalina,* the use of music is entirely different, if only because live music was used, and its function was not mood or psychological description but full musical value in itself. This also determined the nature of the music performed in the production, which consists of variations of well-known folk songs, accompaniment of original choral works, and excerpts from classical music.[93]

Undoubtedly, the most essential expressive power of theatre lies in the presence of the *actor*, the live person who shares time and space with the live audience. The analysis of different acting styles is beyond the scope of this research, but it can be said with certainty that the centre of every theatrical means of expression is the actor and the character (or function) he/she portrays. In addition to talent and accurate presentation (mimic) skills, the actor's individuality is also of indisputable importance and can influence or overwrite any previous artistic planning and preparation. The central part of the director's work is constantly examining the actors' 'individual charisma' (Chaikin, p 59) and talent, and analysing how this modifies or retunes the meaning and emphasis of the whole production. The emergence of solid individuality on stage should be supported, as was in the case of *A Monster Calls*.[94] In *Orphalina,* on the

[91] For broader discussion on this, see: Peter Venczel: *A Brief Analysis of the Functionality and Dramaturgy of the Soundtrack in Film and Theatr*e, 2020.
[92] Leitmotiv or Leitmotif(s) are themes of easily recognizable melodic, rhythmic, or harmonic identity used in connection with a certain character of incident in Wagner's music-dramas.
[93] J. S. Bach: *Matthew Passion* (Matthäuspassion, BWV 244), *Erbarme mich* (1727) – It is more fully explored in Chapter 4.6.5. The directing process – as the core part of the adaptation (d).
[94] The suggestiveness and sensitivity of the young actor (Erik Major) playing the main role was one of the keys to the success of the production. His achievement was also honoured with an award (Best Male Actor - eSzínházi Festival, 2023; Most Talented Newcomer - nomination for the Critics' Award, 2022*)*.

other hand, we built on the ensemble presence, where the actor's individual expression prevails primarily in combination with the others. This difference fundamentally determined the relationship between the actors and the characters they portrayed. Referring to Storm's expression, in *A Monster Calls,* the 'theatrical' presentation was dominant, while in *Orphalina,* the 'narrative' presentation was dominant.[95] While in the first one, the aim was 'the illusion of recognisable beings', in the latter, the characters were 'understood as verbal constructions only'. (Storm, p. 244) Although a production materialises the world inspired by the written words of literature through these means of expression, it still, in essence, serves to stimulate the audience's imagination. This goal fundamentally determines all artistic decisions, and it is particularly important in the field of TYA, as I discussed in the previous chapter.

A good theatre performance – especially for young audiences – balances the artistic means of expression in such a way as to leave enough room for the audience's imagination and interpretation to complement what is experienced in the production. In essence, this is the decision on the extent to which the spectators are considered by the creators as passive viewers or as a 'co-creator' who supplements what they see in the performance with their own imagination and their own interpretation. All these means of expression should give 'the spectators the keys to forming their own opinion', as Patrice Pavis stresses (Pavis, 2012, p. 46). Imagination, that is, the degree of audience involvement, is determined by the ratio of 'familiar' (predictable, requiring no explanation) and 'unfamiliar' (unusual, surprising) elements offered in the performance.[96] If all elements are 'familiar', then there is no room left for imagination because the performance explains itself. If all elements are 'unusual', then the audience's imagination does not start because there is nothing to take root from.

I believe it is fundamentally important that the creators of TYA stimulate the imagination of young viewers instead of closed interactions (shouting, clapping, singing, etc.) that allow only apparent immersion. In both adaptations, I purposely relied on the spectators' 'investment' to supplement the elements and effects of the

[95] For more on the theatrical and narrative presentation of the character, see: Storm, W. (2011): *On the Science of Dramatic Character.*
[96] For more on this, see: Jeanne Klein (2005) *From Children's Perspectives*, p. 47.

stage realisation by keeping the dramaturgical solutions away from mere illustration. I will give an insight into this in the next chapter as part of the evaluation of the creative work process.

CHAPTER 4: EVALUATION OF THE CREATIVE WORK

In this chapter, I want to reflect on the creative work of the two adaptations that form the basis of my research. The thesis aims to approach its findings from two directions simultaneously. First of all, my work is 'practice-led research', because my creative work is the implementation of the pre-existing assumptions of which I wrote in the previous chapters. Secondly, this is 'practice-based research', as the focus is on creative work, which I will attempt to analyse, thereby offering insight into the decisions of the creative process.[97] (Candy, 2006) I will first summarise some common principles defining the two significantly different adaptation works, focusing on thematical and formal aspects.

In the following, I will first reflect on the creative work of *A Monster Calls*. First, I will mention some aspects of the preparatory phase of the adaptation, one of the essential parts of which is the structural analysis of the novel. In addition to providing insight into the dilemma of portraying the main characters, I shed light on the focal points of the adaptation by analysing from a psychological aspect some individual scenes of the novel. Following that, I describe some dramaturgical decisions, challenges and fails of the *first draft* that provided important lessons for the creation of the *second draft*. Before I go on to describe the findings of the directing process, I will analyse some significant differences between the novel and the second draft.

4.1 General introduction to the two adaptation works

I have worked on scripts many times before, but very rarely by starting off with only a blank page in front of me. I usually work with playwrights, developing a story or a script together, giving the basic plot or the final touches to the text myself – most of the time, this happens after the practical try-out of the text in rehearsals.[98] I have also worked with dramaturges several times on stage adaptations based on well-known

[97] More on practice-based and practice-led research, see: Candy, L. (2006), *Practice-based Research: A Guide, Creativity and Cognition*

[98] Among many others: *Cyber Cyrano* with István Tasnádi (Kolibri Theatre for Childern and Youth, Budapest, 2010); *Pin:okkio* with Péter Deres (Pesti Magyar Theatre, Budapest, 2019).

novels.[99] In these collaborations, there are usually two aspects to combine: a literary aspect and a theatrical (practical) one. Meaning: how is it achievable to keep as much as possible from the core of the novel (including characters, events, etc.) but transform (or translate) it into a theatrically imaginable form while already having some directions in mind (some actors, stage design, etc.). These works have taught me one important thing: adapting a novel to the stage is not editing the text of the original work but finding solutions that can only exist or work on stage.

This time, there was no collaborator at the start of the process beside me; it was only the novels and a piece of blank paper – or better to say, a blank screen – in front of me. It entirely depended on me which direction to go with the adaptations. The challenge here was not to write plays that are suitable for young adult audiences as well as older age groups but to create scripts with that target age group primarily in mind. As I have examined earlier in Chapter 1.4[100],there are some key aspects to be kept in mind. The main characteristic is that a play for young adult audiences ideally deals with an issue that a young person can relate to or that is strongly connected to his/her life phase.

Before starting the adaptation work, in addition to the thematic aspects, I also had to decide on basic formal issues. I chose puppetry; however, as discussed above, the target age group (14-18 years old) of both the productions that serve as the basis of my research is traditionally out of the so-called 'puppet-theatre' audience. But since 'puppetry is not an age category, but a genre'[101], I believed that it could provide a unique aesthetic effect for all ages and can represent a wider variety of theatrical expressions. Consequently, I did not treat puppetry strictly as a genre in my adaptations but as an endless source of theatrical possibilities *with* puppets, objects and actors[102]. With that in mind, I focused on creating a dramaturgical interaction

[99] Among many others: *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding (Bárka Theatre, Budapest, 2004); *The Paul street boys* by Ferenc Molnár (Bárka Theatre, Budapest, 2002); *Fanny and Alexander* by Ingmar Bergman (Novisad Theatre, Serbia, 2012); *Butterfly Lion* by Michael Morpurgo (Ciróka Puppet Theatre, Kecskemét, Hungary, 2017).
[100] Chapter 1.4. The difference between 'suitable' and 'beneficial' according to the psychological development of young people.
[101] This is the slogan of the Budapest Puppet Theatre (https://budapestbabszinhaz.hu/en/introduction).
[102] For more on Object Theatre, see: https://wepa.unima.org/en/object-theatre/

between the actors and their roles (puppets) that gave another layer to the theatrical representation.

As I have analysed in detail in the previous chapter, in creating a stage adaptation of a novel, the difference between art forms (literature – theatre) makes it all but impossible to retain the exact same storyline, scenes or even words, consequently, it is essential to provide a unique reading of the source material in terms of formality and thematically. Since my adaptations were always intended to be productions realised on stage and not 'just' scripts, I concluded that I would develop the final version of the scripts within the creative process of directing the show itself. It resulted in scripts that, alongside the spoken speech, include intensive descriptions of the stage actions, i.e., the mise en scène. As stated before, the mobilisation of fantasy is one of the most important aspects of theatre for young audiences; therefore, I have put the emphasis more on the abstract and sensual impressions, in which text has only an additional role.

4.2 Notes on work in progress of the adaptation of *A Monster Calls*

To document the creative process, I chose to take notes on questions, dilemmas, and decisions while writing. I later selected and summarised these notes, and supplemented them with additions, in order to serve as a basis for practice-based research, that is, to provide insight into the creative process, and thus be suitable for possible conceptualisation and theorisation.

First draft of the adaptation[103]

I had a few bases for the adaptation of *A Monster Calls*: first of all, the haunting novel, plus there were some existing adaptations (the film version[104] and the script of

[103] Future references to that source will be cited in text using abbreviation AMC-GV1, Available from DCU DORAS Repository.
[104] *A Monster calls* by Patrick Ness, dir: J.A. Bayona (DVD – 2016, Apaches Entertainment SL, Entertainment One UK,) [Future referees to that source will be cited in text using abbreviation AMC-F]

the first stage version[105] of the novel), which I studied primarily to more precisely outline the justification for my adaptation.

My aim was to use as few words as I could of the words of the novel and re-creating it by visualising actions, emotions, and relationships. In other words, focusing on theatricality and performability, translating literature into the means of expression of theatre.

4.2.1 The preparatory phase – Analysis of the narrative layers of the novel

The preparatory phase of the adaptation work always involves extensive research into the source material. I have read the novel[106] – my main resource – several times, taken notes and analysed it using some very practical aspects.[107] Before looking for motifs that can be used in the stage version, I had to be entirely clear about whether I fully understood the literary composition of the novel: links, parallels, motifs, structure, layers, and meaning. One of the most decisive parts of the analysis of the novel from the adaptation's point of view was the examination of the dramaturgical layers of the story. In my view, the novel's narrative structure consists of four layers. The different layers of the novel are on a continuum between reality (dying Mother) and the subconscious (nightmare).

First layer – reality:

Main characters like Conor, Mother, Grandmother, Father and Conor's classmates belong to the real world. At this layer, Conor deals with (i) the everyday fight of his mother's illness; followed by (ii) the changing dynamic in the family (unwanted influence of the Grandmother, the unreliable Father who is coming and going; and (iii) repeated school incidents (bullying by Harry). All these characters and actions have a strong correlation to the Monster and its stories.

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[105] *A Monster calls* (2018, Old Vic Theatre, London) devised by the company with Adam Peck, dir: Sally Cookson (Walker Books Ltd, 2018) [Future referees to that source will be cited in text using abbreviation AMC-OS]

[106] *A Monster calls* (2011) by Patrick Ness from the original idea by Siobhan Dowd (Walker Books, 2015) [Future referees to that source will be cited in text using abbreviation AMC-N]

[107] See the analysis: *Connections (links) between the Monster and other characters*, Available from: DCU DORAS Repository.

Second layer – at the border of reality and imaginary world:

The existence of the Monster is undecided in the novel – just like in the film – that is, whether it is (i) a dream (another nightmare) or (ii) the projection of Conor's fear, or (iii) real (evidence of its existence: leaves, berries, destruction etc.). The strong link between the Mother character and the Monster as a projection gradually dissolves the importance of answering the question of where exactly the Monster has come from. However, the title of the novel confirms that the Monster is the one who *calls* someone; the Monster repeatedly confronts Conor with the fact that it was *he* who called the Monster, and he made the yew tree walk. The Monster definitely knows more than everyone else in the story; it acts a bit as if it were a transcendent character that has lived thousands of years, that knows about Conor's nightmare too, the one that Conor has never told anyone and can't even accept himself, trying to bury it, not wanting to confront its meaning. All this confirms the reading that the yew tree Monster is the creation of Conor's subconscious. The status of their relationship changes parallel to how Conor is starting to face reality. In the beginning, the Monster appears as something that wants to be frightening for Conor (like a traditional Monster in fairytales or nightmares), however, Conor seems to be not terrified at all. The Monster feels like another unwanted phenomenon in Conor's life, just like his mother's illness as well as the nightmare. As Conor gets closer to the last tale (and to the last phase of his Mother's condition), the Monster gradually starts to appear as a friend that can possibly heal his Mother or, at the very end, can heal Conor. (The Hungarian title of the film refers to that phase: the literal translation would be *The Unexpected Friend.*[108])

Third layer – tales told by the Monster:

The tales – from which the fourth one is Conor's nightmare – seem to make no sense to Conor, or he does not want to understand them, just like he wants to avoid understanding the real horror of his own one, of the nightmare. Conor finds and reads the stories like fairytales in which there are *good* and *bad* characters; there is *salvation* and *justice,* and usually, everything turns out well with a *happy ending* for the sake of

[108] Translated from the Hungarian title: *Váratlan jóbarát*. For more on this, see: »»

all the suffering.[109] He understands these stories and the existence of the Monster in a childish way, even if he denies being a small child who believes in Monsters and fairytales.

The stories appear differently across the novel: while Conor is only a listener in the first story, he can see the second story (the Monster visualises it: 'When it cleared, Conor and the monster stood on the field of green, overlooking a valley of metal and brick.' – AMC-N, p. 125) and influences it by conducting the destruction. This has a very real effect in the first layer: the Grandmother's living room gets destroyed. The third tale is marginally shaped; it is not really told by the Monster but mainly happens in the very space where Conor is, and he plays the main role in it. The fourth tale is Conor's own story; the Monster steps back; he is only helping Conor to reveal his truth. While Conor does not seem to understand the 'morals' in the first stories and tries to distance himself from them, the last story (his own) comes from a deep understanding, which he tries to eliminate.

The fourth layer – the nightmare:

The nightmare is expressively a *dream* that repetitively comes back every night and wakes Conor up. He does not want to analyse it, he does not talk about it, and he denies the disturbing feeling that he *let* his Mother fall from the cliff, even if he could have held her longer. The explanation of his nightmare (his true feelings) and facing the unavoidable reality (his Mother dying) finds its clarification through the Monster. It is as if the first layer and the fourth layer evoke the necessity of the second and third layers, i.e., the Monster.

As I will discuss later, the precise separation of these layers provided the major dramaturgical clue of the stage adaptation.

[109] For more on fairytales, see in chapter 2.1. The longstanding links between TYA and children's literature: reasons and challenges.

4.2.2 Central vision

In the first draft of the adaptation, my central vision was to define the space of the story as Conor's psyche (mind). I wanted to give an insight into his confused and broken emotional status, the whirlpool of his emotions, and his endless nightmares caused by the condition of his mum. In this very upsetting phase of his life, actions, sentences, thoughts, and characters are constantly swirling; the border between reality and dream fades out. It feels like an endless challenge that if he survives, he can protect his mother. In order to support this, I examined how to keep the main protagonist, Conor, as a central character on stage for the entire duration of the play, creating an emotional rollercoaster around him. I was looking for a way to keep the focalisation on Conor without making him a diegetic narrator. In other words, using the tool of *mimesis* versus *diegesis*, by *showing* and not *telling*.[110] Since Conor does not fully understand what is really happening to him, he is constantly forced to analyse his own situation. I wanted to explore a dramaturgical structure that is based on the combination of dreamlike sequences of impressions, emotions and information. In light of this vision, I have shared with Marina Carr[111] my thoughts that the first scene of the play should not be identical to the first scene of the novel. My belief was that the scene in which Conor meets the Monster the second time (when he tells the first story) should have been the beginning of the adaptation. My dramaturgical concept was that opening the play this way might be more tense because of the manipulation of time, space and action, which can raise more questions and hold more secrets about the underlying conflict/collision of the main character.

I was thinking originally that another alternative might be to start the play with the scene in which Lilly and Conor have a fight over the first bullying because that might work better for teenagers. In the end, I decided to combine both starting points. I kept the main storyline, but I broke up the chronology of the novel, giving the impression of simultaneity of actions and reflections of the main protagonist. However, I hadn't decided yet what should be the core (central) moment, the focalisation of the narrative (i.e., from which point of view the story is being told). After all, this technique

[110] More on perspectives on point of view in drama, see: Dan McIntyre (2006) *Point of View in Plays: A cognitive stylistic approach to viewpoint in drama and other text-types.*
[111] Playwright, supervisor of my adaptation work as part of my doctoral research.

allowed me to merge different scenes and characters, connecting them like in a montage or collage. Through this method, it was possible to create correlations between elements of motifs that were only connected in the main character's head.

This is how I started working on the first draft; however, I was conscious of the risk that this technique can be repetitive and tiring and easily lose its poetic power if it is extended for the whole play.

4.2.3 Theatrical representations of the main characters

As mentioned before, my goal was to create a script in which stage actions and the spoken words are shaped together. I considered it necessary to involve the designer[112] of the planned production at this point to discuss the staging possibilities. But before that, I needed to clarify some major narrative questions and to probe different dramaturgical ideas regarding the focalisation of the adaptation. I did not choose the method of writing first, but I rather analysed the different focalisation possibilities and their formal and dramaturgical consequences. Among these, the first – and all-determining – question was the portrayal of the characters on stage.

a) How to portray Conor?

At the start of the adaptation work, one of the main questions was: Who is the story's central character: the Monster or Conor? This decision is at the heart of the adaptation and theatrical representation. The shape and form of the representation of the boy and the Monster can be either realistic (illustration) or poetic (animation). The two different possibilities I focused on were:

- *A young actor* plays the boy – giving a realistic illusion of the character. In this case, the Monster should be more of an illustration of the yew tree.

[112] Ákos Mátravölgyi (1969) is a Hungarian set, costume and puppet designer. He has been a freelance designer since 2001 and has contributed to more than 160 productions in Hungary and abroad (Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Serbia). His works received awards several times (Best Designer in 2006, 2010, 2012, 2015, and 2018) along with the Blattner Award in 2012 for outstanding achievement in puppetry.

- *A puppet* represents the boy – i.e., the boy's appearance is not realistic. In this case, a less realistic form – puppet or object – can embody the Monster.

Both directions affect the quality and the form of other characters too, like Mother, Grandmother, Father, and Classmates. I needed to investigate what matches more to a realistically represented boy or to a puppet.[113] Leading on from these questions, I discussed with the designer the consequences of the different representation possibilities of Conor and of the Monster:

- If Conor is played by a young person (*actor*), the first *layer* (see above) of the story will be more relatable. All the characters of that layer, like the Mother, the Grandmother etc., can be represented by actors. In that case, any other layer of the story: the Monster, the tales and the nightmare, would demand another kind of representation, such as puppets, sound effects, objects, etc.

- If a *puppet* represents the boy, but actors embody all the other real characters like the Mother, Grandmother, etc., they will have an uneven relationship on stage. This can possibly highlight the loneliness of the boy and how much he is alienated from the real world. However, the material and the technique of the puppet will have a big impact on its relationship with the other characters. Further questions were to consider what type of puppet we should use and how many people are needed to animate the puppet. Furthermore, is the puppet realistic or schematic?

b) The stage representation of the Monster

The representation of the Monster was equally important to the portrayal of the main protagonist, Conor. The fact that the show was planned to be in a puppet theatre allowed us to think of a more symbolic, poetic representation. However, it was important to avoid having a childish solution, which would move the show closer to a 'fairytale'. Since the novel stimulates the reader's imagination only, despite the

[113] It is important to clarify I did not examine the issue of spectator's identification, but exclusively the formal aspects of representation.

detailed description of the monster, its appearance remains uncertain and different to every single reader. The beautiful illustration of the hard copy might influence some readers, but only with a general notion of the look of the Monster.[114] On the contrary, the powerful film adaptation in which the Monster appears in its fully realistically-detailed illustration of a humanised giant yew tree.[115] Thanks to advanced special effects[116], the technically perfect re-creation of the visual concept of the book takes away its unsettling secret and its indeterminate nature, which should be one of the most important qualities of the Monster. The 'beauty' and the perfection of the animation emphasise the look of the Monster and weaken the psychological context of it.

I was sure that the Monster's origin should remain uncertain for the theatre audience, just as it is not clear where it comes from in the novel. Some scenes should emphasise the dream-like character of it, other scenes the more psychological aspect of it, and maintain the realistic side only by leaving evidence behind. For that reason, I first thought that the Monster should change its appearance every time it appears and reappears in the story, or not even fully seen, relying mainly on the imagination of the audience: sound, light, shadow, wind, scent, and possibly other remains of the tree, such as berries, leaves and soil. Its voice is the most important aspect that can come from different characters like the Mother, Grandma, Father and Harry – with a modified tone.

In order to find the appropriate formal solution, I first wanted to clarify the function of the Monster. Recalling the story layers of the novel again helped me with this. The boy has a nightmare, plus a Monster visits him. That emphasises the Monster's vision-like character since no one else can see it in the canteen or in the hospital. If I highlight that the Monster is a projection of the boy, then it is similar to the nightmare he has been having. If that is the case, then what could then be the difference between the nightmare and the appearance of the Monster visually?

[114] Illustrator of the book: Jim Kay [AMC-N].
[115] Art director: Jaime Anduiza [AMC–F].
[116] It is a combination of physically created elements and CGI.

The nightmare – the fourth layer – described in the novel (Conor losing his Mother) is a terrifying dream sequence, which the reader can only perceive fully at the end of the novel. This recurring nightmare seems to be giving him the sense that he is the one who must keep his mother alive. He feels that it is his responsibility to do everything for that, her life depends on him. But he lets his mother fall, even if he were able to hold on to her longer; that is the moment he wakes up from the nightmare. Conor feels guilt. That is the reason Conor accepts all the suffering (bullying by Harry, living with his grandmother, all the jobs around the house like washing clothes, emptying the rubbish, etc.). He believes he needs to be strong – but at the same time, he feels weak: he is not able to cope with his mother dying anymore, so in his nightmare, he lets her fall. The reader only discovers this at the end of the novel, when he reveals his nightmare to the Monster.

Compared that with the third layer of the novel, the yew tree first appears to be tough to the boy, it is unpleasant, and it looks frightening (huge, dark, strong) at the beginning. However, even if its stories don't seem to be healing Conor's pain right away, the Monster feels like a supporter, someone who makes Conor stronger to be able to encounter the truth – but not in the way Conor and the reader expects. The Monster isn't here to save Conor's mum's life but to help Conor to accept the inevitable fact of death. In this sense, the Monster is a positive dream, the opposite of the nightmare. This projection (unlike the other one) does not repeat the same scene sequence all over again, but all the encounters build on each other (the number of tales) and lead him to an understanding, while the nightmare only disturbs him and reminds him of his own guilt.

In the first draft, I concentrated on capturing the varying surrealistic appearance of the Monster so much that the importance of the nightmare had been weakened. I could not capture the visual complexity and the intricacy of the action in the nightmare in the first concept.

Analysing the Monster from a different perspective, its connection to other characters is quite strong.[117] His link to the Mother is obvious: the Monster appears every night at the exact time when the Mother will die (12:07) at the end of the story. The Mother talks about the yew tree, which they can both see from the house window. That can mean that the Monster might be the expression of the Mother's will: she is trying to say something through the Monster which she is not able to communicate to her son. This connection is emphasised in the film adaptation through the Mother's drawings. The viewer learns at the end – after the Mother has passed away – that she made some drawings of the Monster (yew tree) when Conor was a small child.

Having discussed these questions with Marina Carr, she drew my attention to the phenomena that happen to dying people – many times, they can't exit before they reveal a secret they have been carrying for a long time. The Mother struggles to tell her son to accept the truth of dying. This reinforced my belief that the appearance of the Monster and the Mother could show similarities, even considering that the Monster might not be male at all, even though the novel states the opposite: 'It wasn't a woman's voice at all' (AMC-N, p. 17). However, if the Monster is the representation of the Mother's will, it could be female, too. Thinking further about this possibility, this could allow for the same actress to play the Monster and the Mother if needed, since the Mother and the Monster never appear at the same time on stage in the adaptation except for the last scene in the hospital. I have made some strong connections between the Mother and the Monster in the first draft, however, I could not grasp this concept completely.

Examining further the function of the Monster, I inspected what kind of implications the tales could have on the appearance of the Monster. I was convinced from the beginning that the different stories told by the Monster could be performed in different styles. Partly because the stories are all very atmospheric, they represent different times, and partly because they could break up the darkness and the one-tone sadness of the show. I thought this might lead to a solution in which the Monster can look different every single time it appears. For instance, at the beginning, it can give

[117] See the analysis: *Connections (links) between the Monster and other characters*, Available from: DCU DORAS Repository.

the impression of a fairytale monster, like Herne the Hunter (with antlers on its head) or the Green Man (with leaves) – as it is hinted at in the novel. Later, it can appear more similar to Conor's 'enemies', Harry, Grandmother. By the end of the story, it may be impersonated by a doctor, who can possibly be the future (adult) version of Conor.

In the first draft, I have only partly followed the above-mentioned modifications of the Monster. My focus turned more to the psychological effect of the tales and emphasising their 'messages'.

4.2.4 Challenges, failures of the first draft of the adaptation

a) The transcript of the film subtitles/dialogue

Although the basis for my adaptation was the novel, I also used all other sources linked to it as inspiration, including the film adaptation. Reading the dialogue of the film script (transcript of the subtitles) gave me a useful detection: I have discovered that without any of the complementary descriptions of the various scenes, the spoken sentences are quite economical and straightforward. While I was working on formatting the subtitles (which I could only download in an unformatted block of text) I realised how easily scenes could follow one another with very few words. It was a challenge to separate the sentences – without knowing who was talking and without knowing where a scene started or ended. However, this particular way of encountering the script inspired me a lot, giving me the courage to create something similar in my stage version too. Reading the script in this way made me confirm my starting point that the central character, Conor, is steady and permanent; he is receiving sentences from other characters like the Mother, Grandma, or the Father from different directions. The unedited form of the film dialogue transcript reinforced the impression that everything was happening around Conor, which works to strongly maintain his point of view and make the storytelling with this subjective perspective stronger. It felt like the locations of the scenes were less important; this is why transitions between scenes can be very fast, almost invisible, avoiding unnecessary illustrations.

b) The Father character

I was trying to find an explicit solution for the father's character. In my first concept, he would have been the only traditional puppet. It only would have come to life in Conor's hands. I saw the chance in that to express the father's weakness, his not-tangible existence in the boy's life.

c) Tales told by the Monster

The adaptation of the tales in the 1st draft was unsuccessful. This was largely because I did not place emphasis on the visual presentation possibilities of these scenes. Consequently, I, unfortunately, lost the distance between Conor and the first tale, in which I believe he should have been only an observer.[118] The second tale's 'result' is supposed to be the destroyed living room, which definitely requires a very challenging stage solution. Since I decided to represent the room with the grandmother's character (in the 1st draft), the action connected to the third tale got diluted. The fourth tale – the nightmare itself – could not come to realisation in the first draft because the significance of the nightmare was lying on very weak foundations.

d) Problem with Harry (cliché storyline, uncertain role)

Conor's classmates and the bullying raised narrative questions in the adaptation. This plot element of the novel feels as if it were an attachment to the main storyline. It is never revealed exactly why Harry has chosen Conor as his target, his sentences do not really represent the way of thinking of a teenage boy, and his changes at the end feel a bit forced – as if it were only for the reason to defeat Conor's feeling of being invisible. In the film version, this storyline is reduced to basically one character (Harry, but not Sully or Anton), and another important character is missing completely: Lily – a good friend of Conor who is desperately trying to help him. At the beginning of my work, I assumed that merging these two characters, Lily and Harry, could be a possible solution to give a stronger yet simpler dramaturgical

[118] See the analysis about Conor's relationships to the tales above.

function to Harry. My aim was to create a more profound relationship between Harry and Conor so that the conflict between them could be rooted in their former friendship, which became ruined because Harry told everyone what had been happening to Conor's mother recently (just as Lily does in the novel). Following this dramaturgical solution, Harry's psychological motivation for physical and verbal aggression towards to Conor could come from Conor's rejection. Harry could feel betrayed and embittered, helpless to Conor's changed behaviour. With this change, it would have been enough to keep only *one* classmate character in the play, yet not losing any counter-point to the one-sided schoolmates' representation where everybody had been Conor's enemy for a long time.

On reflection, I realised that I had failed to bring this concept to a realisation in the first draft. I rather decided to simplify this thread of the plot, hoping that I could minimise the flaw of this character. Nevertheless, the first and really long blockage in the writing came when I got to the third tale that is basically connected to Harry. My main concern was that I have been finding Harry's storyline a little bit of a cliché, since there is very little motivation mentioned in the novel that supports Harry's ruthless behaviour and his constant need to bully or physically abuse Conor. In the film version, there is a hint that gives some explanation for his actions: whenever Harry turns back to Conor in the classroom, he thinks that Conor is staring at him.

Instead of the psychological motivation of Harry's behaviour, I tried to find its dramaturgical function in the story. Conor doesn't talk to anyone about Harry's aggression; he hides it – even from the teachers – and keeps it secret. This is in line with the common behaviour of victims known in psychology, that they feel ashamed by being bullied, so they rather 'protect' the aggressor.[119] If no one knows about the incident, it's as if it doesn't even exist. Another very common reason for keeping bullying secret is because the victim is convinced that he or she deserves the punishment. Since his friend, Lilly, told everyone in the school that his mother is seriously ill, Conor feels ashamed and distant from his classmates. He doesn't want anyone to feel pity for him because that would be an acknowledgement of his mum's

[119] More on this, see: *Behavioural consequences of child abuse* (Abdulaziz Al Odhayani, William J. Watson, Lindsay Watson), 2013

grave condition that he doesn't want to face. Conor has another secret: his nightmare in which he lets his mother fall from the cliff. Conor knows at the bottom of his heart that he is doing so because he is not able to cope with his mum's gradually worsening condition anymore, so he wants it – secretly – to end. This is the 'truth' Conor should confess as a valid and acceptable feeling at the end of the story. But before he comes to that recognition, he feels guilty for having this destructive feeling, so he believes he deserves punishment. Harry is the only one who – without knowing anything about Conor's real feelings – fulfils Conor's wish to be punished.

The moment Harry stops physically bullying Conor and denies him by saying, "I no longer see you" (AMC-N, p. 173), Conor suddenly loses his punisher, and that makes him so angry that he beats Harry so badly. He was already invisible for the rest of the school – it was only Lilly, his former friend, who really took a step towards him by sending him a note anyway – so it does not make a real difference to him if Harry stops seeing him, however, after the brutal beating act, Conor feels that he is no longer invisible to his classmates.

Nevertheless, the motivation for Conor's action beyond the above-mentioned explanation remained unclear to me, which is why its emotional place and its dramaturgical function in the story were difficult to translate to the stage. My solution in the 1st draft highlighted two aspects of Conor's emotional status: namely, his ongoing fight with himself, which is impersonating Harry as one of his enemies, and his guilt about his own feelings towards his mum. In the scene of the third tale, Conor actually punishes *himself*, and the Monster provokes him by reminding him of his nightmare. The motif of 'being invisible' might express the shame that comes with the unwanted attention he gets from his peers. He feels that he is being labelled: he is the boy whose mother is dying. He does not want to deal with anybody's sympathy. Sympathy does not help him. He knows that the only way out of this attention is if he is out of the problem. In reverse, if he makes himself invisible, he might stop the reason for the attention, too.

Second draft of the adaptation[120]

4.2.5 A puppet performance as an additional layer of the story

I believe that the first draft of the adaptation contained some promising solutions, but it lacked a strong and solid theatrical foundation. Core elements like the altered time structure, Conor's mind as the space of the play, or the varying appearance of the Monster seemed to be working to a certain extent, but I felt that it was necessary to build these components on a homodiegetic construction.[121] Therefore, I thought that the new concept (the second draft of the adaptation) should be more rooted in the special opportunity that a puppet theatre environment can offer. My other conviction was that the *layered* structure (analysed above) of the novel should be embedded more directly in the theatrical representation itself.

By searching for an organic (homodiegetic) theatrical construction in my second draft of the adaptation, I followed my new concept of creating a *frame story* around the original story of the novel. This new layer allowed me to introduce a 'new' character, the 'Puppeteer', who is actually the adult Conor himself, as it is revealed at the end of the play. The Puppeteer is, at the same time, the storyteller, the heterodiegetic narrator and the main character. The show is his journey: a psychological confrontation and purification for the Puppeteer, who retells his own story from the past with the help of puppets and objects. The camouflage aspect (pretending to be an omniscient narrator) of hiding the real personality behind a puppet reflects the long-lasting emotional trauma of the main character.

The original layers of the novel (Conor's life story: his nightmare and encounter with the Monster; the tales told by the Monster and Conor) became embodied in the additional layer of a fictional puppet show in the adaptation. Thus, the Puppeteer tells Conor's story as if it were a *tale about a random boy only*, delaying the revelation of the last twist until the end of the show: that the Puppeteer and Conor are identical. I

[120] Future references to this source will be cited in text using abbreviation AMC-GV2, Available from: DCU DORAS Repository.

[121] Similar narrative solutions can be seen in Jiří Havelka's and Marek Zákostelecký's *Georges Méliès' Last Trick* (Drak Theatre, CZ) www.draktheatre.cz; or in Patrick Bonté's and Nicole Mossoux' *Twin Houses* (1994)

have revised and vaguely modified the layer structure of the novel in the second draft of the adaptation. According to this, the first layer contains the basic, more matter-of-fact elements of Conor's life phase:

In the *first layer* (of the adaptation) the audience learns a story about a boy – named Conor – whose mother is seriously ill. He loves her very much, and he does everything for her, but at the bottom of his heart, he wants it to be over. He has an unusual visitor, the yew tree that came 'walking' for him, in the shape of a Monster (AMC-N, p. 50).

The *second layer* reveals a more mysterious, dubious level of Conor's story: The visits of the Monster transport him to another world, a kind of underworld, where the Monster tells tales that are quite unclear for the boy at the start (especially the first two tales), but which bring him to an unwanted confrontation and a profound realisation of his true feelings. It turns out at the end of this process that Conor has a recurrent nightmare every night – which the Puppeteer omitted at their first encounter – in which Conor lets his mother fall into a black hole.

The *third (additional) layer* gives the true point of view of the story told and presented on stage: it turns out that the Puppeteer is retelling his own life story, and he is identical to the boy. The Puppeteer uses puppets to tell the story because he, as a boy, namely Conor – as is mentioned in the first layer of the story – inherited a shed packed with puppets from his late grandfather.

Each of the first two layers holds a secret that leads to the next layer. The Monster's appearance in the first layer leads to the tales told by the Monster in the second layer. The fourth tale, which is Conor's own tale (and which includes the nightmare that was omitted in the first layer), leads to the third layer: the Puppeteer reveals his real connection to Conor and to the traumatic experience of the boy. It works like a Matryoshka doll: one story is placed inside another. At the end of this sequence comes Conor's truth, and the exploration of the real story behind the 'Puppeteer', the grown-up Conor, comes to light. This adds another revelation to the painful truth in this version, namely, the true identity of the storyteller that was kept secret – similar to the nightmare itself.

4.2.6 The benefits of the additional frame story in the narrative and in the theatrical possibilities

The consequences of the frame story layer were varied. Firstly, it had a narrative, verbal /dramaturgical impact. Secondly, it nourished the staging potential of the imagined production.

a) Dramaturgical benefits

Looking at the *narrative* (dramaturgical) impacts, the adaptation gained a homodiegetic narrator who can easily describe parts of Conor's story from *personal experience,* deceiving the spectator about the narrator's real perspective. Thanks to this, descriptions that would be foreign to the stage could also form a verbal part of the adaptation. For instance:

> PUPPETEER: Conor's grandma' drove him to school, and she was also waiting for him every day after school when he left, taking them both straight to the hospital to see his mum. They usually stayed for an hour or so, and then went home to his grandma's house, which was cleaner than his mum's hospital room. (AMC-GV2, p. 23)

Additionally, it allowed the playing out of the differences between the spoken speech and stage action.

> *Conor is alone. Empty stage.*
> PUPETEER: Conor saw that the smile didn't match her eyes. She was happy to see him, but she was frightened, too. And sad. And more tired than he'd ever seen her, which was saying something. She knew he knew it, too. (AMC-GV2, p. 40)

During these sentences, the stage action does not illustrate this description, quite the opposite, the Mother looks calm and relaxed.

Another particularly essential function came from the fact that there was a storyteller (an 'unreliable narrator') on stage: he could hide or delay information about his story

but still give the impression that he 'knows' and 'tells' everything about it. The Puppeteer did not mention the most important information about Conor, that his Mum is very ill:

> PUPPETEER: King Con was living in a small house at the edge of the city, beside the graveyard, the one with a giant yew tree next to the church, with his mother alone together since his father moved to New York to his new family some years before. Although he was only thirteen, he did all things for himself: breakfast, washing his clothes, bringing out the rubbish. (AMC-GV2, p. 3)

This delayed exposure created by the Puppeteer activates the ending of the stage version.

Furthermore, a seemingly anti-theatrical narrative solution became one of the most important dramaturgical elements of storytelling in the adaptation. As the descriptive parts of a novel are often the biggest challenges to adapt to stage: these sentences are left out completely, or a narrator says them in a preferably dramaturgically justified situation.

This solution – as mentioned above – is usually particularly anti-theatrical because instead of using the language of the theatre, it reinforces literariness on stage.[122] In my adaptation, I only seemingly used a similar solution by creating an 'omniscient' narrator through the Puppeteer. His embeddedness in the story is sound: his 'communicativeness' (or his silencing) is one of the dramaturgical cornerstones of the stage version; over and above, his presence is the key to the genre of the production (puppet theatre). And as such, the storyteller (the Puppeteer) can articulate some sentences from the novel that would have been a waste to lose but could not have been implanted in any dialogues:

> PUPPETEER: Conor held tightly onto his mother. And by doing so, he could finally let her go. Here is the end of the tale. (AMC-GV2, p. 48)

[122] For more on this, see in Chapter 2.3. Theatrical representation of children's literature – Stage adaptations for young people

b) Theatrical impacts

Since the main protagonist is a Puppeteer, it frames the style and the theatrical language of the show and the adaptation. Therefore, puppets, masks, objects, and the presence of actors/puppeteers can be a natural part of the setting. That has been extremely beneficial in the *stage representation* of the *Monster* and the main character, *Conor*.

i) Manifestation of Conor in the second draft

As I detailed above, in the first draft, Conor was imagined as a boy played by a young actor who encounters puppets, objects and real people in his whirlpool-like journey. Nevertheless, there wasn't any explanation within the adaptation for any of those theatrical (puppetry) solutions. According to the other initial idea for the adaptation, Conor could have been represented as a puppet on stage, but its consequences (the combination with real actors on stage) didn't look satisfactory either.

While the *second draft* merges the two above-mentioned concepts, Conor now appears as a *puppet* on stage, animated by a *puppeteer* who is the real Conor himself. The duplication of the main character and the changing relationship between the puppet and its animator creates a tense base for the long-life emotional and psychological battle of the central protagonist. The diverse relationship between puppet and puppeteer is a fundamental element of modern puppetry.[123] The puppeteer is the performer of 'both live and mediated performances' (Wiśniewska, p 23). When Conor, as the Puppeteer, uses the puppet or mask to represent himself, it is a form of concealing his real identity and the truth of the young Conor. Conor's journey towards accepting his own feelings runs parallel to how the Puppeteer gradually frees himself from his concealment tools - the puppet and the mask - and becomes more himself as just a man on stage.

Conor (the Puppeteer) is not only the central character, but he is the only 'focalising' character in the play. All the other actors are his multiplication, representing his inner

[123] Most well-known examples are the works of Duda Paiva (*Bestiaires*, 2012); Meinhardt&Karuss (*Robot dreams*, 2019); Hoichi Okamoto (*Kiyohime Mandara*, 1987).

demons and the projection of his thoughts. Namely, the existence of the characters played by them in the performance can only be interpreted in relation to Conor, whose point of view determines the storytelling.

It was dramaturgically necessary to implant an explanation in the adaptation as to how and why Conor became a puppeteer later in his life. There is an invented background story hidden in this draft: Conor's grandfather[124] could have been a puppeteer (before our story started) or a collector of puppets. He left those puppets and a portable puppet theatre (or a shed with puppets) behind after he passed away, which is somewhere in Grandma's house, either in a room or in the attic of the house. Conor gets a key with a red ribbon from his Mum in order to discover his grandpa's heritage as a form of solace for his ongoing sacrifice. Since the boy Conor does not know what to open with the key, the shed with the puppets will never be revealed in his boyhood story-layer. This happens only at the end of the Puppeteer's (the adult Conor's) performance when he closes the puppet theatre with the key hanging on a red ribbon. As a result, the delayed information about the meaning of the key generates the final twist at the end of the journey, one that gives a retrospective explanation of the form and the setting of the performance.

ii) Manifestation of the Monster

There was another major benefit ensuing from the puppet-theatre setting of the frame story: the representation of the *Monster* on stage. From the beginning of the adaptation work, this has been one of the most crucial aspects: to find a solution for the look and the appearance of the Monster that is rooted strongly in the theatrical context, even if that requires making some changes in the story or in some of the characters. The novel contains a lot of links between the mother and the yew tree, but it isn't entirely clarified why *the tree* comes into life in the shape of a monster and visits Conor. As I have described earlier, the film version gives a more direct explanation of this by adding *drawing* as a common activity of Conor and his mother

[124] Another hint, which was taken from the film version: The voice and partly the motion capture actor of the Monster is Liam Neeson, who also appears in a photograph as Conor's grandfather at the end of the movie.

in the past. These sketches are mainly about a certain monster that looks very much like the monster that comes from the yew tree (years later). I think this more explicit connection in the film version doesn't weaken the mystery of the monster at all. Since the novel is composed using the imagination of the reader through the power of the written *words*, the film translates it into *images*: Conor's constant drawing creates a visual reference. Consequently, *puppetry* as the later-profession of Conor and a possible link with the mother can be an adequate theatrical form for the representation of the Monster, too.[125] Since Conor's story is told and performed as a tale with puppets, objects, shadows and masks, the appearance of a fairytale-like Monster fits perfectly in the play. Based on one of the references mentioned in the novel (Herne the Hunter), our starting point with the designer was to materialise the Monster as a man with antlers on his head, representing a different style and layer to the puppet-size Conor. The antlers were later changed to a wooden mask, which gave the character more abstraction, as I will describe it in the next chapter.

Following this concept, with the appearance of the Monster, the scenery changes too: while at the beginning of the play, everything is proportionally bigger than a puppet, in this second story layer, the landscape becomes small compared to the actors. When – at the end of the journey – Conor (i.e., the Puppeteer) arrives at his final confrontation (third story layer), the characters lose their masks too; their 'hiding' terminates.

4.2.7 Further significant differences to the novel

a) The motif of another monster, King Kong

The giant gorilla, King Kong, is probably one of the most famous fictional monsters created in the Twentieth Century, whose utmost iconic appearance places him on top of the Empire State Building while trying to hide from airplanes firing at him.[126] One

[125] It can be a possible background story to this: Conor and his Mum used to play often with those puppets some years before this story begins. Conor is surrounded by tales told and played with those puppets. Conor finds comfort among those objects and characters, even if some of them are creepy or weird. But looking at them, especially into their eyes, Conor has the feeling that every single one has a story to tell.

[126] 'King Kong is the most famous fictional character that ever made to the silver screen.' (Peter

would not expect it, but there are conspicuous parallels between King Kong and the yew tree Monster to be found. Both characters are forms of dichotomies: King Kong is an enormous beast and also a vulnerable victim; the Monster is giant and frightening, too, but sympathetic. King Kong's look is half ape and half human being; the Monster is half yew tree and half human being, too. King Kong can be unimaginably strong and violent but gentle and sensitive, on the other hand, just like the Monster. King Kong and the Monster are dangerous for their assailants, but they mean protection for others. King Kong, similar to the Monster, is a symbol of an ancient world and untouched nature.

King Kong does not appear in the novel, but there is a scene in the film version where he can be seen. Conor and his Mother are watching the original *King Kong* movie (1933) at home on Grandpa's old projector.[127] There are no other explicit consequences of this scene later in the story, except for creating a nice and cosy evening for mother and son before it all goes wild. This scene replaces the section in the novel that describes their last evening before Mum and Conor 'needed to have a little talk' (AMC-N, p. 39), so they went to the cinema and his favourite Indian restaurant. At the same time, there are some hidden references in the film: the projector belonged to Conor's grandfather earlier, who – as it is mentioned before – is 'played' by the same actor (Liam Neeson) who gives the voice and the movement of the Monster. The excerpt from the original King Kong movie shown in the film is the one on the top of the skyscraper. Conor and his Mum add some comments to that part:

MUM
People don't like what they do not understand. They get scared.

CONOR
King Kong could've just smashed them all... break them into a million pieces.
(AMC-F, 00:08:18-00:08:31)

The sentences of Conor's Mum resonate as if she had something more general to say to her son while explaining the anger of the people in the movie. It is as if she wanted to prepare Conor for something inapprehensible to come in their own life. Conor's

Jackson's *King Kong* (2005): A Critique of Postcolonial/Animal Horror Cinema, 2017, p. 1)
[127] 00:08:02 – 00:09:17 (AMC-F)

comment focuses on the superior power of the beast, something that he doesn't possess. He stares with discontent and fear in his eyes at the screen when King Kong falls from the building: even a robust beast like this one isn't strong enough to defeat his enemies. The next scene in the film is the Monster's first visit to Conor's room, which creates a more direct link between the two beasts in Conor's head.

The idea of building King Kong into the stage adaptation was strongly supported by the film reference, but it wasn't born out of it. When I was trying to find a matching nickname for Conor to make his character more approachable, I came across 'King Con' on the Internet, which I really liked.[128] In order to corroborate the reason for this particular nickname, I made King Kong one of Conor's favourite film characters in the adaptation:

> PUPPETEER: His name was Conor, but everybody called him by his nickname King Con, because his favorite film was about the famous giant gorilla King Kong, which freaked out half of the world. (AMC-GV2, p. 2)

Thus, King Kong (as an ape toy-puppet) appears right at the beginning of the stage version, recalling the famous skyscraper scene from the classic movie with a little variation: this time, King Kong is climbing up the building in order to save his love, the fair lady who is in danger (represented by a Barbie-doll), and who is about to fall down – similar to Conor's mum in the boy's nightmare. The connection between the mother and the fair lady becomes even stronger because both characters are voiced by the same actor. When Conor's Mum interrupts the scene by calling her son from the other room, at first, the spectators may think that the blonde toy doll spoke:

> MUM *(as the fair lady)*: Conor! You will be late for school, hurry up! (AMC-GV2, p. 2)

This kind of confusion about who is talking to Conor can be paralleled with the moment in the novel when the Monster appears for the first time, Conor believes that the Mother has spoken to him. Both King Kong and the fair lady fall out of the Puppeteer's hands, but Conor (the puppet) puts away the fair lady (the doll), giving

[128] See reference here: https://www.findnicknames.com/nicknames-for-connor/

the impression that the scene with King Kong on the skyscraper was part of Conor's playing. That action is the first inner hint to Conor's later career, and this introduces puppetry as the main language style of the planned production.

The motif of King Kong only returns at the end of the adaptation, creating not only a simple frame in the dramaturgical structure but giving a reference to the so-far hidden information about the heritage of Conor's Granddad. Besides that, the façade of the puppet theatre reinforces the real identity of the Puppeteer and the importance of King Kong in Conor's life:

> *The puppeteer closes the puppet-theatre using the red-ribbon key to lock it. On the front cover of the theatre is a painted picture of King Kong clinging onto the top of a skyscraper holding a lady tight with his hand stopping her from falling.* (AMC-GV2, p. 48)

b) Grandma's character and her environment

Conor's biggest emotional support in this journey, besides the Monster, is his Grandmother, even if he has a very controversial relationship to her too.[129] The novel portrays her as a youthful[130], but rigorous[131] lady who is trying really hard to help Conor in her way, even if she must be suffering a lot quietly by losing her own daughter at the same time. She looks or pretends to be rigid and emotionless most of the time. It feels as though she is showing very little empathy towards Conor; however, the reader never really gets any insight into her actual feelings. The Grandmother is described in the novel from the subjective perspective of Conor, who basically sees her as his enemy.[132] (See also for further analysis in Chapter 4.3.1 Visual concept of *A Monster Calls*)

[129] 'You and me? Not the most natural fit, are we?' (AMC-N, p. 105).
[130] 'Conor's grandma wore tailored pantsuits, dyed her hair to keep out the gray, and said things that made no sense at all, like "Sixty is the new fifty" or "Classic cars need the most expensive polish."' (AMC-N, p. 26).
[131] 'Don't stand there gawping, young man.' (AMC-N, p. 47).
[132] '"I'm not your enemy, Conor," she said. "I'm here to help your mother."' (AMC-N, p. 27).

The turning point in their relationship is the moment when Conor breaks her sitting room into pieces and sees his Grandmother grieving.[133] This moment gives an insight into their repressed feelings and their helplessness. In the *first draft*, the sitting room was represented by the Grandmother herself, and the grandfather's clock was her glasses. Therefore, Conor's extreme aggression felt more like a personal attack against the Grandmother than an act of desperate destruction. Hence, that made only a victim out of the Grandmother – the harm to her was personal, and therefore, she could not have perspective on the real feelings of Conor's action. In the *second draft*, the target of the destruction is the grandfather's clock and only partly the whole settee, unlike it is mentioned in the novel (or shown in the film version). As stated in the analysis[134], Conor's biggest enemy is time, which explains why he starts his damage with the precious clock in the novel. Grandma's reaction when she sees the destroyed sitting room is vital.

> Her mouth closed, but it didn't close into its usual hard shape. It trembled and shook, as if she was fighting back tears, as if she could barely hold the rest of her face together. And then she groaned, deep in her chest, her mouth still closed. It was a sound so painful, Conor could barely keep himself from putting his hands over his ears. She made it again. And again. And then again until it became a single sound, a single ongoing horrible groan. Her handbag fell to the floor. She put her palms over her mouth as if that was all that would hold back the horrible, groaning, moaning, keening sound flooding out of her. (AMC-N, p. 64)

The description of her feelings caused by the shock is different to Conor's (and probably the reader's) expectations in the novel. There isn't any questioning, verbal shouting, or punishment, but internal grief. She does not show any anger towards Conor – she rather wants to be part of Conor's satisfying destruction: she destroys the display cabinet and walks back to her room crying. Her tears are not for the demolished pieces of furniture but for her daughter. This is the first time she faces *emotionally* (and not practically) her daughter's inevitable passing. In order to make this emotional link stronger, I decided to use identical sentences to describe her feelings after the destruction and when Conor's Mum dies:

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[133] 'The settee was shattered into pieces beyond counting' (AMC-N, p. 63).

[134] See the analysis: *Connections (links) between the Monster and other characters*, Available from: DCU DORAS Repository.

PUPPETEER: Only her eyes moved in disbelief, almost refusing to see what was really there. Her mouth trembled and shook, as if she was fighting back tears. And then she groaned, deep in her chest. She put her palms over her mouth, and then she screamed. Inside. (AMC-GV2, p. 33 and p. 48)

The arc of their emotional journey required a scene after the destruction and before the fatal ending. The headmistress' sympathetic reaction after Conor's physical fight with Harry felt the right scene to modify as a conversation between the Grandmother and Conor (AMC-GV2, p. 39). Through this, the second draft was simplified by reducing one supporting character and was enriched by an empathetic scene between grandmother and grandson.

c) Clarification of Harry's purpose

The writing of the first draft got blocked at the scene when Conor was supposed to beat Harry in the cantina. My conflict around the motivation of Conor's action is described above.[135] I found a different, psychologically more grounded lead-up to that aggression in the *second draft*. Conor does not get frustrated with Harry only because he decides to ignore him, but mainly because by doing so, Conor loses his punisher. Conor accepts Harry's physical and emotional bullying because he wants to be punished for his secret feelings (for his guilt is revealed in the fourth tale). Before Harry's withdrawal, Conor is confronted with the truth about his mother's condition: first, his father and later his Mum disillusions Conor; he feels helpless. Being invisible became a metaphor for being *helpless in the second draft*, for having no control over his existence, his actions, and his wishes. This is what Conor cannot tolerate. Therefore, he ends up being extremely aggressive. His action and his existence have an effect now (by beating up Harry); however, he won't be punished for that either. Hence, nothing changes through this action. There is no other way out of this trap left for Conor other than accepting to confront the truth. See more about the stage realisation of it in the next chapter.

[135] For more on this, see: Chapter 4.2.4. Challenges, fails of the first draft of the adaptation.

d) Who tells the truth?

There is a significant difference between the novel and the film version regarding the fourth tale. While in the novel, the Monster helps Conor by telling the true version of his nightmare – namely that he could have held on to his mother longer, but he let her fall – the film adaptation changed that part.

> And so you let her go.
> She fell! Conor said, his voice, almost in desperation. (AMC-N, p. 216)

The Monster – in the film version – continues with psychological pressure on Conor until he finally admits that he wanted it to be over.

MONSTER
Speak the truth, boy.

CONOR
I want it to be over.
I can't stand knowing she will go.
(AMC-F, 01:24:30-01:24:42)

So, while Conor tells the truth in the film, the Monster speaks for Conor and he 'only' confesses it later in the novel. Conor was trying to hide the truth, but the Monster was stronger, so Conor had to succumb.

Since in the *second draft*, the 'real' Conor is the Puppeteer, there is another layer added to that part of the narrative. The Monster urges the Puppeteer (and not Conor, the puppet) to tell the fourth tale, and by doing so, he foreshadows the Puppeteer's real identity.

> MONSTER: It's time for the fourth tale. For your tale. *(appears, lifts up the puppet and gives it to the Puppeteer)* (AMC-GV2, p. 42)

The Puppeteer starts telling Conor's life story again, repeating his sentences from the beginning of the show. This time, the Monster acts as Conor did earlier during the first two tales of the Monster: distracts the storyteller with cheeky comments until he

finally gets to the point. It comes to light that telling the fourth tale has already begun at the start of the show, except for one segment that was hidden so far. The Puppeteer tries to avoid mentioning the *nightmare* again since this is the part of Conor's story he has intentionally 'forgotten' to tell earlier.

Both in the novel and the film, Conor lives the nightmare again, and only after he lets his mother fall comes the real pressure from the Monster to let Conor interpret his action. The description of the nightmare is translated into an active, verbal part of the storytelling in the *second draft* – the stage action loosely visualises the horror – for a good reason – but complements it with another. The Puppeteer refuses to continue the storytelling when he gets to the point of describing what happened in the nightmare, so the Monster has to take over it from him.

> MONSTER: If you don't tell it, I shall have to tell it for you. (AMC-GV2, p. 44)

The end of the fourth tale is told by the Monster, just like in the novel. Conor (i.e., the Puppeteer) confesses his true feelings only after he has been dragged through the terrible experience of the nightmare again. I hoped this solution would have a stronger emotional impact, especially because the trauma caused by the guilt-inducing nightmare has to be resolved in an adult who has been carrying this fear around for a long time. My intention was confirmed, the revelation of the long-held secret deepened the trauma – as I will explain in the next chapter.

4.2.8. Lessons learned - before the third version[136]

While writing the adaptation, I always kept in mind its theatrical feasibility and that the text and the stage action should support each other and not repeat each other. I was doing so in the hope that this would strengthen the possibility during the directing process that the stage situations would be free from pure illustrations of the spoken text, and they could become components with their own meaning within the theatre performance. When writing the script, I paid special attention to the target audiences'

[136] Future references to this source will be cited in text using abbreviation AMC-GV3, Available from: DCU DORAS Repository.

age group by finding dramaturgical solutions that are suitable for stimulating the viewers' imagination. However, I underscore that my aim was not to make any artistic compromises for young spectators because I was convinced that the precise and complex theatrical language would find its way to young people due to the relevance of the topic. As I expounded above, the choice of theme determines the age group of the audiences, there is no need to 'dumb down' the theatrical language. The complexity of the novel was a powerful resource for finding solid and valid theatrical forms in the stage adaptation. One of the most substantial guiding principles of the adaptation was to use the motifs offered by the novel freely, even taken out of their original context – but always keeping it in focus that it should be in accordance with the logic of theatrical and dramaturgical construction while preserving its validity by the young adult audiences.

Due to the long and forced break, rehearsals for the production of *A Monster Calls* did not begin until more than a year after the second draft was completed.[137] The delay allowed me to look at the adaptation again from a decent distance during the immediate preparation period for the rehearsals. Since my practice-led research is best characterised by *dialectical practice*, which is 'making meaning through experiences that are felt, lived, reconstructed and reinterpreted' (Sullivan, p 50), I let the adaptation rest to reread it with a fresh, critical eye. After I started to work with the accurate designs of the original rough visual concept and we finalised the exact puppet designs, I tried to imagine each action in light of these again. Moreover, all of this was preceded by an unusual work phase for adaptations, namely, that I had to translate the adaptation written in English into Hungarian, the language of the actual performance. For a more accurate translation, I used the Hungarian version of the novel for sentences that I had transferred from the original English-language novel to my adaptation without changes[138]. Surprisingly, I found that most of the sentences of the novel cannot be taken directly from the Hungarian version; they needed to be modified in order to become a recitable text (unlike the English novel).

[137] The planned rehearsal period was postponed due to COVID 19.
[138] Hungarian translation of the novel by Anna Szabó T. (Published: Vivandra Könyvek, Bp. 2019)

In summary, these three aspects (distance in time from the second draft; finalised stage design; and translation process) resulted in some changes to the adaptation again. The concept of the third version did not differ from the previous one, it only refined and updated it, which resulted in it being shorter.

4.3 The directing process – the second step of adaptation

4.3.1 Visual concept of *A Monster Calls*

As I argued earlier, the script that forms the basis of the theatre performance is never completely identical to the final realised stage production. In this case, too, it was inevitable that the written adaptation was overruled at certain points despite it being created with stage realisation in mind. I chose the rehearsal diary format to record the creative process: after each rehearsal, I took notes about the questions, problems, and results that arose.

In this section, I would like to demonstrate that during the stage adaptation, I intentionally did not want to illustrate the novel's world but rather to recreate its meaning-making by using its motifs and elements exclusively according to the logic of theatre, which may also be relevant for young spectators. First, I will give an insight into the visual concept, which clarified and sometimes modified the third draft. Since the production strongly relies on visual signs in addition to the text, many layers of content gain meaning only through them. After the conceptual examination of the space and the set, I will analyse the significance of the different puppets and masks, highlighting their relationships to the actors (animators). Next, I cover the four tales' dramaturgical and visual solutions, thus touching on the pivotal point of the adaptation, namely the relationship between the Puppet and Conor. Finally, in addition to examining the dramaturgical function of music, I summarise some particularly difficult issues and challenges of the stage direction.

a) The space and the set of the production

When exploring the visual concept of the production, I took two fundamental aspects into account with the designer, Ákos Mátravölgyi: On one hand, the space should be

feasible for acting out the story; on the other hand, that space should hold symbolic potential. The scenery I imagined in the *second draft* referred to a puppet theatre that Conor inherited from his grandfather. I did not specify what type of puppet theatre this could be: a screen, a table or a marionette stand. The only thing that was certain was that some parts of it could open and close, meaning that it should be suitable for different space variations. After some versions, we found that on one hand it limits the scenic possibilities, and on the other hand, it is too specific, too certain and can therefore bind the young spectator's imagination. We moved away from the concept of constructing a concrete puppet theatre and decided on a huge box stage that could be opened from all sides in the end. (Fig. 1) The space is thus more abstract and allows more associations for the audiences, but simultaneously, it could still be perceived as a 'puppet theatre'. The action at the end of the performance, whereby Conor closes the door of the box, a King Kong poster is visible, referring to the front of a puppet theatre. With this, we have preserved the concept described in the *second draft* (see above).

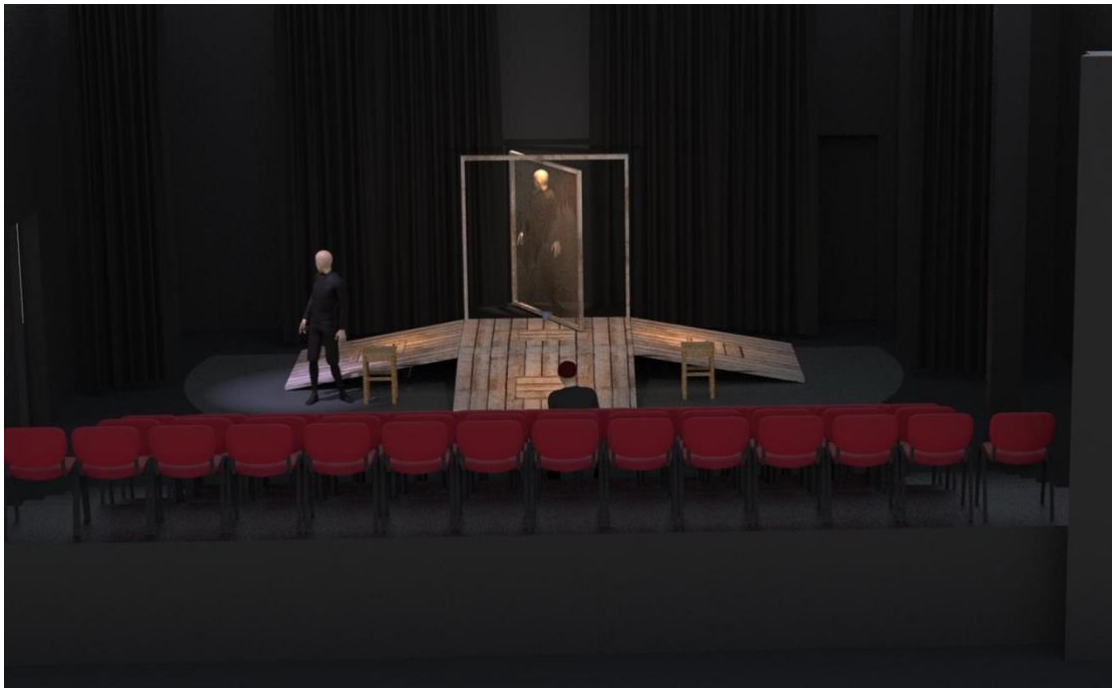

Figure 1. Set design of A Monster Calls (Ákos Mátravölgyi, 2021)

We added two components to the 'box' that I had already connected to certain actions in the second and third drafts: the transparent, curtain-like back wall and an opening in the centre of the stage. This seemingly simple yet abstract set has been given 'life' and a 'past' by its material and colour: the box, carved from slats, was given a worn green pattern. My goal was that these elements would trigger the young audience's

association, so they can not only see a connotative sign in the formal clarity of an abstract space but as a denotative sign: a real, specific territory - a box, a stage that belongs to someone. This is how it connects with our starting point, which is that this space can either be a stage, a puppet theatre, or a storage container in reality. We confirmed the storeroom character of the set with the opening image: Conor is sitting alone in the box, with only the side facing the audience open, the space full of puppets and other objects. The context in which the audience sees the space and set, for the first time is important not only in helping the young spectator's interpretation but also in establishing the content of the production.

After we had created the opening image of the performance and thus the starting point of the dramaturgy, I immediately had the final image in my mind. I imagined that before Conor closes the side of the box facing the audience with the King Kong image on it (Fig. 20)[139], the box will be packed with puppets and objects like in the opening image as if we have returned to the beginning of the story. This dramaturgical framework strengthens one interpretation of the space, providing a sort of retrospective context to the environment in which the story came to life. Closing the box thus not only refers to the end of the story but also links to the legacy of the grandfather that is purposely unclear earlier in the performance. Nevertheless, during the rehearsals, I had to nuance my sense of that last stage image. Although the exact recollection of the opening image could have confirmed the physical context (the location) of the story, it did not allow enough freedom for the spectator's associations, namely, what else this 'box' could mean. The abstract nature of the space allows for a wider range of interpretations, including the psychological layers of the story, such as narrowed living space, place of memories, eternal children's room or, as one of the audience members confessed, 'a room (or box) of fear and guilt'. In order to give space for this wider range of interpretation, I changed the closing image: before Conor closes the box, the 'room' is completely empty. In other words, the starting 'scene' is recalled, but it has already changed; it has been purified, and thanks to this, the grown-up Conor manages to get out of it and close it forever.

[139] See in Section 6. Figures.

Among the elements of the set already mentioned in the script, the back wall of the box contains several practical and dramaturgical functions. Together with the designer, I was looking for a material that can simultaneously function as the wall of the box but – with special lighting – can also become transparent. This was essential because of the connection – discussed above – between the Mother and the Monster. The Mother is several times behind the wall; her first 'appearance' is just a hand holding the door (back wall) ajar. When the Monster first appears, the Mother's and the Monster's voices get mixed up, so Conor turns to the back wall, where – a scene later - the shadow of the Monster can be seen. The back wall also functions as an entrance, through which the other characters appear, the Monster alike, as a projection of Conor's inner world. And through this wall disappears everyone and everything at the end of the final scene, when Conor remains alone again.

Another important element of the space is the opening in the middle of the box. Its first function is when the Monster appears: Conor sweeps the spiky leaves that have fallen to the ground into this hole. Conor wants to get rid of all traces of the presence of the Monster, i.e., the yew tree, similarly to how he later throws his mother's wigs into the same hole. That is the moment when the shadow of the Monster appears on the back wall, yet Conor turns towards the hole and speaks as if he was being addressed from there. The hole also serves as the location of the nightmare, which is staged differently from how it was described in the novel. The Mother's body crumbles and sinks into this hole. The hole – leaving enough freedom of interpretation for the young audiences – functions as a place for the dark, innermost fears of the psyche, where everything that Conor cannot face is buried. The Grandma's shattered home sinks here, too, but the sapling also 'grows' from here, which is one of the signs of the Monster's guidance (Fig. 21).[140]

We aimed to add symbolic meaning to the opening and closing of the two sides of the box. For instance, the box, as the scene of Conor's psyche, closes in as if it were crushing the boy when the Monster streams Conor's trauma-related memories. The pressure ends with the first real appearance of the Monster; when the image 'clears', the Monster and Conor are located symmetrically in the two open 'wings' of the box,

[140] See it in Section 6. Figures.

expressing their unity and aversion at the same time. (Fig. 2) Another symbolic gesture is when the Puppeteer, after learning that the Mother's medical treatment has ended unsuccessfully, breaks out of his closed and isolating 'room' and opens the sides of the box in search of the Monster. He breaks down the walls of protection and concealment, and at the same time, he 'destroys' the scenery of the performance as if he would get rid of the backdrop of a 'theatrical construction'. This is the first time that the Puppeteer changes the scenery with his own hands; he (the adult Conor) unconsciously falls out of his omniscient narrator role of being the Puppeteer and exits the performance as the adult Conor.

Figure 2. Production shot – A Monster Calls – The Monster and Conor (Photo: Jácint Nagy)

b) Puppets and masks, reflecting on their relationship to the actors

As discussed above, the aspiration to use puppets arose primarily for aesthetic and dramaturgical reasons while also considering the venue and the target age group. The multi-layered nature of the story, the visual inspiration of the novel, and the heaviness of the topic all pointed in the direction that puppets could provide sufficient abstraction on stage, a medium that 'serves as a means to devise theatre of representation based on staging techniques' (Wiśniewska, p 23) for young

audiences.[141] For the same reason, I wanted to use different styles of puppets in the production to emphasise their meanings and their relationship to real people (characters) on stage. Typically, in puppet theatre, the use of puppets is self-evident and needs no special explanation, but I wanted to treat these 'objects' as theatrical tools which are given their dramaturgical justification within the performance. The additional dramaturgical layer (discussed above) thus serves as the framework of the adaptation, according to which a 'Puppeteer' begins to perform a story with puppets, justifying the use of puppets from within the story. In addition, the variety of puppets – again, within the story – could indicate that these puppets were not made for this specific performance of the Puppeteer, but they are 'found' objects. We hoped that this dramaturgical bridge could make puppet-theatre elements accessible to teenage spectators, who may feel that puppetry is already too childish for them. That is why it was important to create not a 'pure' puppet theatre performance but a theatre production in which there are also puppets that the audience can approach as theatrical signs and not only as elements of a genre. The puppets are first seen as inanimate objects in space, so they 'exist' only in relation to the actor and not because of the rules of the genre. The dramaturgical ending of the story also confirms this: the puppets and masks were only tools for presenting the story within the performance.

The puppets we imagined for the production differed not only in style and use but also in size, which caused some unforeseen problems during rehearsals. I will explain this in more detail below. *Conor's puppet* is carved from wood; it is a 'bunraku' style[142], a medium-sized puppet with a realistic finish (Fig. 3). It could be imagined in a traditional Pinocchio performance representing the boy. I felt it was important that Conor's puppet should not be a caricature and should not contain unusual stylisation features, i.e., it should remain basically 'realistic' both in its appearance and movement. Our main reason for that was that all other puppets are supposed to be interpreted in relation to it; that is, their size and style gain significance in their deviation from the Conor puppet.

[141] Perhaps the most well-known example of puppet-based adaptation is *War Horse* by Michael Morpurgo (Adapter: Nick Stafford, Director: Tom Morris), National Theatre, London, 2007

[142] For more on Bunraku style puppet, see: https://wepa.unima.org/en/bunraku/

Figure 3. Design and realisation – A Monster Calls – Conor (Design: Ákos Mátravölgyi, production shot: Zsolt Mészáros)

The performance begins with the storytelling of the Puppeteer, who brings Conor – the puppet – to life. In most of the performance, the relationship between the Puppeteer and the puppet in his hands is simple and predictable: the Puppeteer is the 'invisible' life-giver, the so-called animator of the puppet; he always remains in the background, and his relationship is one-way. By breaking this 'rule' or semiotic system, I wanted to give special significance to the moments when the Puppeteer puts Conor – the puppet – down and still speaks on his behalf. He first breaks away from the puppet in the third tale, then at the beginning of the fourth one. During the latter, the Monster takes the puppet in his hands and brings it back to 'life', forcing the Puppeteer to tell his truth. My goal was with this gesture to make the dramaturgical language of the performance to the young audience clear: the puppet is a shield, support for the Puppeteer, a kind of medium through which the child Conor can speak. In other words, the main protagonist of the production is the Puppeteer, who uses the puppet as a tool. I intend that this concept is supported by the moment when the Puppeteer faces his nightmare; he covers the puppet's eyes and starts talking as Conor in first person (Fig. 22).[143] Also, at the end of the performance, in the hospital scene, the Monster holds and moves the puppet, but the Puppeteer speaks as himself, that is, as the adult Conor, recalling the moment of his mother's death while seeing

[143] See it in Section 6. Figures.

himself in the room as a child.

As alluded to above, when creating the *Mother's puppet*, we decided that it should only consist of a Mannequin head for wigs covered with a soft fabric. Its body is just a long, light blanket, which – for technical reasons – we supplemented with a shoulder frame. Two puppeteers give the Mother her hands through the blanket, so her movements are rich in detail and elegant. (Fig. 4) This puppet differs from the Conor puppet not only in the way how to be operated but also in its size: it is much larger than him. We intended that this difference in size makes the Mother character 'adult' compared to Conor and creates a close connection with two other protagonists in the production who appeared man-sized: the Monster and the Puppeteer. The Mother puppet is large but airy at the same time, emphasising her only defining visual feature: her baldness.

During rehearsals, the previously described stage presentation of the nightmare turned out to be valid and feasible because of the body-less nature of the puppet. The sand falling from the Mother's dress easily gave the illusion of the body's exhaustion, which became a simple foldable material before disappearing into the opening of the stage (Fig. 23).[144] I found that the process of the Mother's 'real' death could be most accurately expressed with this puppet; however, death can hardly be illusorily portrayed on stage with a 'live' actor. Most spectators watch the forced breathing of the actor portraying a dead person, so realistic depiction is rightly impossible. In our version, the Puppeteer holds the Mother puppet in his arms as if he were holding a still-living, frail body, and when death occurs, he slowly lets the puppet's head hang down (AMC-SR, 01:20:04-01:20:52). In this scene, the Puppeteer – a living person – and the puppet (Mother) are equal characters. The representation of death is based on the most original feature of puppetry: the puppeteer gives life and soul to a puppet by animating it and making it lifeless by not moving it anymore.

[144] See it in Section 6. Figures.

Figure 4. Design and realisation – A Monster Calls – The Mother
(Design: Ákos Mátravölgyi; production shot: Zsolt Mészáros)

After the considerations analysed above (Chapter 4.3.3. Theatrical representations of the main characters and Chapter 4.3.6 / ii) Manifestation of the Monster), we finalised the form of the *Monster's* stage appearance, which consists of three major elements: a mask made of slats, a cassock and noisy boots. As stated before, we were looking for a solution that was not based on the external features of the Monster described in the novel; that is, we did not want to illustrate a yew tree. We were convinced that we

should focus primarily on the internal nature of the Monster and refer only in detail to the physical description mentioned in the novel that is also recited in the performance. Another important aspect was to keep the character appropriately mysterious. In order to support this, we decided to use elements that do not match each other (like the mask and the cassock), thereby making the character unidentifiable (Fig. 5).

From the interpretation of the Monster, we did not concentrate on highlighting Conor's projection of his inner horror in the form of a beast, but rather the missing adult companion, a parent character who could act as a father or grandfather: he is giant compared to the body of the Conor puppet, the same size as the Mother. The Monster forces Conor to make a confession, which is why we decided on a cassock-like jacket, which not only lends elegance and poise to the character but also makes him stand out from the ordinary. The squeaking boots of the Monster were primarily an acoustic decision; the sound of the shoes reminded us of the creaks of woods.

Figure 5. Design and realisation – A Monster Calls (Design: Ákos Mátravölgyi, production shot: Zsolt Mészáros)

A significant part of the visual appearance of the Monster is when only its silhouette is visible on the back wall that previously was presented as the wall of the mother's room, showing an immediate connection between them. In this form, it most closely resembles a tree or a terrifying figure. We decided to distort the voice of the actor playing the Monster to make him stand out from the rest – he is the only one whose voice is amplified – plus, we wanted to increase his mystique with the pitch-down effect, but only so much that his utterances could remain human at the same time. Our goal was to express that the Monster is a projection of Conor's inner struggle when, in the third tale, the Puppeteer puts the Monster's mask on his own head and hugs the Conor puppet tightly. With the mask on, the Puppeteer answers his grandmother's questions about Harry's beating, but on Conor's behalf. This union is symbolic: he takes on the traits of the Monster; he feels strong in this battle and is determined to take on the world if need be (Fig. 24).[145]

The dramaturgical path of the puppets of Harry and the *Father* is less complex. In this adaptation, both only appear for short episodes, and they represent only one meaning and function in Conor's life. As set out above, we designed the Father as a soft textile puppet; he looks like a cowboy[146], a non-serious, funny figure (Fig. 6). It has two physical characteristics as we intended: small and soft, in other words, insignificant and spineless. In this performance, the Father blows smoke disturbingly often; he is inattentive, and he is constantly in transit (this is indicated by the fact that his residence is a suitcase), a temporary being who will probably never find a real home due to his resilience to conform to others. We could best imagine *Harry's character* as a ventriloquist puppet. (Fig. 7) There were several reasons for this decision: on one hand, we did not want to create another realistic boy puppet; on the other hand, we wanted to develop this puppet for its psychological effect and meaning. As discussed above, Harry's character has been simplified compared to the novel. His dramaturgical function was narrowed down to a single quality: he represents physical misery to Conor. Thanks to some horror movies, the look of the ventriloquist puppet has become synonymous with fearmongering in general.[147]

[145] See it in Section 6. Figures.

[146] A stereotypical reference that he lives in America.

[147] For examples of this tendency, see: *Goosebumps (dir: Rob Letterman, 2015), Child's Play (dir.: Tom Holland, 1988)*, the *Poltergeist* movies (dir.: Tobe Hooper, 1982; dir.: Brian Gibson, 1986; dir.:

Figure 6. Design and realisation – A Monster Calls – Father puppet
(Design: Ákos Mátravölgyi; production shot: Zsolt Mészáros)

We built Harry's character on this effect, thus depriving him of any other deeper or more complex psychological layers. For the sake of effect, we made not only his mouth but also his eyes movable, which gives him an even more unpredictable, frightening, and sneaky impression. However, it was immediately clear that real physical violence between the two puppets (Harry and Conor) could not happen because of their limited movement capacity. We decided to show Conor's *humiliation* instead of a clumsily executed puppet fight illustrating the physical abuse mentioned in the novel. The puppet's vulnerability can best be depicted in its helplessness. That's why I decided that the actor who moves Harry 'steals' Conor's puppet from the Puppeteer and throws it to his fellow actor - who is called Lilly for the duration of the scene. The Conor puppet ends up on the ground, twisted, 'lifeless', far from the Puppeteer's protective hands (AMC-SR, 00:08:39-00:09:06). I am convinced that this solution not only achieves what we wanted in its effect but also strengthens the formal language of the production: the emphasis on the relationship between puppeteer and puppet.

Gary Sherman, 1988; dir.: Gil Kenan, 2015) or *Toy Story 4*. (dir.: Josh Cooley, 2019). More on this, see: https://www.fangoria.com/finding-the-fear-ventriloquist-dummies-are-always-horrifying/

Figure 7. Design and realisation – A Monster Calls – Harry
(Design: Ákos Mátravölgyi, production shot: Jácint Nagy)

In addition, I am convinced that this stylised presentation of school bullying gives young audiences a better chance of identification, because – in my experience – the presentation of explicit, illusionary (therefore illustrative) violence on stage usually causes confusion in young viewers and they tend to dismiss it with laughter, referring to the 'falsehood' of the execution. In the third tale – which is originally about beating Harry – I decided on the same solution. Namely, when Harry tells Conor that he has become invisible to him, the Puppeteer acts aggressively towards the ventriloquist puppet. This happens at the same time as the Puppeteer steps out of his role and identifies with Conor.

All of the puppets we designed were easily incorporated into the production except for one, the *Grandmother puppet*. Our concept was to express the character's old-fashioned delicacy, untouchability and rigidity, so we decided on a small marionette puppet portraying a traditional old woman (Fig. 8). The problem occurred when Grandmother first appeared according to the script: the puppet – and through that, the Grandmother's character – looked disturbingly, almost ridiculously small compared to

the Mother. In the scene, the Grandmother ideally should have had the capability to physically help her daughter, who was sick and had fallen to the ground. The marionette puppet could not support the human-sized Mother with any realistic or comprehensible gestures, not to mention that the puppet's mobility was also quite limited. Since I was adamant on not omitting this scene, I had to look for another solution, but for that, I had to understand the essence of the problem. In addition to the size difference and physical limitation, the fact that this was the first appearance of the Grandmother puppet was really disorientating. The audience would not have any chance to understand who the character would be trying to help the Mother; they could have only seen a ridiculously small puppet with a surprisingly different style – fumbling. One of my solutions was to change the order of the scenes and bring Grandmother on stage earlier – into *Scene 3 Wigs* (AMC-GVF, p. 127) – for a brief appearance. I hoped that it would ensure that the audience could identify her as the Grandmother alongside the characteristics coming from the style of the puppet. Despite the fact that in this scene, I deliberately positioned the Grandmother puppet far from the Mother, and there was no physical interaction between them – that is, I reduced the perception of the size difference – I still did not find that the marionette puppet would fit into this environment. I felt that we had chosen an overly extreme solution with the marionette puppet concept, which makes the character invalid and weightless, in fact, ridiculous. Fortunately, an object discovered by chance in the rehearsal room helped me out of this dissonance.

I found a large empty picture frame and placed the puppet in it - disregarding how traditionally a marionette puppet should be used. The frame immediately 'magnified' the puppet and gave such an unusual yet harmonising context to the puppet, which even enhanced its traits. Consequently, the characteristics of Grandma that Conor sees in her have been strengthened: she has become more aloof and rigid, as if she were an object of a museum. However, this solution did not help in the scene where the Grandmother should have physically helped her sick daughter. In this, the previously mentioned layer of the dramaturgy, the emphasis on the relationship between the actor and the puppet, brought results.

Figure 8. Design and realisation – A Monster Calls – The Grandmother
(Design*: Ákos Mátravölgyi; production shot: Zsolt Mészáros*

In our final version, Mother's sickness happens so suddenly that the actor playing Grandma 'has to rush' to the stage without her puppet to catch the Mother puppet as it falls to the ground (Fig. 25).[148] Although the actor playing Grandmother only shows up for this one scene without her puppet, this moment confirms dramaturgically that Conor identifies the queen played by her in the first tale with his grandmother. Returning to the Grandmother's puppet, the picture frame enriched the character with another dramaturgical potential. After the second tale – following Conor has destroyed everything – I wanted to show how the pain breaks out at the Grandmother; and through that, she gets closer to Conor emotionally, she understands the reason for his destruction, and shares Conor's boundless rage.[149] In the novel – and also in the film – the Grandmother pulls the only intact piece of furniture, a display cabinet, to the ground (AMC-N, p 64 / AMC-F, 00:54). In the stage version, the Grandmother gets freed from the picture frame, as if breaking out of it. This allowed her for the first and only real interaction with another puppet on her part: she walks up to the kneeling

[148] See it in Section 6. Figures.
[149] For more on that, see in Chapter 4.3.8 Further significant differences to the novel.

Conor and caresses his face (AMC-SR, 00:43:33-00:45:20).

4.3.2 Path to the final version of the adaptation – changes and challenges during the directing process

a) Untangling the problem of storytelling

The final version of the written adaptation (*final draft*) was created during the staging of the performance, taking into account all the changes that were necessary during the realisation of the stage situations.[150] The complexity of the third draft was noticeable by the fact that the actors did not exactly understand all the details during the script's first read-through. The reason for the uncertainty was on the one hand, that the draft contained an unusual amount of descriptions of stage actions, which everyone could imagine differently, and on the other hand, the layers of the story were difficult to follow at first reading. Since the actors had not read the novel previously and only knew the theme of the show in passing, this proved to be a very useful test of the third draft. I had to make sure that the performance would not end up in a similar confusion so that the complexity of the theme, which comes from the novel, would not overload the end result on stage. Weeks later, at the first run-throughs, seeing the whole production in one piece, I was disappointed to experience a similar obscurity. I felt that the performance consisted of too many fragments, the layers of the story were not separated from each other in a traceable way, and the story could not be hooked emotionally because there was no real stake. A similar phenomenon is also regularly experienced during first run-throughs because each scene rehearsed separately may work on its own and not always in relation to the others. In this case, it was more than that: the complexity of the literary material burdened the logic of the theatre, and the individually developed details of the story continued to exist only in the shadow of the novel. The solution partly has lay in strengthening the focus, i.e., going back to the most basic questions: what is the story we want to tell for young people, who is the main character, and what is the context of the storytelling? I noticed that the dramaturgical balance is overturned with the first tale, which burdened and complicated the focus; consequently, the production became almost impossible to

[150] This final version is included below in Chapter 4.5. as part of the creative work (AMC-GVF).

follow. There were too many fragments and episodes until that point: the Puppeteer starts telling a story about a boy; the boy plays with King Kong; someone scatters spiky leaves in a room; the Mother seems to be not well; the boy is beaten at school; the Mother tries on wigs; a Monster appears and throws a bundle of heavy memories at the boy; the Mother collapses; the Grandmother tells him that he will live with her in the future. This complicated series of episodes was followed by the tale about a prince and a queen – theatrically in a completely different style, which unfortunately gave the impression that a new performance had begun. I found that too many apparently loosely connected episodes did not build on each other but weakened one another. I had the feeling that no matter how much I wanted to translate the story of the novel into the language of the theatre, in fact, the dramaturgical construction of the literary material dictated the continuation. Analysing the difference as to why this stacking of scenes works in the novel and why it doesn't in the theatre, I came to the following conclusions. In the novel, the role of the narrator is constant; he 'holds' the young reader, who, therefore, feels initiated, even if the story is full of unexpected twists and turns. That is, every event in the novel happens in relation to the narrator, who is a neutral but omniscient, a know-it-all storyteller.[151] In the theatre production, although the Puppeteer communicates with the audience as a homodiegetic narrator directly, he is sometimes shocked by the twists of stage actions as if he had no prior 'knowledge' of what is to come. The significant difference between the covert narrator of the novel and the performance is that, while the storyteller of the novel remains an outsider (heterodiegetic), the one of the adaptation is the main protagonist (overt), who not only 'directs' the story but experiences it at the same time. This unifying thread was missing from the production during the first run-throughs, so the scenes were missing connections, which confused the whole construction. No one 'held' the young spectator's hand, so the focus was lost. Due to the equal emphasis of the scenes, it was not clear what belonged to which story layer, in other words, what belonged to reality and what to imagination.

Since I didn't want to deviate significantly from the novel and the third draft, I worked on changing the transition before the first tale. My goal was to make the series of episodes and fragments up to that point to give the impression of *one* single unit for

[151] For more on this, see in Chapter 2.2. Who is actually speaking to young readers?

the young audiences, like a long roller coaster journey that pauses and gets a twist when the first tale starts. I managed to fine-tune some details and the transitions of those scenes so that everything up to that point became the preparation of the first tale as if it were an extended prologue of the production. The key to the solution was to make the joints between scene changes 'invisible'. This interference also helped the Puppeteer become the main protagonist not only because of his storytelling role but also because the young audience identifies with him and, through him, with Conor. I have managed to reduce the impression that each scene up to the first tale would bring an emphatic twist in the story, to leave the real wrench for the Monster, who really begins a new chapter with his natural, almost sobering, meditatively calm presence. By way of this nuanced stage-craft shift, namely, by clarifying the logic of theatrical storytelling, consolidating the dramaturgy and emotional construction in addition to its impact, I was hoping to make the production readable for young audiences again. I will report on the implementation of this in the next Chapter (4.4).

b) The world of the tales – theatre within the theatre

As I alluded to earlier, while writing the first and second drafts, it was clear that, like the illustrations in the novel, the world of the tales told by the Monster must be utterly different from the rest of the production's world. In the film adaptation, there is a brave change of style: the tales are shown as animated inserts and thus can be remotely connected to the Mother, who worked as a visual artist.

When staging the *first tale*[152], I strove – following the instructions described in the second and third versions – to make certain elements merge with Conor's reality in order to confirm the embeddedness of the tale in the whole production, that is, in Conor's story. For example, the Monster's blanket covers the prince's killing, which later covers the Mother; the little house, which plays a role in the demonstration of the tale, later becomes Conor's toy; the teacup in which Conor makes tea for his Grandmother suddenly becomes a display of gushing blood. I have decided that

[152] See below in Chapter 4.5: Scene 7 – First tale (The cheating prince), (AMC-GVF, p. 133)

similar to medieval storytelling[153]; the Monster should present the tale by showing pictures, which indicates the style of this insert, which is meant to be different from the rest of the performance. Here, we chose the solution that the pictures should not be painted images but live illustrations, in which the actors take on the roles that may have some connection to Conor's family members: the Grandmother is the Queen, and the Mother is the murdered bride (Fig. 26).[154] I wanted to strengthen this connection when – similarly to the objects – the murdered bride imperceptibly 'transforms' under the blanket into the Mother. I have placed here the part of the novel when the Mother tells a tale about a yew tree coming to life – which also briefly becomes visible on the back wall – underscoring the connection between the Monster and the Mother, while the boundary between imagination and reality blurs for Conor. At the end of the scene, Conor lies alone on the blanket; before the Mother leaves, she lulls her son to sleep by repeating a few sentences of the Monster's tale – that is another connection. The boy wakes up, startled as if from a nightmare, with no sign of the Monster and the Mother or any objects of the tale. This is how I intended to wrap up the first tale, i.e., this second large dramaturgical *unit* of the production, neatly, thus giving young audiences a solid landmark (Fig. 9).

This sequence gave us the opportunity to reinforce Conor's childish self, which is something that was only moderately possible in the previous section of the production. His ironic questions addressed to the Monster, his rhapsodic enthusiasm, and his naive need for love all contributed to the chance of Conor's identification as a juvenile boy among the young audiences. We looked for the possibility of humour, which we did not intend to be as a sham effect of comedic relief but as a sign of vigour.

The *second tale* required a completely different genre: we decided to create a shadow theatre scene (Fig. 27).[155] I felt this form could be appropriate because of the world of the story: the age of industrialisation dark, aloof characters.

[153] 'Stories often come with pictures, which become part of the experience of storytelling' (Kathryn A. Duys, 2015, p 4) *Telling the Story in the Middle Ages* (ed. Kathryn A. Duys, Elizabeth Emery And Laurie Postlewate)
[154] See it in Section 6. Figures.
[155] See it in Section 6. Figures.

Figure 9. Production shot – A Monster Calls – Scene 7 (photo: Zsolt Mészáros)

I also found it important to embed the second tale into the first story layer of the production, too, but here I decided to use a different form than in the first one. The world of this tale was transparently constructed from the objects of the 'reality': the Monster stacks Grandmother's tea set on top of each other to transform it into a silhouette of a city. The priest's children were represented by two gingerbreads found on one of the plates, which crumbled when they died.

We planned to illuminate the objects and the characters from the front to create their shadows on the back wall. It soon became clear that it was impossible to place a lamp in a way that would provide enough contrast for the two characters, so we came up with a special solution. Two other actors took turns lighting the characters (the Apothecary and the Priest) with two flashlights. With this, not only did the shadow theatre effect become controllable, but the tale became easy to follow, and it gained more tension through the alternating lighting 'cuts'. As I explained in the above chapter (4.3.3.), it was important for me to follow the dramaturgical steps of the novel (and the film version), according to which Conor is only a witness to the first tale but becomes more part of it in the second one. We made Conor's involvement even more

intense than it is in the novel: he himself 'incarnates' the Priest and carries on a dialogue with the Apothecary (who is 'formed' by the Monster), experiencing the pain of accepting illness and death. This, I believe, is a more effective psychological preparation for why Conor starts to break everything into pieces. The tale ends with the smashing of Grandmother's living room; in the stage version – according to the third draft – Conor breaks the delicate tea set into pieces. Since the tea set represents Grandma's room, but at the same time, the world of the tale was built from these objects, I feel that Conor's shock after his aggression is more reasonable than in the novel. In the book, Conor destroys the Priest's house in his unconscious 'imagination', while in reality, he demolishes Grandma's furniture. By using the same objects to represent the room and acting out the tale in the stage version, I believe it is more justified why Conor treats Grandmother's valuables as the Priest's house (Fig. 10).

This section of the production ends with the surreal and, at the same time, dreadful disappearance of Grandmother's 'room': the broken tea set and plates, together with the tablecloth, are absorbed by the opening in the middle of the stage in the blink of an eye.[156] This solution was born from the practical problem that we wanted to avoid a long and uninteresting scene change made by the actors. Since the broken objects could end up in unpredictable places in the set, a quick pack away seemed impossible. After some brainstorming and technical application[157], the opening in the middle of the stage turned out to be the perfect solution: it was useful from a practical point of view and strengthened the symbolic layers of the scenery. Little miracles on stage, like this one, grab the attention of the young viewers.[158]

The *third tale* – as I have discussed in detail before (4.3.3.) – raised serious dramaturgical problems for me. Recalling my concerns: the tale does not really have a story, Harry's change of attitude, as well as invisibility as a problem, are unprepared dramaturgically.

[156] For more on the function of the hole in the middle of the stage, see above: (Chapter 4.3.1.).
[157] We hooked the bottom part of the tablecloth to a string coming through the opening on the stage. One of the actors pulled it from behind the set. See the recording in DCU DORAS Repository.
[158] The birth of the calf is a similarly miraculous moment in the *Orphalina* production. For more on this, see below.

Figure 10. Scene 11 – Scream – A Monster Calls (photo: Zsolt Mészáros)

Besides that, Harry's beating is based on a similar aggression to destroying the room, which is difficult to carry out believably on stage. I saw the possible dramaturgical and emotional preparation leading up to the third tale – which I described in the second draft – in the twist that Conor is confronted with the real outcome of his mother's illness for the first time. I planned two dialogues right before the third tale, in which the Mother and the Father try to tell Conor that the treatment has little chance. My aim was to embed both arguments in Harry's provocation separately. The combination of losing hope in the treatment and the termination of the punishment, which Connor believes he deserves, was – according to my intention – supposed to end up in aggression and complete loneliness. However, without restructuring that scene, I did not feel that the solution that worked well on paper was sufficient. The final result lies in the parallel editing of two dialogues – similar to *Scene 6 (The Nightmare)* – in which the Mother and Father seem to talk to Conor in the same space and time, but they are only swirling in the boy's psyche. I ended the scene – intentionally breaking the rules of puppetry – with the actors leaving their puppets alone on the stage, reinforcing Conor's echoless loneliness: the puppets stopped reacting to Conor's hopeful sentences. The Puppeteer – continuing the dramaturgical logic of the scene – separates from his puppet and thus offers it to Harry for beating. I

freed Harry's appearance from the sobering dialogue montage of the Mother and the Father because the embeddedness weakened its drama. I found during the rehearsals that positioning Harry's appearance after that increased Conor's – the Puppeteer's – separation more intensively. The Monster's entry is the climax in this scene. Contrary to what is described in the second draft, in the stage realisation, he only tells the beginning of the tale about the invisible man, and then he becomes 'inanimate', too, like a 'puppet' (Fig. 11).

Figure 11. Scene 13 – Punishment (The Third Story) – A Monster Calls (photo: Zsolt Mészáros)

With this solution, I significantly deviated from the instruction of the novel and the adaptation, in which I imagined that Conor (or the Puppeteer) would sweep everyone off the stage with the help of the Monster, which would probably have seemed ridiculous to young audiences due to its clumsiness. Instead, I preferred to create a dramaturgical twist that does not illustrate Conor's aggression and prepares the real identity of the Puppeteer: in his despair, he puts the Monster's mask on his own head, turns into a beast himself, finishes off Harry with one hit, hangs the chain made of healing berries around the Mother's neck, then lies down holding Conor's puppet tightly (Fig. 24).[159] After the walls of the box close, the picture is reminiscent of the

[159] See it in Section 6. Figures.

room of an endlessly lonely boy. The fact of Harry's beating is revealed only from the questions of the Grandmother, which – as alluded in Chapter 4.3.3. – I took this from the headmistress's scene of the novel.

Nevertheless, I felt it was emotionally reasonable for the young audiences to show Conor's helpless aggression, but not how the novel suggested. In the stage version, after the Mother tells her son that there is no more treatment, that is, the medicine made from the yew tree has not worked, Conor angrily destroys the walls of the room in search of the Monster. This moment in the book is quite different: Conor is almost paralysed by the news; he only bursts into bitter rage later when he tries to wake up the yew tree to question him. The film adaptation is between the two versions: Conor runs helplessly from the hospital all the way to the cemetery to awaken the yew tree.

This moment directly leads to the *fourth tale*, the creation of which was probably the highest-stake challenge in the production. As I discussed in detail in the previous chapter, the fourth tale is not only the confrontation with the nightmare in the stage version but the continuation of the Puppeteer's story about Conor. The Puppeteer is the one who consciously kept silent about Conor's innermost conflicted feelings alongside the nightmare. The merging of the Puppeteer and Conor's persona becomes completely certain for the audience at this moment, even though it was gradually hinted at earlier. The Monster addresses him with the sentence: 'I came to heal you.' (AMC–GVF, p. 154). The Puppeteer first answers instinctively in his own name, as if forgetting that the puppet is not in his hands. When correcting his reaction, he repeats the same sentence in the voice of the Conor puppet, but he already loses the strength to continue, to pretend: 'My mum's the one who's… *(pause, and then puts down the puppet, quietly)* Help me!' (AMC–GVF, p. 154). This simple request for help appears in the same place in the novel, but Conor applies it to something other than the Puppeteer. Conor refers to his mother's recovery, keeping the tormenting feeling of the nightmare a secret, while the Puppeteer asks for support in facing the trauma, i.e., to continue to tell Conor's story. In the stage version, the Puppeteer starts retelling Conor's story all over again, delaying talking about the nightmare. In the second and the third drafts, following the structure of the novel, the Monster immediately placed Conor (i.e., the Puppeteer) in his own nightmare to force the truth out of him. This gesture corresponded to the 'method' used by the Monster in the first and second

tales, according to which he himself creates the world of the tale on stage, into which he forces Conor almost without a transition. For this reason, the 'theatre in the theatre' effect also seemed to be justified in the fourth tale, too. My intention was not to illustrate the vision of the nightmare described in the novel, I already deviated from this while writing the adaptation. The previously mentioned image of the Mother crumbling to dust and disappearing in the stage opening seemed like a strong solution (Fig. 23).[160] I tried to synchronise the action with the Monster recalling – instead of Conor and the Puppeteer – the original description of the nightmare, taken from the novel, but it didn't work. The image and the text (the spoken words) differed to such an extent that the scene could not function similarly to the previously seen theatrical demonstrations of the Monster. The two strong elements weakened each other, and in fact, the image shown parallel to the spoken speech worked more like a didactic scene with a manipulated effect than a poetic act on stage. I considered this especially to be avoided because of the young audiences: forced poetry on stage can be even worse than didacticism. The solution lay in the separation of the text (monologue) and the action from each other in time, which eliminated the impression that the image and the action created on stage wanted to be an illustration of the spoken words. In the final version, although the Mother appears during the narration of the nightmare, her decrease only begins after the Monster has recalled the nightmare. This solution preserved the power of the text (the image/event it describes) and the image created on stage because the stage action did not work as an illustration anymore but as a poetic creation realised in the language of the theatre, which allowed for unrestrained interpretation, which I believe is especially vital for young spectators. The presentational nature of the picture was further reduced by the fact that the Puppeteer did not just passively watch his Mother disappear but could interact with her: he tries to hold up the falling grains of sand in despair.

It was instructive to experience the interaction of text and image elements, at which points and why the construction imagined on paper does or does not work.

[160] See it in Section 6. Figures.

c) Whose story is it anyway? – Reinforcing the dramatic stake of the stage adaptation

As I alluded to earlier, one of my key decisions was to incorporate the Puppeteer as the grown-up Conor in the adaptation, who recalls and retells the boy's story. My goal was to gradually reveal the true identity of the Puppeteer, which becomes completely clear in the fourth tale. After that – in the third draft – I followed the storyline of the novel and returned to the narrative of the young Conor, putting the Puppeteer back into the role of storyteller. It seemed logical that the Puppeteer, after revealing the child Conor's biggest secret by telling his truth, could continue to narrate – this time without hiding anything – the end of Conor's story. According to the third draft, the Puppeteer took the puppet in his hands again and – as the boy Conor – led through to the hospital scene (*Scene 18 – The truth*) with this sentence:

> CONOR (p): I need to see my mum. I have to get back to my mum.
> MONSTER: You will. There is time. The tale is not yet told.
> (AMC–GV3, p. 42)

Then, in the rest of the adaptation, the Puppeteer continued – as before – to narrate Conor's story:

> PUPPETEER: Conor ran after her grandma' almost automatically. He didn't dare ask why they were hurrying.
> (AMC–GV3, p 42)

I had the idea that the Monster should 'transform' into a doctor in the ward who helps the young Conor cope with the last moments of his Mum's passing away. After having rehearsed this scene, I felt it didn't work on stage. It became weightless, the dramatic stakes were missing, and the conclusion of the story proved to be insufficient. First, I couldn't grasp the core of the problem and why the last scene didn't work as composed in the third draft.

In order to find a solution, I had to return to some of the fundamental questions in forming my adaptation: who is the main protagonist? In other words, whose character development is the production actually dealing with, that is, who will the young spectator identify with? The answer to this is – seemingly contradictory – the

Puppeteer and not the young himself. At first, it may seem to the audience that the focalisation is separated from the viewpoint of the narrator, that is, the story is recounted from the perspective of young Conor, represented by the puppet. Since in the third draft, the Puppeteer simply *recalled* the last meeting of the child Conor with his mother, the dramatic force of the actual stakes was lost; instead, it became a melodramatic reminiscence. I had to steer the dramatic focus back on the Puppeteer, which entailed stripping him of his previous role as narrator. Following the revelation of the fourth tale, according to which the Puppeteer is the subject of the trauma processing, it became clear to me that the Puppeteer should need the Monster's additional support; he must be helped to accept the death, not the boy himself. Therefore, I deleted the child Conor's sentence quoted above and changed the person who narrates the arrival at the hospital (see quote above) from the Puppeteer to the Monster as if he would continue telling the fourth tale. Emphasising the focus on the Puppeteer, I changed that the Monster takes over the Conor puppet and animates it until the end. Consequently, the Puppeteer continues to recall *his own* personal memory and does not resume the boy's story as an omniscient narrator anymore (Fig. 12).

Figure 12. Scene 16 – The Truth – A Monster Calls (photo: Zsolt Mészáros)

This simple dramaturgical twist can increase the experience of immersion for young audiences through the experience of 'deciphering' My goal was, in this case, that revealing the 'secret' that the Puppeteer is identical to Conor can shift their sympathy to the adult character, in whom they also can see the child. When the Puppeteer takes the Mother puppet in his hands, he looks at her as if he were hugging his own mother. Surrounded by all the helpers – the other actors – he tells them, as if it were happening all over again, how he felt as a child at that time. He no longer needs the verbal help of the Monster; he no longer needs to hold the Conor puppet in front of him to mask his feelings. With this change, it was possible to maintain the dramatic tension and follow the logic of the stage adaptation, deviating from the novel intentionally.

d) Fine-tuning – the mother's farewell

The Mother is represented as a puppet throughout the show, except for one scene. When she enters Conor's room after the third tale, the actress appears without the puppet, in fact, with loose, long hair, which she had previously always covered with a scarf. This is not how I imagined this scene originally in the third draft: the entry of the actress with a scarf on her head was planned to be practical; she immediately was supposed to take the puppet – which she left on stage previously – in her hands and talk. However, during the rehearsals, the Mother's entrance without the puppet seemed so compelling and hopeful that I decided to change the scene – following the logic of what the stage offered. I wanted to strengthen the hope associated with the Mother's entrance: therefore, she appears as she lives in Conor's memories from before, with long hair and a reassuring smile. Instead of grabbing her own puppet, she takes the Conor puppet, but as if it were her son, she puts it on her lap, caresses it and looks deeply into its eyes. The Puppeteer – still with the Monster's mask on his head – is only the witness and silent, fearful narrator of the happening. I asked the actress to announce the ineffectiveness of the treatment with a relieved smile on her face and not in a sad, self-pitying manner. On one hand, I instructed her in this way because the fact she is communicating is tragic, and a similar emotional illustration of it would be self-evident. On the other hand, because the Mother – I believe – does not want to strengthen sorrow in her son, but the composed acceptance of the fact of near death. Also – and this is the most important – she sees the end, no more struggle, no more

hope; now she can only focus on her son and her own passing, and this I wanted to express with relief. This instruction was only partially executed in the performance; the actress – understandably – felt it extremely burdensome to express an emotion that was almost 'opposite' to the content of the sentences.

The Mother 'turns into' a puppet again when she tells her son that there is no more treatment available. My intention was to let this transition see through Conor's eyes, as if the long-haired, smiling mother from his memory turns back into a bald 'skeleton'. The tone of the Mother's next monologue was also significantly different from what was expected, i.e., how the reader might 'hear' it when reading it in the novel.

> MUM: One day... if you look back and you feel bad for being so angry, you have to know that was okay. And if you need to break things... By God you break them. Break them good and hard. And I'll be right there. I wish I had a hundred years. A hundred years I could give to you. (AMC–GVF, p. 154)

These few sentences are an extract of what the Mother says while lying in her hospital bed in the novel and the film version. She speaks softly; she barely has any strength:

> (quietly weeping) (AMC–F, scene 127)

> – she said, very quietly – (AMC–N, p. 89)

My instructions were for the actress who played the Mother to shout out loud and scream these sentences into the world. In the stage version, these sentences are the answers to the Puppeteer's (that is, Conor's) angry accusations of his rejection of an unacceptable future as part of his emotional crescendo. I wanted the ever-quiet, gentle Mother to express her infinite pain just once.

These two examples clearly show how significantly the meaning of the written adaptation can be modified in the stage version, that the 'how' through the representation can completely change the attitude and through that the connotation of the portrayed characters.

4.3.3. The dramaturgical concept of the soundscape and the music

As I alluded to earlier (Chapter 3.2.), the most substantial function of the music in the production was portraying the different psychological conditions of the characters, depicting moods in order to support situations, but still staying 'unnoticeable', blended into the overall effect of the production. Our most decisive aspect for the musical map of the production was that the music should not illustrate but complement the feelings already expressed in the scene.

We decided to connect diverse recruiting musical motifs to the scenes and characters, thus also strengthening the dramaturgical structure of the production. With this, we not only intended to help the emotional identification of the young audiences but also their 'orientation' in the story. We first decided with the composer, András Monori[161], that the musical universe of the production should be similar to film scores; that is, it should act on the subconscious and be 'able to transmit the narrative associations or the secondary meanings' of the story (Venczel, p 149). It was a conscious decision that we did not make any 'compromise' in the music world for the sake of young spectators; that is, we did not use modern soundscapes or musical quotes known to them. We felt that the story did not require this 'youthful' context. Instead, we focused on firmly separating the sound design of the scenes taking place in 'reality' (first story layer) and in Conor's 'imagination', including the nightmare (third and fourth story layers).

For Conor, we varied two fundamentally different musical themes: one is delicate, lyrical, and almost meditative; the other one has dramatic power that it sounds like a painful inner cry. The lyrical musical motif accompanies the Puppeteer's tale about Conor; it is meant to depict the boy's introverted sadness, which is not expressed in words. The dramatic, passionate theme expresses Conor's (that is, the Puppeteer's) elevated state of mind at several turning points of his journey. This musical motif can also be linked to the Mother; the female vocal counterpoints the dynamics of the music and gives to it an eternal horizon.

[161] For more overview, see: https://www.monoriandras.hu

The musical expression of the nightmare also works as a projection of the subjective consciousness of Conor, to which we chose dissonance and cacophony. Krzysztof Penderecki's music served as inspiration, which has a merciless and uncompromising effect.[162] We were looking for an unconventional soundscape that includes faster and slower vibratos, tone clusters and playing on the tailpiece and behind the bridge of string instruments, which also has strong dynamic shifts and counterpoints. The terror in Conor's soul was expressed by the variation of the same music theme; since the nightmare, the thoughts swirling in Conor's head, the smashing of Grandmother's room and the Monster's first appearance all represented a similar state of consciousness – to my opinion. For young audiences, this soundscape may be familiar from horror movies, which we intended as an 'accurate' association.

The first two tales required a separate musical world: in the first tale, we evoked the age with fairytale-like medieval musical motifs, while deep brass instruments emphasised the dark and harsh world of the second tale. The illustrative, somewhat 'cheap' sound used in these scenes deliberately deviated from the darker and heavier musical world of the performance. Similar to the musical theme, belonging to the Father is a playful reference to the look of the puppet (cowboy); the primitive country music supports the character's superficiality.

We hoped that the dense musical world of the production would help young audiences to identify and open up emotionally.

4.4 Reception

4.4.1 Audience experience and feedback

Following on from the above discussion about the kind of reception I aspired to in the production, here I summarise our experiences regarding the audience reactions to *A Monster Calls*. First, I will share some general observations; then, I will describe and evaluate the outreach program connected to the production.

[162] Krzysztof Penderecki: *Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima* (1961).

As stated before, theatre practitioners of TYA have a strong 'belief that theatre can help audience members cope with situations in their everyday lives by mirroring their dilemmas on stage' (Omasta, p. 36). This is one of the fundamentals of TYA, which we keep in mind during creation. All the artistic decisions related to a TYA production – from the choice of theme to the stage realisation – are subordinated to this aspect. Namely, for the accurate and high-quality presentation of the issue raised by the production. Below, I examine *A Monster Calls*' audience reception primarily from the point of view of how well it met the expectations of young audiences and what impact it had on them. It is important to emphasise the consideration of two aspects: on one hand, the production was seen *not* only by young spectators but also by adults. The theatre scheduled the performance in two separate time slots: in the afternoon, it was played for young audiences – school groups – and in the evening for individual adults. So, our experience and conclusions are not only based on young spectators. The second consideration relates to the fact that we did not use a professional analysis to measure the production's impact on young viewers. Therefore, I am here relying on our personal experience and the feedback received during the outreach program connected with the production.

As I emphasised earlier, it is important that the dramaturgical and formal structure of the production forms a solid system because the young audiences likely encounter the topic raised in the production for the first time[163]. In addition to the importance of 'introducing' the topic/issue with real clarity, its layered and artistic presentation is decisive. Crucially, the drive for a 'clear' representation here does not mean the delivery of a didactic, sealed 'message' or moral but rather to raise questions and dilemmas to which the young spectators should provide the answers.[164]

Due to the weight of the topic, the production was performed together with a

[163] Despite the popularity of the novel and the film version, *A Monster Calls* is not widely known among young people in Hungary.

[164] It is important to mention that during the period of the performances, we came across some parents and teachers who found the topics 'undesirable' and 'inappropriate', and therefore kept their children or students away from the theatre. Although, fortunately, this did not happen often, the objection was usually that the subject was too sad and upsetting, so young people did not need to see it. Without disputing the right that everyone – including parents and teachers – are allowed to decide what they want to show their child or student, the same thinking lies behind the fear and reasoning for self-censorship or – from the side of authority – censorship of certain topics.

preparatory and reflective session led by two drama teachers for high school student groups. The so-called two-step drama pedagogical outreach programs were aimed at preparing and processing the dramatic experience through discussions and play. With the help of educational and theatrical means, the young audience could express their views and opinions about conflicts and difficult situations depicted in the production.[165] The focus of the outreach program was how to deal with the loss of people close to us.

The *preparatory phase* started with contacting the class teachers about if there was a directly affected young person in the class; they should talk to them about the context of the show (illness and death) in advance. These students must have been given the opportunity to decide whether they wanted to come to the theatre, but even if they did, the drama teachers should have been aware of them.

The groups were asked to arrive 30 minutes prior to the performance in the theatre. They were welcomed by the drama teachers for approx. 20-minute-long preparatory session. The first phase focused on the genre aspect of the forthcoming performance, namely on puppets. We thought it important to examine this because, as I mentioned earlier, teenagers might feel puppet theatre is too 'childish'. Although the performance dramaturgically justifies the use of puppets, this playful preparation may have resolved possible objections in some young students and drawn their attention to a few characteristics of the genre. By presenting different types of puppets[166] – which were not from the production – the drama teachers asked the students for associations about what these puppets would express for them. After anyone who wanted could try animating the puppets, they discussed the relationship between the puppet and the actor: when is the animator visible, or when can it disappear completely. The second phase of the preparatory session was connected to the theme of the performance. The drama teachers asked the students if they had heard anything about the theme of the theatre piece, if they knew the novel, or if they had seen the film. Our experience was

[165] It is important to dispel a widespread misconception: the session does not deal with the formal explanation or content interpretation of the production but promotes the discussion of the *issue* raised by the performance.

[166] A hand (or glove) puppets; a finger puppet; a rod puppet; a marionette puppet; a bunraku puppet; a mask; a shadow puppet and an object.

that students generally had no prior knowledge of the topic or story; therefore, the drama teachers shared the following context with the students: 'Our story is about the 13-year-old Conor. Here is a letter he left on your desk. We don't know who it was meant for…' The drama teachers showed to the students a handwritten letter that read: *'That day, after my Mum needed to have a little talk with me, everything has changed. Until then, everything seemed possible, but after that, I felt like a secret mark had been placed on me. It felt like the life I liked with Mum became only a life that 'used to be'*. The drama teachers raised the question of what the students thought Conor might be referring to in the letter, but they did not expect an answer. Instead, they suggested watching the show together.

After the performance, the *reflective phase* of the outreach program began with discussing Conor's feelings throughout the production. The drama teachers scattered cards on the floor with synonyms for different emotions in several copies, like 'anger, fear, rage, boredom, jealousy, happiness, sadness, loneliness, pain, temper, aggression, hurt, lethargy, joy, cheerfulness, anxiety, peace', etc. There were also some blank cards for anyone who wanted to add another emotion. The students were asked to put the cards on Conor's 'body' drawn on wrapping paper. After that, they discussed which emotions are the most frequent, which ones are missing, and why.

The next phase dealt with the relationship between Conor and the other characters. Conor was represented with a baseball cap in the centre of the room. The other characters were indicated by other objects (Mother: wig; Father: picture of New York; Grandma: teacup; Harry: vest; teacher: file; Lily: pen). The students were asked to place the objects in relation to the baseball cap (close or far away), displaying the characters' bond to Conor. After having discussed their decisions, the drama teachers distributed some sentences (on cards) to students and asked them to read beside the matching objects (characters) while the other students were asked to decipher what Conor might be thinking when he heard these sentences.[167]

> 'LILY: My mum said we need to make allowances for you, because of what you're going through.

[167] The sentences were from the Scene 4 – Whispering.

GRANDMA: We need to have a talk, young man.
TEACHER: I can't imagine what you must be going through, Conor, but if you ever want to talk, my office door in the school is always open.
HARRY: Look at me when I'm talking to you.
FATHER: I came because your mum asked me to. You need to be brave.
MUM: Keep an eye on the yew tree for me while I'm away, will you?'

In this phase, the students – with the help of the role-play – were able to express their *own* thoughts about passing away, grief, and death in a safe way. After that, the drama teachers put away the wig representing the mother from among the other objects – symbolising her absence. The students were asked to change the position of the remaining objects (characters) if they felt it necessary: who moves closer or further away; who can Conor better count on, etc. After having discussed the differences, the drama teachers recalled Conor's confession from the performance: 'I wanted it to be over. I wanted to stop having to think about it. I couldn't stand the waiting anymore. I couldn't stand how alone it made me feel. I wanted her to die.' The drama teachers' experience was that the earlier phases of the session loosened up the students so much that they dared to express themselves bravely and honestly about this question.

The last part of the reflective session was about reconciliation. The drama teachers described an imagined situation: A year has passed. Conor, like every week, goes out to the cemetery (the grave is represented by a chair), sits at the grave and talks to his mother in his mind. What can he say to her now? The students were given the possibility to write down their thoughts on a piece of paper and attach it to the chair. Whether to read the sentences out loud or not was the joint decision of the group.[168]

After the end of the session, the students had the opportunity to ask questions about the formal solutions of the production in an informal discussion. Our experience was that many of them were interested in the meaning of the puppets. The drama teachers never gave 'explanations' but answered the students' questions with a question: 'What do you think? What did it mean to you? What came to your mind?' Based on the students' answers, it was confirmed that they understood the formal solutions of

[168] I don't have these messages, the drama teachers destroyed them after the section.

the production exactly; they were just waiting for confirmation in this regard.[169]

The drama teachers prepared a resource (helping material) for those teachers who wanted to prepare the students for the performance themselves.[170] The material differs from the session conducted in the theatre, but the focus is similar: to prepare the students for the emotional difficulties of the topic.

When the performance was renewed in January 2025, a new, much shorter reflective session was connected to the production. At the end of this conversations, young spectators were free to write messages to Conor, which they could then place on the set (the closed box).[171] With their permission, I share some of them: 'I had a similar experience, but fortunately I haven't had to experience my father's death yet, as he has recovered. Although I am a few years older than you, I had a very slow and difficult time processing it. You are very strong that you managed to process this, to defeat the "enemy" within yourself.'[172]; 'Conor, remember and don't forget that you are not to blame for anything!'[173]; 'In life, there are people you can count on and who love you. You are never alone!'[174]; 'Don't be afraid to ask for help, even if it's sometimes difficult and you can't find the right person.'[175]; 'Thanks for showing us that we are not alone. And that we don't have to feel like the worst person in the world for our feelings and thoughts. Guilt is normal!'[176]

Our general experience regarding the reception of the performance was that young audiences were not only captivated by the production but were also able to identify with it deeply. This could be felt from the reactions in the auditorium, often from the sounds of stifled crying. There was usually a long delay in applause at the end of the

[169] See more about it above in the Chapter 1.4. The difference between 'suitable' and 'beneficial' according to the psychological development of young people
[170] See: szolit_a_szorny_segedlet.pdf, Available from: DCU DORAS Repository.
[171] Photos of the messages are available from: DCU DORAS Repository.
[172] "Nekem is volt hasonló élményem, de szerencsére édesapám halálát még nem kellett megélnem, mivel meggyógyult. Bár nálad idősebb vagyok pár évvel, nagyon lassan és nehezen tudtam feldolgozni. Nagyon erős vagy, hogy ezt sikerült feldolgoznod, legyőzni az "ellenséget" magadban."
[173] "Conor, emlékezz és ne felejtsd el, hogy te nem vagy hibás semmiben!"
[174] "Az életben vannak olyan emberek, akikre számíthatsz és akik szeretnek. Sosem vagy egyedül!"
[175] "Ne félj segítséget kérni, mégha olykor nehéz és nem találod a megfelelő személyt."
[176] "Köszi, hogy megmutattad, hogy nem vagyunk egyedül. És hogy nem kell a világ legrosszabb emberének éreznünk magunkat az érzéseink és a gondolatatink miatt. A bűntudat normális!"

performance – this was similar for adult audiences[177]. This disconcerting silence clearly signalled to us – which was then confirmed verbally by many – that the audience was under the influence of the production and needed time to reflect. In summary, the engagement and empathy of the young audience exceeded all our expectations.

The professional reception of the production confirmed the same, as evidenced by the numerous appreciative reviews in addition to the awards. A selection of reviews can be found in the Repositories.[178]

[177] See more above: the quoted review in the Introduction.
[178] DCU DORAS Repository.

4.5 Final version of the stage adaptation of A Monster Calls

A MONSTER CALLS

(final version – AMC-GVF) [179]

Based on the novel by Patrick Ness
Inspired by the original idea of Siobhan Dowd

A stage adaptation by György Vidovszky[180]
(2019-2021)

Created as part of Ph.D. on Artefact research study, Dublin City University (2018-2025)

Supervisors: Ms Marina Carr, Prof Eugene McNulty

[179] The adaptation forms the basis of the performance created in Weöres Sándor Theatre, Szombathely (Hungary) coproduction partner of Mesebolt Puppet Theatre, Szombathely (Hungary).Cast: Conor – Erik Major (2021-2023) György Zoltán Dávid (2025-); Grandma – Angéla Kolozsi; Monster – Gábor Lukács; Mother – Bori Varga; Harry, Father – Bálint Kovács; Lily – Zsófia Gyurkovics; Design: Ákos Mátravölgyi; Music:András Monori; Artistic consultant: Haibo Illés; Assistant director, prompter: Eszter Győrváry; Director: György Vidovszky. Premiered 7th October 2021.
[180] By courtesy of Michelle Kass Associates Ltd.

SCENE 1 – KING KONG

A box-shaped stage. The Puppeteer sits in the centre surrounded with puppets and with a boy puppet on his lap.

PUPPETEER *(to the audiences)* Stories are the wildest things of all. Stories chase and bite and hunt. This story begins just like so many other ones with a boy too old to be a kid, too young to be a man.

Not long ago, a boy lived at the edge of the city, beside the graveyard, the one with a giant yew tree.

He had lived with his mother alone together since his father vamoosed off to New York to his new family. Although he was only thirteen, he did all things for himself: breakfast, washing his clothes, bringing out the rubbish.
His name was Conor, but everybody called him by his nickname King Con, because his favourite film was about the famous giant gorilla King Kong, which freaked out half of the world.

Heroic music. The revolving door behind swings, actors enter. A gorilla puppet is climbing up on a skyscraper, turning back sometimes with fear.

CONOR Come on, King Kong! Escape!

An airplane flies close to the skyscraper, shooting at the animal, but the gorilla hits it down with his giant hands.

CONOR Climb up! Hurry up! They are coming after you!
FAIR LADY King Kong, help me! I'm falling!
CONOR Catch her!

King Kong keeps climbing, reaches the top of the skyscraper, where a blonde lady puppet in a long white dress is hanging, King Kong grabs her and saves her from

falling. The lady puppet turns to the gorilla and says:

MUM *(as the fair lady)* Thank you for saving my life! *(as Conor's Mum)* Conor! You will be late for school, hurry up!

Music stops. The Puppeteer lets the gorilla puppet jump from the skyscraper, and by doing so the gorilla lets the lady fall. A boy puppet (Conor) grabs it (her).

CONOR On my way!

Conor puts down the lady puppet. Conor stands up, puts on his schoolbag, and then notices something on the ground. He lifts it up: it's a spiky leaf. He looks around, doesn't understand where it came from. Stormy wind clatters from far away. Spotlight from above.

MONSTER *(voice only)* Conor!
CONOR Mum?
MONSTER *(voice gets deeper)* Conor!
CONOR Mum?

Sounds like creaks of wood.

CONOR *(talks as if it were someone outside)* Do you need any help? *(pause)* Mum?

Silence. An actor scatters spiky yew tree leaves in the spotlight.

MONSTER: I have come to get you, Conor.
CONOR: Who is this? What do you want?
MONSTER: I've come to get you, Conor.
CONOR: I'm not afraid. Not of you anyway.
MONSTER: You will be. Before the end. *(exits)*

Sound stops.

MUM *(only her voice, as if she were in another room)* Con? You've had breakfast?

CONOR *(trying to clean the leaves from the floor)* Yes, Mum.

MUM You're sure?

CONOR Yes, Mum! Toast and cereal. And juice. I put the dishes in the dishwasher. *(about to leave)*

MUM You are a good boy.

The revolving door slowly opens, the mother can't be fully seen behind it, only her hands on the doorframe.

MUM *(voice)* I'm sorry I wasn't up.

CONOR It's ok.

MUM It's just this new round of…

CONOR It's ok. Really. *(starts walking)*

MUM *(voice from behind the door)* Con! I forgot to tell you, your Grandma's coming by today.

CONOR Aw, Mum!

MUM I know, I'll try to keep it as short as possible, okay?

CONOR We don't need her here!

MUM She's going to bring me some of her old wigs if you can believe that. Be lucky if I don't end up looking like a zombie. *(laughing and coughing)*

CONOR: You okay? Do you want me to stay at home?

MUM I'm okay. Conor, you shouldn't have to make everything on your own. You are only thirteen...

CONOR We've been okay so far.

MUM Only a couple of nights. I promise.

CONOR *(disappointed)* I'm going to be late. I'm off.

SCENE 2 – HARRY

Short music. Harry (puppet) is beside Conor at the school desk.

PUPPETEER: Somewhere over the past year everything had changed at school. Previously Harry hadn't even known Conor's name. Then suddenly he had started noticing him.

HARRY King Con!

Harry turns his head slowly towards Conor.

HARRY I have come to get you, King Con.

He throws Conor's schoolbag at him, but Conor doesn't defend himself.

HARRY You're bleeding, King Con.

Conor puts his hand up to his mouth.

HARRY Stop crying! You'll have to get your baldy mother to kiss it better.

CONOR: I'm not crying!

HARRY: You will be. Before the end.

CONOR: What do you want from me?

HARRY: Me? What do YOU want from me, King Con?

The animator of Harry lifts Conor puppet.

HARRY: Is this what you want, King Con? Lily!

Lily's animator enters, they throw Conor to each other.

LILY: Come here, you! Stupid liar! Get lost!

School bell. All exit except the Puppeteer, who lifts Conor puppet from the ground.

SCENE 3 – WIGS

Light changes, back to normal. Cheerful music. His Mum is standing there wearing a wig.

MUM: Look, Conor!

Conor is shaking his head.

MUM: How about that?
CONOR: Nope.
MUM Was that you I heard last night, Con?
CONOR When?

Mum is checking different wigs with Conor, but he keeps shaking his head after each of them.

MUM Sometime after midnight it must have been.
CONOR: Dunno.
MUM: *(changing wig)* And this one? *(takes off the wig)* I thought I was dreaming but I could have sworn I heard your voice.
CONOR Probably just talking in my sleep, Mum. *(shaking his head and takes the wig from his mum)*
MUM Probably. I hope you didn't forget that Grandma's here already.
CONOR Aw, Mum… *(whispering)* How long is she going to be here?
GRANDMA *(her voice from outside)* I hope you're not too picky about the wigs, sweetheart. Oh, my Lord! The floor is full of needles. *(she enters)* I've told you so many times that this ancient yew tree should be cut down. *(to Conor)* Why don't you greet me, my boy?
CONOR I have a name, you know.
GRANDMA Less of your cheek, Conor.
CONOR Hi, Grandma.
MUM Conor, I would like you to go over to Grandma. For only a couple of nights, okay?

Silence.

	Listen, Conor…
CONOR	I suppose this is going to be another round of "We Need To Have A Talk".
MUM	Listen, Conor…
CONOR	We've been okay so far, haven't we?
MUM	Yes, we have. But you know how I am feeling after…
GRANDMA	How was school today?
CONOR	All fine.
GRANDMA	Why don't you put the kettle on for me and your mum? Two sugars, no milk for me, you know it, don't you. *(about to exit)* Lizzy, my sweetheart, we need to talk about something.
MUM	I wouldn't have asked her if I didn't need her to, all right? *(pause, takes a key with a red ribbon)* Look, your Granddad bequeathed something for you when you were born, he asked me to give you the key when you are old enough. You can check it out in Grandma's house, in the shed. *(handing the key, but Conor doesn't take it)* So, what do you think? *(takes off the wig, gives it to Conor)*
CONOR	These wigs are terrible. *(he is trying to put the plastic bag full of wigs into the bin)*
GRANDMA	*(her voice from outside)* Lizzy!
MUM	I'm coming, Mum. *(secretly to Conor)* These wigs are terrible.
GRANDMA	*(from outside)* Lizzy, please!

Mum exits.

CONOR	*(mocking his Grandma's voice)* "Lizzy, please!"
GRANDMA	*(from outside)* I've heard you. I'm old, not deaf.

Conor opens the centre of the stage; light shines out of it. A silhouette of branches appears on the door. As they are slowly rising, turn into a huge head.

SCENE 4 – WHISPERING

MONSTER Conor!

CONOR Is this you again? Leave me alone! Go away!

MONSTER I've come to get you.

CONOR I'm not afraid. What do you want from me? Are you going to litter the flat with leaves again?

MONSTER I know about you.

CONOR What do you know about anything?

MONSTER Everything.

CONOR Leave me alone! Go away!

MONSTER I know what's in your head. Don't you believe me? Listen!

Deep sound. Both sides of the stage get closed. The voices are coming from the darkness.

LILY *(voice only)* I forgive you!

CONOR For what?

The Puppeteer looks around suspiciously.

LILY *(voice only)* I forgive you for lying, stupid.

Conor doesn't answer. The Puppeteer blocks the puppet's ears.

LILY *(voice only)* My mum said we need to make allowances for you, because of what you're going through.

CONOR Your Mum doesn't know anything. And neither do you.

GRANDMA We need to have a talk, young man.

CONOR What's wrong, Grandma?

GRANDMA It's not working.

MISS KWAN *(voice from another direction)* Conor!

CONOR Yes, ma'am.

MISS KWAN *(voice only)* I can't imagine what you must be going through,

	Conor, but if you ever want to talk, my office door in the school is always open.
CONOR	I'm fine, ma'am.
HARRY	Well done, King Con.
GRANDMA	Conor!
HARRY	Look at me when I'm talking to you.
GRANDMA	Your mum wants to talk to you.
CONOR	Why is Dad coming?
GRANDMA	There's a lot of pain. More than there should be.
MUM	Keep an eye on the yew tree for me while I'm away, will you?
CONOR	I will, Mum.
MUM	Make sure the tree is still here when I get back, Con.
FATHER	*(voice)* Your mother is … She's a fighter, isn't she?
CONOR	What are you doing here, Dad?
MUM	We're a team, me and you. We're in this together.
FATHER	I came because your mum asked me to.
LILY	King Con!
CONOR	Shut up, Lily!
MUM	Keep an eye on the yew tree for me while I'm away, will you?
CONOR	I will, Mum!
MUM	When you were a little baby, I knew that you were counting on me, and that was the only thing that mattered.
FATHER	You need to be brave.
MUM	Mum, you have to run! Hurry up!
MUM	I'm fine darling. There is nothing to worry about.
FATHER	Can you hear me, son?
CONOR	Mum, you have to run!
FATHER	I'll see you tomorrow, yeah?
MUM	Help me! Don't let me fall.
CONOR	I won't. I promise.
MUM	I can count on you this time, can't I?
CONOR	Mum!!
MONSTER	*(voice comes from outside)* Conor!
CONOR	Mum?

MONSTER Conor!

CONOR Mum?

SCENE 5 – FIRST ENCOUNTER

Clock changes to 12:07 on the top of the stage. Conor finally closes the centre hole of the stage. Sudden light changes. Silence. Conor finds himself in front of a man.

CONOR *(frightened)* What do you want from me?

MONSTER Me? It is not what I want from you, Conor. It is what you want from me, Conor.

CONOR I don't want anything from you.

MONSTER Not yet. But you will.

CONOR Who are you?

MONSTER I do not often come walking, boy, only for matters of life and death. I am here because you called me.

CONOR I didn't call you.

MONSTER You are afraid, aren't you?

CONOR I've seen worse.

MONSTER Well yeah. I will tell you three stories…

CONOR What? You are going to tell me stories??

MONSTER And when I have finished my three stories, you will tell me the fourth.

CONOR I hate stories.

MONSTER It's a pity, since yours will be the truth.

CONOR The truth? What truth?

MONSTER Your truth. The one that you hide, Conor, that you're most afraid of. Your nightmare.

Pause.

CONOR No. I won't.

MONSTER You will tell it. For this is why you called me after all.

CONOR I told you already: I didn't call you!

MONSTER I know about you.

CONOR What do you know about anything?

MONSTER Everything. I know what's in your head.

CONOR If you did, you'd know I don't have time to listen to stupid stories from some brainless tree that isn't even real. Monsters are for bed-wetters anyway.

MONSTER *(together with Conor)* …for bed-wetters anyway. *(patronizing, laughing)*

CONOR *(shouting)* Go away!

MONSTER I've come to get you, Conor. No escape! *(exits)*

CONOR Leave me alone!

SCENE 6 – GRANDMA

Sound of throwing up from behind the door. In the background lights up: the mother falls on her knees, throwing up. The mother looks up with fear and starts crying from pain. She is trying to reach Conor with her hand. Conor is trying to go close to her, but he feels paralysed. Grandma runs to help her daughter.

CONOR Mum!

GRANDMA I'm here, I'm here. I'm giving you the medicine. Take a deep breath, Lizzy!

CONOR Mum!

GRANDMA Go back to your room, Conor! *(to Lizzy)* Hold on! Deep breaths! Look at me! Lizzy! Here you go. It's okay.

The Mother calms down slowly; she seems to be falling asleep. Grandma leaves her alone, enters the room.

GRANDMA Conor! You and I need to have a talk. Why don't you put the kettle on for me? Two sugars, no milk, you know it, don't you.

The Puppeteer turns on the kettle.

GRANDMA I am not your enemy, Conor. We need to talk about what's going to…

CONOR No, we don't. She'll be better tomorrow. And then you can go home.

GRANDMA She'll seem better tomorrow, but she... She needs to talk about this with you.

CONOR Talk to me about what?

GRANDMA About you coming to live with me.

CONOR I'm never going to live with you.

GRANDMA Yes, you are. I'm sorry, but you are. It's important for you to know that when this is all over, you've got a home, my boy.

CONOR When this is over, you'll leave and we'll be fine, Grandma.

GRANDMA She should have talked about this with you a long time ago.

CONOR I'm never going to live with you. *(pushes out Grandma)*

GRANDMA I'm sorry, but you are. *(leaves)*

The kettle gets loud.

SCENE 7 – FIRST TALE (THE CHEATING PRINCE)

The Monster turns the kettle off. Clock changes to 12:07.

MONSTER It's time for the first tale.

CONOR I told, you, I don't have time to listen to stupid stories.

MONSTER It's a pity, since my first story is of a wicked queen and how I made sure she was never seen again.

CONOR What's that got to do with me?

MONSTER In more ways than you think.

CONOR Okay. Go ahead.

The Monster steps on the stage with a doll's house.

MONSTER Long ago… *(music starts)* before this was a town with roads and

trains and cars, this was a kingdom.

CONOR What? Here? *(music stops)* We don't even have a McDonald's here.

MONSTER Nevertheless, it was a kingdom that had been forced to ride into battles with dragons, giants and black wolves, wizards to preserve the peace.

Heroic music continues, light changes.

CONOR This is all sounding pretty fairy tale-ish.

MONSTER You would not say that if you heard the screams of the man killed by a spear, or his cries of terror…

CONOR Ok, carry on.

MONSTER Be quiet! The victory came at price. All the princes of the kingdom fell, leaving the king…

An actor's 'big' face – wearing the king's mask on his nape – appears in the window of the castle (doll's house).

MONSTER …only one heir, his infant orphaned grandson, who was raised as a prince.

The actor turns around, showing his/ own (the 'prince's) head.

MONSTER He was nearly a man when his grandfather took a new wife. She was young and fair.

A lady's head (the animator of the Grandma's puppet) appears in the castle's next window. The king turns towards her.

CONOR Can we finally get to the point?

MONSTER These were happy days for the kingdom. The battles were over, and the future seemed secure in the hands of the brave young prince.

CONOR But… *(stands up)*

MONSTER But the king died with still a year before his grandson would be old enough to take the throne.

The actor takes off the king's mask and drops it on the floor.

MONSTER So, by law, the queen, his step-grandmother, became regent.

The king's widow puts on the crown.

MONSTER A rumour began to spread that the king was being poisoned by his wife. *(takes out the medicine from her pocket she gave to her daughter earlier)*

CONOR What a surprise… So how did you get rid of her?

MONSTER Wait! The prince, meanwhile, had fallen in love.

CONOR *(gives up)* Ok. That's enough. I thought this story was going to be good. Stupid princes are always falling in love in fairytales.

MONSTER As I was trying to say he had fallen in love with a farmer's daughter. She was beautiful, and also smart. The kingdom smiled on the match.

A female actress (the animator of the Mother's puppet) steps in wearing a long wig.

MONSTER The queen, however, was rather enjoying being queen. And what better way to remain so, than to marry the prince herself.

CONOR That's disgusting! She was his grandmother!

MONSTER Step-grandmother. Not related by blood.

CONOR That's just wrong. *(pretends to be gagging)*

MONSTER The prince thought the same. One night the prince and the farmer's daughter ran away from the kingdom, stopping only in the evening to sleep in the shade of a giant yew tree.

CONOR That's you, right?

The farmer's daughter lies down on the floor. She gets under a blanket. The Prince is

beside her.

MONSTER They slept through the night. The prince awoke: “Arise, my beloved”. But the farmer's daughter did not stir... And the prince noticed the blood.

CONOR Blood?

The Monster pours a red ribbon out of the teacup.

MONSTER Someone had killed his beloved in the night.

CONOR What?

MONSTER "The Queen" he cried. "The queen has murdered my bride." The villagers, full of fury and vengeance, rose up against the crime. It was then that I came walking. The queen was never seen again.

CONOR Good. She deserved it. Now, I don't suppose you can help me with my grandma.

MONSTER The story is not yet finished. I took the queen and carried her far enough away so that the townspeople would never find her... to a village by the sea, where she began a new life.

The widow queen exits, leaving the crown behind.

CONOR But she murdered the farmer's daughter. How can you possibly save a murderer? You really are a monster.

MONSTER I never said she killed the farmer's daughter. I only said that the prince said it was so.

CONOR So who killed her then?

The Monster continues the demonstration.

MONSTER The prince never fell asleep that night... but waited for the farmer's daughter to be lost in her dreams... and then began his real plan. He killed the farmer’s daughter.

CONOR What? The prince? *(Noticing ‘blood’ on his the ‘prince’s’ hands)*

MONSTER He knew her death would start a fire that would consume the queen entire. So he can be the king.

The prince covers the farmer's daughter with the blanket.

CONOR That's a terrible story. And a cheat.

MONSTER It's a true story. Many things that are true feel like a cheat. When he said that the queen had murdered his bride, he believed, in his own way, that it was actually true. It may surprise you to learn, sometimes people need to lie to themselves most of all.

CONOR Is that supposed to be the lesson of all this? That I should be nice to my grandma?

MONSTER You think I tell you stories to teach you lessons?

CONOR Did the prince ever get caught?

MONSTER No. He became a much beloved king... who ruled happily until the end of his long days.

CONOR I really don't get it. Who is the good guy here then?

MONSTER There is not always a good guy, Conor... nor is there always a bad one. Most people are somewhere in between.

CONOR So how is this all meant to save me from grandma?

MONSTER It is not her you need saving from.

CONOR So, what is it then?

Silence. The Monster leaves, he takes the doll's house, too.

CONOR So, what is that then? You're gone?

Conor turns away with annoyance.

MUM *(waking up, coming out from under the blanket – this time the puppet)* Conor! Keep an eye on the yew tree for me while I'm away, will you? Make sure it's still here when I get back.

CONOR I will.

Conor goes to his mum, sits beside her.

MUM Listen, Conor.

CONOR I suppose this is going to be another round of "We Need To Have A Talk".

MUM This latest treatment's not doing what it's supposed to. All that means is they're going to have to adjust it, try something else.

CONOR Is that it?

MUM That's it.

CONOR You're sure?

MUM I'm sure.

CONOR Because… you could tell…

MUM Don't worry. We've been here before. I've felt really bad, and I've gone in and they've taken care of it. That's what'll happen this time too. So, keep an eye on the yew tree for me while I'm away, will you?

CONOR *(rather annoyed)* I will. But why is this yew tree so important to you?

MUM Well, if you can believe it, this new drug is actually made from yew trees.

CONOR Yew trees?

MUM Yeah. The green things of the world are just wondrous, aren't they? We work so hard to get rid of them when sometimes they're the very things that save us.

Conor gets under the blanket too.

MUM Oh, Con, you should be in your own bed, Con.

CONOR Five minutes.

MUM That is not true.

CONOR Yes, it is.

MUM Come on, Con.

CONOR Just five minutes. I promise. Five minutes. Tell me more about the yew tree.

MUM Once upon a time, there was a great yew tree that rose from the centre of the graveyard. One night a cloud moved in front of the moon, covering the whole landscape in darkness. One could hear the creaking and the cracking of wood. Then the cloud passed, and the moon shone again. And there was the monster. Its branches twisted around one another until they formed arms and legs. The needle-like leaves gathered themselves into a great and terrible face.

CONOR Mum, monsters are for babies. Monsters are for bed-wetters. I'm too old for monsters. 'Night, 'night, Mum.

MUM *(stroking his hair)* "The battles are not over yet, but the future seems secure in the hands of the brave young prince."

The Mother slips out from under the blanket, puts a key with a red ribbon beside him.

MUM "The victory will come at price. Arise, my beloved." (leaves)

Conor wakes up in shock.

SCENE 8 – THE CLOCK

Classical music. The actors place a big silver tray packed with precious China cups, plates and an alarm clock on the stage.

PUPPETEER Conor's grandma drove him to school, and she was also waiting for him every day after school when he left, taking them both straight to the hospital to see his mum. They usually stayed for an hour or so, and then went home to his Grandma's house, which was cleaner than his mum's hospital room. Grandma's sitting room was one of those sitting rooms where no one ever actually sat. The whole room was like a museum.

The stage is covered with a white tablecloth. Conor is holding the key with the red ribbon, Grandma pours tea. Sound of clock ticking.

GRANDMA I should get going back to the hospital.

Conor turns around with surprise.

GRANDMA Don't stand there, gawping, young man. Your Dad'll be here soon.
CONOR I wasn't gawping.
GRANDMA Your dearest father may not notice how tired your mum's been getting. So, we're going to have to work together to make sure he doesn't overstay his welcome. *(silence)* I'm going now. *(silence)* And don't meddle with the grandfather clock. It's very precious; it belonged to your great-grandmother.

Conor moves away from the clock.

GRANDMA And don't touch anything.
CONOR I will do my very best not to.
GRANDMA No need for your father to think I'm keeping you in a pigsty.
CONOR Not much chance of that.
GRANDMA Go up to your room and wait for your father there.
CONOR That's not my room.
GRANDMA Be good. *(exits)*

Sound of clock ticking. Conor slowly walks close to the clock, checks it, and even if he touches it very gently, a part breaks off. Conor jumps back from fright. He is trying to fix it in panic.

FATHER *(voice from the side)* Hey, son!

SCENE 9 – AMERICA

Cheerful country music. A big suitcase slides into the room. A smiley floppy cowboy-puppet pops out of it.

CONOR Dad!

FATHER Hey, son!

CONOR Dad!

FATHER It's good to see you! So, how are you holding up, Con?

CONOR I'm fine.

FATHER Great! Good to see you!

CONOR Mum's on this new medicine. It'll make her better.

FATHER She is a fighter, isn't she?

CONOR Usually she goes to the hospital every two weeks.

FATHER You're going to need to be brave for her, Con.

CONOR Why is everyone acting as if...? *(stands up with anger)*

FATHER How are you holding up? I can't wait for you to meet your sister.

CONOR Half-sister.

FATHER She is doing well. Really cute. Almost walking.

CONOR Great!

FATHER So, how are you holding up, Con?

CONOR You've asked me already. I'm fine.

FATHER Sorry. Sorry, my son. *(looks at him)*

CONOR I thought it was a dream at first.

FATHER What do you mean?

CONOR The yew tree beside the house. That's been visiting me.

FATHER Oh, yeah. We'll have to arrange for a visit soon.

CONOR And tells me stories.

FATHER Would you like that?

CONOR It hasn't come to Grandma's house yet. For five days now.

FATHER What do you think, Con?

CONOR But it'll heal her. I know it will.

FATHER Oh, yeah, New York is New York! Would you like to come?

CONOR Of course! Can I really come to New York? To yours?

FATHER Sure! For the Christmas holidays.

CONOR So you mean just for a visit then?

FATHER Yeah, but it would be great, wouldn't it?

CONOR I don't want to live with grandma. Can't even leave a mess for two seconds.

FATHER Conor, I know, but...

CONOR She's so strict.

FATHER Conor, listen...

CONOR I want to come and live with you.

FATHER It would be unfair to just take you out of your home.

CONOR Unfair to who?

FATHER I wish it was different too.

CONOR Why can't I come and live with you in New York?

FATHER Your family, your life, your friends...

CONOR Grandma's house is like a museum.

FATHER …all of it is here. This way is best. You'll see.

CONOR That's what everyone says. As if it means anything.

Pause.

FATHER What was all that you were saying about that tree?

CONOR How long are you here for?

FATHER *(looks at the clock)* Just a few days, I'm afraid.

CONOR That's all? Why bother coming at all?

FATHER I came because your mum asked me to.

CONOR What about Mum? *(jumps up)*

FATHER I'll come back, though. You know, when I need to.

CONOR Why did you come?

FATHER And you'll visit us at Christmas! That'll be good fun.

CONOR Why did you come?

FATHER You're going to need to be brave for her, Con.

Conor shuts down the top of the suitcase, and then kicks the suitcase several times.

CONOR *(shouting)* Why did you come?

He is panting, helpless. Clock-ticking again. Conor looks at the grandfather clock; he goes close to it, breaks one hand off. The clock changes to 12:07.

MONSTER As destruction goes, that was remarkably pitiful.

Conor jumps back. Light changes.

SCENE 10 – THE SECOND TALE (BELIEF IS HALF OF HEALING)

MONSTER I have come to tell you the second tale.

CONOR I already told you, I am not interested in stupid tales. Stories aren't real. They don't help anything.

MONSTER Stories are wild creatures, Conor. When you let them loose, who knows what havoc they might wreak?

CONOR Speak! Can you heal her?

MONSTER The yew tree is a healing tree.

CONOR That's not really an answer. Can you cure her? Answer!

MONSTER It is not up to me.

CONOR The medicine made from yew trees, right?

MONSTER Right. Its healing impact has been discovered a long time ago.

The Monster pours some red berries in the centre of the stage.

CONOR You're making that up.

MONSTER You dare to question me, boy?

CONOR No. I'd just never heard that before.

MONSTER It can cure almost any ailment man suffers from, mixed and treated by the right apothecary.

CONOR The right what?

MONSTER Apothecary. Apothecary is an old-fashioned name for a chemist.

CONOR So, why didn't you just say that?

MONSTER This second story is about a man… *(moves the teacups)*

CONOR Don't touch those! You're gonna break them!

MONSTER *(continues)* …who thought only of himself. And he gets punished very, very badly indeed.

Industrial sounds from the background. The Monster is leaning on a walking stick.

The Monster turns the silver tray around, its shadow on the door. The small cups and plates appear to be a model layout of a city.

MONSTER One hundred and fifty years ago... the future came. Factories grew like weeds. The sky choked on smoke and ash.

Smoke covers the stage, light changes.

MONSTER But there was still green to be found if you knew where to look. Along the edge of this green lived a stubborn man. *(bows as the Apothecary)*

CONOR *(looking at him)* 'A pot of curry', or what.

MONSTER The apothecary. Who refused to change. He dealt with the old ways of medicine... herbs and barks and concoctions brewed from berries. There was a church in the city. And beside the church there was an ancient yew tree.

CONOR I knew it.

MONSTER There was a young parson in this church who preached against the apothecary.

The Monster points at Conor. He gets a white collar.

MONSTER The apothecary wanted to cut down the yew tree *(lifts up the stick)* to harvest its goods, but the parson would not allow him. The apothecary's business sank, which only made him grow bitter.

An actress wearing a winged bonnet steps in. She lifts up two pieces of girl-shaped gingerbread and lets them swing on her fingers.

MONSTER The parson and his wife were caring, loving parents who would've done anything for their two daughters. But one day both little girls were struck by a terrible sickness... and nothing the parson did helped. No cure from the more modern doctors, no prayer, nothing. There was no choice but to approach the apothecary.

CONOR *(as the parson)* “Will you help my daughters?”

MONSTER *(as the apothecary)* “Why should I? You have driven away my business with your preachings... and you have refused me the yew tree, my best source of healing.”

CONOR *(as the parson)* “You may have the yew tree, I will preach sermons in your favour. I will do anything if only you will save my daughters.”

MONSTER *(as the apothecary)* “Would you give up everything you believe in?”

CONOR *(as the parson)* “If it would save them, I would give up everything.” *(tears off the collar)*

MONSTER *(as the apothecary)* “Then… there's nothing I can do to help you.”

CONOR What?

MONSTER The very next day both of the parson’s daughters died.

The parson’s wife smashes the two gingerbread dolls at each other: they break into pieces. She starts weeping / sobbing.

CONOR You’re a monster!

MONSTER And that night I came walking. *(takes off the coat)*

CONOR Good. This guy deserves all the punishment he gets.

MONSTER Indeed. It was shortly after midnight... that I broke the house of the parson into pieces. *(lifts the stick)*

CONOR The parson? What are you talking about? This bastard apothecary was the evil one.

MONSTER He was greedy and rude, but he was still a great healer.

CONOR Really? He refused to help heal the parson’s daughters. And they died.

MONSTER The parson, what was he? A man of faith without faith. Belief is half of all healing. Belief in the cure, belief in the future that awaits. Your belief is precious... so you must be careful where you put it and in whom. He sacrificed his belief at the first challenge.

CONOR So? So would anyone!

MONSTER He believed selfishly and fearfully. And it took the lives of his daughters. *(smashes the top of tray with the stick)*

CONOR So, is this a story of punishment?

MONSTER This is a story of a man punished for his selfishness. Don't you want to join in?

CONOR What?

MONSTER It is most satisfying, I can assure you. Join in! Punish! Break something if you feel so!

Conor is hesitating for a while, and then smashes the cups and plates.

MONSTER That's it. Yes. Feels good, doesn't it?

CONOR Yeah.

MONSTER Tell me. What should we destroy?

CONOR *(pause, and then quietly)* Everything.

Conor lifts the stick... Blackout. Terrible loud noise.

SCENE 11 – SCREAM

Light comes back again. Smashed cups and plates everywhere, the alarm clock is in pieces. Grandma is standing at the other end of the stage. She starts walking slowly among the ruins.

CONOR Grandma. Grandma. Grandma, please... Grandma.

Grandma lifts a piece of the broken clock.

CONOR I am so sorry, Grandma.

Grandma is about to leave without saying a word. Conor stands there beyond shock.

CONOR You're not even going to punish me?

GRANDMA What would be the point, Conor? *(with understanding in her voice)* Destruction is very satisfying.

The puppeteer of the Grandma puppet throws away the (her) frame.

GRANDMA There is nowhere to run. No time to escape to somewhere she wouldn't find you.

Grandma sits down on the ruins.

PUPPETEER Her mouth trembled and shook, as if she was fighting back tears. And then she groaned, deep in her chest. She put her palms over her mouth, and then she screamed. Inside.

Light changes. In the background Conor's mum appears pushing an IV stand.

CONOR Mum! You have to get out of here! Mum, you have to run!
MUM I'm fine darling. There is nothing to worry about.
CONOR Mum, run, please!
MUM But, darling, there's nothing to worry about.
CONOR I'm too weak, much too weak.
MUM I know.
CONOR This is only a nightmare.
MUM *(stops for a second, turns to Conor)* Will you help me, Conor?
CONOR I will. I promise.
MUM *(smiling)* I'm falling!

A loud scream surrounds the space. Sound of wind, and a low sound. The room disappears through the central hole. Black out.

SCENE 12 – SAPLING

Spotlight on a sapling growing out of the centre hole. Conor checks it out from up close, but then the puppeteer puts down the puppet, looks at the sapling from up close himself too. He uses a flashlight to create a giant shadow of the sapling on the door.

CONOR The Monster is only a dream. Obviously. A stupid dream. The

medicine made from yew tree, that's what matters. Medicine that can properly cure her. Yeah, the monster can't be real, (*changes his mind)* unless it came here for a reason, to heal mum.

RESEARCHER *(appears in the background, talking to Mum)* The medicine interferes with microorganisms that invade the body, destroys abnormal cells. It attacks the bad cells directly and slows their growth and spread. Furthermore, it may cut off the supply of oxygen and nutrients to the bad cells that would kill them all. *(disappears)*

CONOR The treatment must have worked, and the yew tree has cured her. Better to say the Monster had done it.

Conor picks up one berry from the tree that is tied to the next one by a thin thread, and that as well to another etc. He pulls out a necklace of berries.

CONOR I know it for sure. Please! Please!

SCENE 13 – PUNISHMENT (THE THIRD STORY)

Conor's father appears in the suitcase again. Light changes.

FATHER Hey, buddy.

CONOR Dad.

FATHER That's quite a mess you made, son. I can see how upset you are.

CONOR Sorry.

FATHER Don't worry about it. Worse things happen at sea.

CONOR What? You aren't going to punish me either*? (straightens up)*

FATHER What would be the point, Con?

Pause.

CONOR Listen, this new medicine your mum's taking it's going to make her well.

FATHER No, Conor, It probably isn't.

CONOR Yes, it is.

Mum enters. Conor runs to her with excitement.

CONOR Mum! It will cure you. I know it. The new medicine. Believe me!

FATHER I'm sorry, but things have moved too fast.

CONOR *(to his father)* It'll cure her. I know it will. *(to his mother)* "Belief is half healing…"

MUM If you say so.

CONOR "Belief in the cure, belief in the future that awaits."

FATHER You must know what's really happening.

CONOR *(to his father)* What do you know about it?

FATHER Conor, Things the doctors have tried haven't worked like they had hoped.

CONOR *(to his mother)* It will cure you. I know it. It is the reason it came. It has to…

MUM Reason what came?

CONOR The Monster… At first, I thought it was a dream, but there is always...

FATHER Conor, your mum…

CONOR She's going to be okay. This new medicine is the secret. I'm telling you; I know. So, go back to your other family and we'll be fine here without you. Because this is going to work.

FATHER Con, no…

CONOR Yes, it is. It's going to work.

FATHER Son, stories don't always have happy endings.

Conor closes the suitcase.

MUM I'm sorry you have to face this... This is too much to ask of you. It's unfair and cruel. But you are brave, I know it. You are really brave, darling.

The animators of the Father puppet and of the Mum puppet leave the stage. The

puppets stay still.

CONOR Dad! Mum!

Silence.

CONOR Mum! Dad! Mum!

HARRY What do you want me to do to you, King Con?

Harry is on the side of the stage staring at Conor.

HARRY You swan around school acting like you're so different, like no one knows your suffering. *(silence)* What do you want me to do to you? Spit it out!

CONOR *(quietly)* Just do it! *(kneels down waiting to be hit)* Just do it!

HARRY Do what? Say it! Out loud, King Con! *(acting as if he finally understands him)* You want me to beat you into the ground again? To kick your arse? Is that right? Is that really what you want? Correct?

CONOR *(kneels back)* What are you waiting for?

HARRY I think I've finally figured you out, King Con. I know your big secret.

CONOR Shut up!

HARRY All you're looking for is someone to punish you. But you know what? I'm not that guy anymore. I no longer see you.

CONOR *(lifts up his head)* You don't see me?

HARRY No. I don't. No one here does. When I look at you, I see nothing. Now you're invisible to me too, King Con. *(turns away)* Invisible. *(stays still)*

Clock changes to 12:07.

MONSTER I guess you beg in vain for punishment here, Conor.

CONOR Shut up!! I want to know what's going to happen with my Mum!

MONSTER Do you not know already?

PUPPETEER You said you were a tree of healing. I need you to heal!

MONSTER And so I shall! It's time for the third tale.

CONOR Enough of your stupid tales!

MONSTER There was once an invisible man... who had grown tired of being unseen. It was not that he was actually invisible. It was just the people had become used to not seeing him.

CONOR I'm not invisible!

MONSTER He kept wondering if no one sees you... Are you really there at all?

CONOR I'm not invisible! Did you hear me?

MONSTER One day, the invisible man couldn't stand it anymore.

CONOR I'm not invisible! (shouting) I'm not invisible!

PUPPETEER *(puts down the puppet, talks to Harry)* I'm not invisible! *(goes to Father puppet)* I'm not invisible! *(goes to Mum puppet)*

Nobody moves except the Puppeteer. The Puppeteer takes the Monster's mask of and moves like a monster. Throws away the suitcase, breaks the Harry puppet and then he holds on to Conor puppet, and lies down. Light changes.

GRANDMA *(only her voice from outside)* I don't even know what to say to you, Conor. You sent Harry to hospital. His parents are threatening to sue.

PUPPETEER It wasn't me.

GRANDMA Conor, an entire school saw you hitting Harry. They saw you knocking him down, pushing him over a table.

CONOR It wasn't me. *(muttering to himself)*

GRANDMA I can understand how angry you must be.

CONOR *(muttering)* I'm not angry.

GRANDMA You know that school rules dictate immediate expulsion.

CONOR *(with relief)* Will they then expel me?

GRANDMA No. *(pause)* The headmistress said she won't do that to you.

CONOR Are they not going to punish me at all?

GRANDMA What could possibly be the point, Conor? *(pause)* We will talk about this one day, but not today. I have to go back to the hospital

right now.

CONOR When is she going to come home?

GRANDMA We have no time to waste. *(leaves)*

CONOR When is she going to come home? *(louder)* When is she going to come home? *(louder)* When is she going to come home?

SCENE 14 – LIE

Mum steps in, this time the animator.

MUM Hi, son. How are you doing, sweetheart?

CONOR I suppose this is the “We Need To Have A Talk”, isn't it?

MUM Con... I spoke to the doctor this morning.

PUPPETEER Conor saw that the smile didn’t match her eyes. She was happy to see him, but she was frightened, too.

MUM The new treatment, it's...

PUPPETEER She was more tired than he’d ever seen her.

MUM ...it's not working.

CONOR The one from the yew tree?

MUM Yeah.

CONOR How can it not be working?

MUM Things just happen fast. Faster than they thought.

CONOR How can it not be working?

MUM *(holds on to Conor puppet as if it was her son)* I don't know. Looking at that yew tree every day, it felt like I had a friend out there who’d help me.

CONOR But it didn’t. *(takes back the puppet)* So what happens now? What's going to be the next treatment?

MUM *(slowly lifts the Mum puppet)* I'm so sorry. I've never been more sorry about anything in my life, my sweetheart.

CONOR You said it would work.

MUM I know.

CONOR *(shouting)* You said it would work! You said it would work!

The Puppeteer lets the puppet lie beside the sapling.

PUPPETEER *(shouting)* You said it would work! *(undecided whether it's addressed to the mother or to the Monster)* You lied!

The Puppeteer drops down the mask of the Monster, pulls out the sapling and leaves.

MUM It's okay that you're angry, Con. It really is. I'm pretty angry too, to tell you the truth. But...

PUPPETEER *(undecided whether it's addressed to the mother or to the Monster)* You have been lying the whole time.

MUM I think, deep in your heart, you've always known what will happen, haven't you?

PUPPETEER Where are you? You said it would work! You lied! You lied! You said the yew tree would cure her, but it didn't! It didn't work! Cure her! You have to cure her! What's the use of you if you can't cure her?

MUM One day... if you look back and you feel bad for being so angry, you have to know that was okay. And if you need to break things... By God, you break them. Break them good and hard. And I'll be right there. I wish I had a hundred years. A hundred years I could give to you.

The clock changes to 12:07, the Monster enters.

PUPPETEER I called you to save her! I called you to cure my Mum!

MONSTER I did not come to heal her. I came to heal you.

PUPPETEER Me? I don't need healing. My mum's the one who's… *(takes the puppet again)*

CONOR My mum's… *(pause, and then he puts down the puppet, quietly)* Help me!

MONSTER It's time for the fourth tale. For your tale.

SCENE 15 – THE FOURTH TALE

The Puppeteer hesitates.

MONSTER Let's start!

PUPPETEER *(slowly, back to the starting point)* It begins like so many stories with a boy too old to be a kid, too young to be a man.

He is trying to repeat the action from the start of the play with little enthusiasm.

CONOR Not long ago, a boy lived at the edge of the city, beside the graveyard, the one with a giant yew tree. His name was Conor, but everybody called him by his nickname King Con, because his favourite film was about the famous giant gorilla King Kong, which freaked out half of the world.

MONSTER This is all sounding pretty fairytale-ish so far.

PUPPETEER He had lived with his mother alone together since his father vamoosed to New York to his new family. Although he was only thirteen, he did all things for himself: breakfast, washing his clothes, bringing out the rubbish.

MONSTER Can we finally get to the point?

PUPPETEER The day… that day, after his mum needed to have a little talk with him, everything has changed. Until then everything seemed possible, but after that he felt like a secret mark had been placed on him. It felt like his life he liked with his mum became only a life that 'used to be'. He forced himself not to show...

MONSTER But…

PUPPETEER But Conor started having nightmares. Real ones, that he would never tell another living soul about. (pause) And he would never tell another living soul about.

The Puppeteer stands up and let the Connor puppet down.

PUPPETEER Go away!

MONSTER If you don't tell it, I shall have to tell your nightmare for you. *(pause)* Tell me, what do you feel?

PUPPETEER / CONOR *(closes his eyes)* I feel that my lungs are filling with blackness, my stomach is beginning to fall.

MONSTER Carry on! What do you see?

PUPPETEER / CONOR The sun has disappeared. Cold darkness everywhere.

MONSTER What else do you see?

PUPPETEER / CONOR The hill, the church, the graveyard and the yew tree.

Mum (puppet) enters. She looks very weak, skinny.

PUPPETEER / CONOR *(still with closed eyes)* Mum, you have to run! Hurry up!

MUM I'm fine, darling!

PUPPETEER You have to get out of here!

MUM But, darling…

PUPPETEER No! No! That's not my truth! That's just a nightmare! Go away! *(lies down)*

MONSTER Carry on! *(pause)* If you don't tell it, I shall have to carry on for you. *(grabs the Conor puppet)* Conor's Mum stops next to the yew tree. Behind her the ground began to collapse away, almost like a whirlpool, whipping everything into it, along with blackness and dust. Conor starts to run for her. But the ground continues to collapse, dropping her into the gaping hole. Conor reaches her, grabbing onto her, but she starts to slip from Conor's grasp holding her there. She's pulling away from his hands, from his fingers.

PUPPETEER Stop it!

MONSTER Conor is trying to hold on…, but she falls. The hole takes her and she falls away, her white dress a light in the darkness.

There is a low sound, rumbling, booming noise. The Mum's puppet slowly starts leaking out dust. Connor is trying to stop the leaking, but he is too weak. He gives it up. The Mum puppet shrinks, and slowly disappears into the hole in the centre of the stage. Conor rushes to close the hole. Sudden light changes. Silence all at once.

PUPPETEER She falls because I cannot hold onto her anymore. That's the moment when I wake up screaming every night.

MONSTER Conor. Speak the truth.

PUPPETEER What truth? This is just a nightmare. *(takes his puppet back)*

MONSTER You must tell the truth, or you will be trapped in this nightmare for the rest of your life.

PUPPETEER Please don't make me say it.

MONSTER You could have held on for longer, but you let her fall. You wanted her to go. Why?

Long pause. The Puppeteer holds the puppet in his hand.

CONOR I can't stand knowing she will go. I wanted it to be over. That's why I let her fall. I let her die every night… in my nightmare.

Pause.

PUPPETEER I deserve punishment. I deserve the worst. I've known forever that she wasn't going to make it. She kept telling me she was getting better all the time... because that's what I wanted to hear. And I believed her. Except I didn't. I started to think how much I… I wanted it to be over. I wanted to stop having to think about it. I couldn't stand the waiting anymore. I couldn't stand how alone it made me feel. I wanted her to die. But I didn't mean it, though.

MONSTER I know. How can a prince be a murderer and beloved by his people? How can an apothecary be tempted by evil, but right thinking? How can invisible men make themselves lonelier by being seen? You were willing to die rather than say what you were wishing secretly for a long time.

PUPPETEER So what do I do?

The Monster takes the puppet.

MONSTER The tale is not yet told.

SCENE 16 – THE TRUTH

MONSTER Conor followed his grandma on automatic to the hospital. He didn't dare ask why they were hurrying.

Grandma stands beside Conor.

GRANDMA You know, Conor, you and me? Not the most natural fit, are we?
CONOR I guess not.
GRANDMA But we have something in common.
CONOR We do?
GRANDMA You mum.

The animators bring in the Mum puppet; they give it to the Puppeteer. The Puppeteer holds in his arms what remains of the body of the Mum puppet. The clock shows 12:05 on the top of the stage.

PUPPETEER The room was mostly dark. Her eyes were closed, and her breathing sounded like there was a weight on her chest.

The three puppets (Conor, Grandma and Mum) are close to each other.

GRANDMA I'm here, darling. Conor's here too.
PUPPETEER "I'm here, Mum." said Conor. His mum didn't say anything, just reached out the hand closest to her. He could see his grandma leaning over her daughter. Her mouth trembled and shook, as if she was fighting back tears. She put her palms over her mouth, and then she screamed. Inside. "I'm afraid." Conor said.
MONSTER Of course you are. All you have to do is tell the truth.
PUPPETEER One minute before 12:07. Conor knew that it was going to happen whatever he wanted. And he also knew he was going to get through it. It would be terrible, beyond terrible, but he'd survive. He looked at his mum's outstretched hand, and he slowly took it. "I don't want you to go."

MUM I know, my love.

PUPPETEER Conor held tightly onto his mother. And by doing so, he could finally let her go. Here is the end of the tale.

The clock changes to 12:07. The Mum puppet dies in the Puppeteer's hands.

Everyone leaves. The puppeteer closes the box (stage) using the red-ribbon key to lock it. On the front cover of the box is a painted picture of King Kong clinging on the top of a skyscraper holding a lady tight with his hand stopping her from falling.

Lights fade out.

4.6. Notes on work in progress of the adaptation of *Orphalina*

The source material of the second adaptation that serves as the basis of my research is Zsigmond Móricz's short novel, *Orphalina*[181], which is considered a cult novel of Hungarian literature. Since the novel is little known outside Hungary, I will provide some context in this chapter to facilitate understanding of my analysis of the stage adaptation. With this goal in mind, I will briefly summarise the origins of the work, its reception, and its afterlife. In order to make clear the differences between the adaptation and the novel, I will briefly outline the novel's storyline, paying special attention to details that were relevant in the stage version. I will also highlight a few motifs from the novel that gained importance in the theatrical version.

4.6.1. Origin of the novel, Author

Zsigmond Móricz (1879-1942) was a Hungarian author, journalist, editor, and one of the most significant figures of twentieth-century realist prose in Hungarian literature. He excelled at the portrayal of life in rural and small towns, along with truthful representations of injustice and contradictions in society. Countless works of his are not only part of the Hungarian literary canon but continue to have an impact to this day and inspire new interpretations. *Árvácska* (*Orphalina*) is one of his later novels and occupies a special place in his oeuvre in many ways.[182] Its genre is considered both sociographic fiction and non-fiction because the novel was based on a series of interviews, he conducted with an orphan girl. Móricz met the subject of the novel, the 20-year-old childlike woman Erzsébet Littkey, in 1936 as she was preparing to attempt suicide by jumping off one of the bridges in Budapest. The writer took the woman in and later – under circumstances that have never been fully clarified – lived with her until his death. Between 1936 and 1937, he wrote 28 short stories based on her unbearable life, which were published in serials in the literature magazine *Kelet Népe* in 1940. The novel version was published in 1941.[183]

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[181] Original title: *Árvácska*. The novel is translated into English by Virgina L. Lewis: *Orphalina* (2020), Library Cat Publishing. There is another English translation of the title; the film (1976) version is called: *Nobody's daughter.*

[182] The literal translation of the Hungarian title' Árvácska' means 'little orphan', but the same term also refers to 'pansy'. Pronounce it as 'ærvæchkəʊ'

[183] Móricz Zsigmond: *Árvácska*, Atheneum Kiadó, Budapest, 1941

The stylistic oddity of the work – which has given rise to different readings since its publication – is that realistic, naturalistic, and even sociographic elements can be discovered in it, but at the same time, it is permeated by strong poetic features. One of the most striking aspects is that Móricz did not divide the novel into chapters but into 'Psalms'. Regarding the origin of the novel – which presents selected, almost unbelievable forms of misery and cruelty – the author wrote the following: 'Take it in hand. I think it's a horrible book, but there's not a single line of fantasy in it. I have never written a book like this before. Even the tiniest sentence of this rose from raw life itself, like sulphurous vapour from a swamp.' (Móricz, 1941, 1).[184]

As I mentioned before, the short novel is part of the school curriculum in Hungary and is, therefore, particularly widely known.[185] When preparing for the adaptation, I could, therefore, build on the plot's embeddedness in public consciousness, and that includes teenagers, too. The short novel describes children's vulnerability to mental and physical abuse, which can be read, on one hand, as a strong social criticism manifesto, on the other hand – considering its transcendental and poetic motifs – as a 'reversed profane gospel'[186] (Bozók, 2007, no page number) about eternal human suffering without redemption. Despite the cruelty of the subject, I found that young people can resonate well with the stage representation of this extreme life situation because vulnerability to adults' physical and existential dependence may be well known to them. I created the adaptation with this in mind.

4.6.2. Brief story outline

The novel begins with the description of a farm and Csöre[187], the little orphan girl, who is taken in by a poor peasant family with six children. The Dudás[188] family keeps

[184] Translated from the original Hungarian:'Tessék kézbe venni. Írtóztató köyv azt hiszem, de a fantáziának egy sora sincs benne. Ilyen könyvet még nem írtam. Ennek a legeslegkisebb mondata is magából a nyers életből szállott fel, mint a mocsárból a kénes gőz.'
[185] In Hungary, depending on the school, it is recommended or compulsory literature in the 6th, 7th and 8th grades.
[186] Translated from the original: 'Fordított profanizált evangélium'.
[187] Pronounce it as 'Ch3:re'
[188] Pronounce it as 'Dudæsh'

her only because the state pays them to foster the child. The clothes assigned to her by the state are given to her stepsisters, so Csöre is forced to walk naked in the summer and in hand-me-down clothes in the winter. She is beaten or verbally abused for every little mistake she makes, for instance, for not drinking milk, which she cannot stand. They don't enrol her in school; instead, she has to work with the animals and is sent out to the field with the cow, Boris.[189] Once, while out grazing, she takes a melon from the field, for which Mr Dudás places burning coals on her palms as punishment. Another time when she is alone in the vineyard, the drunken neighbour farmer, Kadarcs rapes her.[190] When she tells her foster mother, this is the only time she comforts the girl. She does not know that her husband also molests the child. One evening Kadarcs, dressed as a ghost, scares the hell out of the children for fun, but the drunk Mr Dudás shoots him in the yard. Following an inspection by the authorities, Csöre is transferred to another family because they find out that she hasn't been going to school and had been kept naked most of the time like an animal. Csöre learns that her given name is 'Orphalina', and the family kept her only for the money. Nonetheless, the confused child tries to escape back to her foster parents, but without success; the lady from the child protection association drags Orphalina into the city with her hands tied.

Her new home is with the rich Szennyes family.[191] They call her 'Pösze' (meaning: lispy), referring to her way of talking. She is again sent out to work in the fields and not allowed to go to school. Once, she is so hungry that she accidentally eats a dead fly from her plate. The only one who treats her well is an old man who lives on the family's bread of mercy, like a poor relative. The old man takes her to church, where the little girl tells him that her previous foster father used to molest her. The old man reports it to the gendarmes. The little girl is beaten so badly by her foster mother for talking to the gendarmes that she has to be checked by a doctor, who is told she was kicked by a cow. Mrs Szennyes poisons the old man with a glass of milk, and then she tries to poison the girl as well, but since Orphalina doesn't like milk, she wants to give it to the new-born stepbrother. The woman accuses her of wanting to kill her child, so she is taken back to the orphanage before she is placed with another family.

[189] Pronounce it as 'Borish'
[190] Pronounce it as 'Kəʊdəʊrch'
[191] Pronounce it as 'Sɛ'nɛsh'

The Verő[192] family also beats her for everything, and their spoiled daughter makes the girl's everyday life miserable for fun. She doesn't get any presents at Christmas, for which the well-fed daughter makes fun of her. Orphalina lights a candle for her dead mother in the chamber and asks her mother to take her with her. The house catches fire from the flame of the candle; she – with the whole family together – is consumed by the flames.

4.6.3. Motifs of the novel in light of the adaptation

As I alluded to earlier, the novel has several readings: the sociographical report, social-realist social criticism, and, as rendered from the Hungarian, 'fact novel'. In the following, I will cast light on the motifs beyond the story that come from a deeper, primarily stylistic analysis of the book, which formed the basis of the adaptation.

The unceasing interest in Hungarian literary history, as evidenced by countless studies, confirms my belief that this disturbingly cruel novel became a significant work that remains influential today, not only due to its unusual subject matter but mainly to its literary composition and layers.[193] Although the literary complexity of the novel likely takes a back seat to the story for young readers, I still tried to find a sophisticated theatrical form that young audiences could decode and experience. Móricz boldly mixes different stylistic features that provide a rich source for this kind of adaptation. The narrative style of the text is typically objective and descriptive – which places it closer to realism or to a sociographical report – but the sentences are often woven through with lyrical sympathy supported by rich adjectives. The opening lines of the novel are perfect examples of the use of poetic devices, like analogy, personification, or contrast:

[192] Pronounce it as 'Vɛrə'

[193] Some recent studies on *Orphalina*: Ferenc Bozók (2007) *Krisztus és Csöre*; Norbert Baranyai (2010) *„…valóságból táplálkozik, s mégis költészet"*; Miklós Takács (2009) *Ió lánya. Nemek, átváltozások, a szöveg idegensége és az idegen „szövegesedése" Móricz Zsigmond Árvácskájában;* Sabine Pap (2012) *Móricz Zsigmonds Roman Árvácska (1941) – Realität oder Fiktion?;* Kornélia Lomboš (2017) *Móricz Zsigmond Árvácskájának horrorisztikus olvasata*

> Dawn breaks on the puszta. The harsh, relentless sun nudges upward where the sky's edge meets the earth, like the underdeveloped egg of an ungainly chicken. Red and yellow rays crackle forth into the blue fog of dawn.' (...) 'Today it's still a happy farmstead.' (...) '...a diminutive wisp of a girl, beneath the immense sky… (O-N, p. 17-18)

Thanks to the richness of the description and the use of poetic images, what will later be a horrifying story starts to be elevated. Because of this, the symbolic layer of the text – which is beyond the plot – is strengthened. This is how the opening image, the description of the rising sun over the wasteland ('puszta') with an innocent little child standing in it, can become – in addition to introducing the location and the main character – a metaphor for birth. Thus, at the end of the novel, the image of the burned-down farm closes the story in a biblical framework: from creation to the apocalypse.

> Not a trace was visible that here a house had stood, and that people had lived there, and these people perished beneath the snow. Their voices perished, and their actions, the meanness perished and the cruelty. Everything grew peaceful, transformed, all life took on a different nature. Their tongues turned to ash, their insults became vapor and smoke. (O-N, p. 256)

It was decisive during the process of the stage adaptation to analyse the novel through the lens of biblical themes and poetic motifs, which we substantiated strongly in the opening and closing scenes of the production – as I will explain in detail later. Examining the novel's more profound interpretation not only goes beyond the repeated depiction of human vulnerability and cruelty but also makes it secondary. Thus, the emphasis shifts to the stages of human suffering instead of the horrendous and often unbearable presentation of misery in itself. According to this interpretation, the novel's seemingly concealed dimensions take over the narrative construction's main logic. The predominant location of the novel is the wasteland (puszta), which can be interpreted as the Hungarian desert. The desert is the location of the temptation of evil - according to the Bible, this is where Satan tempted Jesus. Therefore, the depraved, cruel people living there are not only the embodiment of a social class but also wretched plebs who have fallen under the power of evil, while the fate of the little girl shows the vulnerability of a person thrown into the wilderness. The girl's continuous nakedness also emphasises this.

The Psalms as chapter titles reinforce the Biblical context in the novel – more about that later – just as events like Easter or Christmas do. The duality of Easter – the sorrow felt over the Passion and the joy felt over the resurrection – is reflected in the scene when Orphalina goes to church with the old man at Easter and compares her fate to the sufferings of Jesus. This is one of the first signs of the girl's awakening of self-awareness; she reveals to the old man that she was sexually abused in the past. The hope for justice disappears on the same day; the old man with the 'God-beard', the only one who was kind to the girl, gets poisoned. Paradoxically, Christmas, which is the celebration of hope, is only fulfilled in the form of the purgatorial flames that burn everything. This suggests that the little girl's wish to meet her mother may come true in the afterlife. In reality, snow covers the ravages of the fire, as if it makes iniquity disappear from the face of the earth. Motifs such as the embers burned into the girl's palm (stigma) and the 'compassionate' cow (Bethlehem manger) or her head injury from the clogs (crown of thorns) underline the parallelisation of Orphalina's life with the Passion. The analysis of the novel's biblical motifs formed one of the foundations of the adaptation. My aim was not to emphasise this interpretation and the representation of these motifs on stage, thereby potentially alienating young audiences from the production. My goal was to define the underlying dimensions, the dramaturgical direction of the adaptation with some emphasised motifs that can be easily decoded in their formal appearance by all young people (e.g., Christ, Christmas, Psalm).

In addition to poetry, the novel's stylistic feature is its use of words that suggest a naturalistic, almost documentary fidelity. This is captured especially in the linguistic layers of the characters. Unfortunately, the English translation of the novel cannot reproduce exactly the style that can be read in Hungarian. Orphalina's foster parents, especially the first family, speak almost exclusively by swearing and cursing. In the original Hungarian version – in an attempt to reflect the live speech of the characters – all of this takes the form of colloquial speech and incorrect, crude expressions. These farmers find it difficult to express themselves, and sometimes, they are almost unable to verbalise their feelings and thoughts; this is reflected in the corrupted use of language. The dialects used in the novel do not represent one specific geographical territory, which indicates that Móricz saw this as a stylistic and expressive tool rather

than a verification of authenticity. The use of this extreme, sometimes dubious language became part of the adaptation as a contrast to the poetic mise en scène. It is important to note that since they are not modern swear words and expressions, they do not become 'funny' or too casual for young spectators. Rather, the hateful content of words and sentences is expressed through them.

As I mentioned, the text is descriptive in the novel; the covert narrator usually describes the events objectively as an external, covert witness. This probably reflects the author's previously mentioned working method: the novel was created based on real interviews. Another lyrical layer is the subjective point of view when the writer describes the events from the little girl's perspective, but still in third person. These parts not only help with lyricism and emotional identification but also add drama to the text. For example, when Kadarcs rapes the girl, the description uses the poetic device of reticence/silence, which is in harmony with how Orphalina captures this brutality: she does not understand what has happened to her.

> All of sudden they heard a blood-curdling scream. In this wild shenanigans the crude man heaved the child over a stake – immediately she was dripping with blood. (O-N, p. 55)

Keeping the reader in uncertainty – while one can probably guess exactly what happened – carries tension and suspense. Avoiding the precise utterance of the bestial act is also reflected in how the narrator interprets Kadarcs's deed only with the words of the little girl:

> Why are you all bloody?
> The stake poked me. (O-N, p. 56)

As seen, the little girl uses the same metaphor ('stake'), thus blurring the line between the narrator and the subject of the story. The creation of this scene – especially with regard to young audiences – required serious care. In order to avoid the naturalistic representation of the brutal act, the stage solution was inspired by the logic of the literary material analysed above.

The components of ballads and tales can also be discovered within some features of the novel: besides the magic numbers like three – she goes to three families – or seven – the novel is divided into seven psalms; perhaps the most characteristic sign is the reader's expectation of a positive ending – the hope that the little girl's story sooner or later, perhaps due to some miracle, will turn for the better and her evildoers will receive their punishment – like in fairytales. This works like a dramaturgical tool: the readers' wish in resolution keeps their engagement with the novel. Every time the reader perceives the slightest sign of hope, the expectation learned from fairytales is confirmed – such as when Orphalina is 'saved' from the first family, or when the molesting foster father kills himself, or when an investigation is launched against the murderous foster mother. Therefore, the ending of the work can give the reader the feeling of the child redeemed from her suffering rather than the tragedy of a victim who lived a terrible life and died. Although the adaptation disconnects Orphalina from the realistic environment and only shows episodes from the story, it can evoke the same reflexes and expectations for the young spectators as for the readers. They hope that the girl's fate will change for the better and that the cruel people will be punished.

4.6.4. Antecedents of the adaptation process

Below, I provide insight into the adaptation process, focusing on key aspects of the central vision of the production. To give this an accurate context, I will reflect on my previous stage adaptations of *Orphalina*, as well as the film version of the novel. Focusing on the genre of the current production, I explain why I distinguished visual thinking from text in relation to storytelling. After presenting the visual concept of the production, I will summarise the dramaturgical aspects of the script created as part of the performance. I attribute a decisive role in this to the relationship between the actor and the puppet, the use of symbols, and the role of music.

a) Principles/cornerstones of the adaptation

This is not the first time I have adapted *Orphalina* for stage.[194] Although the novel is particularly well-known among Hungarian readers, very few theatre adaptations have been made of it, which I believe – besides its extreme subject – is largely due to the novel's staging difficulties.[195] The primary reading of the novel would require a realistic representation on stage, which runs into a lot of problems. In addition to the authentic representation of the farm, the age and nudity of the young main character and a believable illustration of the bestial acts, raise many concerns from a theatrical point of view. Although the novel contains some elements of drama, the motivations of the characters are undeveloped, and the protagonist is mostly just a victim of her environment's actions. In short, the source material is seemingly alien to the stage. However, for me, due to the poetic layer of the novel combined with theatre as a rite, it is an inspiring source material offering a lot of theatricalities, which can be relevant for young audiences. As I mentioned earlier (Chapter 2.1.4.), the novel may have become recommended reading for young people partly because of the main character's age and partly because its literary complexity elevates its subject above the brutality of the basic plot. Consequently, I believed that by finding a theatrical form and language that captured the *theme* of the novel rather than the basic story with its setting, a production valid for young adult audiences could be created, which may help in their 'sensitisation' for difficult topics such as vulnerability, lack of love, emotional and physical orphanhood, and also compassion. Although the individual scenes are built on emotional involvement, the structure 'startles' the audience again and again, thereby providing an opportunity for reflection. This narrative structure is related in its form and function to Brecht's alienation effect ('V-Effekt') and epic theatre.[196]

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[194] *Árvácska* (Vörösmarty Drama School, Budapest, 2006), O-SR/1, Available here: »»; *Árvácska* (Karinthy Theatre, Budapest, 2010), O-SR/2, Available here: »» ; *Árvácska* (Ariel Theatre for Youth and Children – Târgu-Mureş, University of Arts Târgu-Mureş, 2023), O-SR, Available here: »»

[195] Apart from my adaptations the following versions are known: *Árvácska* (Dollár Papa Gyermekei, Trafó, 2019, dir: Tamás Ördög); *Árvácska remix* (Rippl-Rónai Institute of Arts and Theatre of Kaposvár Campus, dir: Péter Forgács; *Állami* (University of Arts Târgu-Mureş, 2024, dir: Péter Forgács) – previously there were only two radio-play adaptations in the Hungarian State Radio, one in 1972 (dir.: László Baksa Soós), and another one in 1973 (dir.: Mikós Cserés).

[196] Epic theatre (episches Theater) is a theatre movement in the early 20th century's Germany. The purpose of epic theatre is to force the audience to see their world as it is. Epic theatre incorporates a

b) Reflections on previous adaptations of *Orphalina* in light of the final version

Since the *Orphalina* adaptation that forms the basis of my research is nourished in many details by the previous two adaptations, I consider it essential to provide a brief insight into the main dramaturgical and theatrical decisions of the earlier versions. Among the similarities, I must first mention that all three stage versions (2006, 2010, 2023) of *Orphalina* were prepared as exam performances by acting students, the last two of which were later taken into the repertoire of a theatre. This similarity is relevant because exam productions usually require group work by a given class; that is, each of the students should have a role in the production. This circumstance undoubtedly influenced the dramaturgical work and shaped the nature of the adaptations, even in terms of the number of actors (14, 22, 5). The three versions differ significantly in many aspects, but while retaining certain motifs, they show similarities in their basic approach. All three versions do not focus on telling the novel's story on stage but instead attempt to create a theatre performance about *orphanhood* and *vulnerability* based on the narrative, emotional, symbolic and character motifs of the novel. All three are ensemble performances in which the actors – in all cases young people – change roles, so it follows that there is not one single lead actor; they also take turns in the role of the girl, Orphalina. Among the similarities, live music and choral works have a special role, and in all three versions, they give the dramaturgical pillars of the stage play. Without listing further, the similarities and differences in detail – which are of little importance in this research – I will cover the main aspects that determined the creation of these works. Since the first version involved many findings that laid the foundation for the next two, I will explain the background of these decisions in more detail.

The first version, made in 2006, was performed by high school drama students (16 years old) as part of their studies. I was primarily looking for suitable material for the group dynamics of the actors and less for their individual abilities. It was essential for me that the actors encountered themes they could relate to, such as vulnerability in an

distinct attitude of acting (named 'gestus' by Brecht): the 'epic' narration of that character by the actor. For more on this, see: Bertolt Brecht's *Kleines Organon für das Theater*.

adult world or the sense of injustice; for these reasons, I decided to work on *Orphalina* with them. In order to find their own perspective, I let the actors choose between the scenes and characters of the novel themselves. In other words, the production's selection of scenes consisted of only those episodes that reflected their interests. This is especially noteworthy because it formed the thematic foundation of the currently examined adaptation. The students' selection made it clear that we did not want to cover the entire storyline of the novel in the production but rather that the work should be about orphanhood in a broader sense. I approached the adaptation from this ethos, which directly led me to focus on the poetry and symbol system of the novel.

In ensemble-based performances, it is also important to determine the attitude of the actors as a group on stage to their functions and roles. In order to enhance dramatic force, I placed the actors' characters in a world far from the context of the novel. The aloof presentation of a noble, aristocratic company highlighted – through the extreme contrast – the misery of the story's environment. This role-play made it possible to demonstrate and 'enact' the scenes selected from the novel as separate episodes and to keep a distance from the story as a whole (as I already mentioned in relation to the young audiences). The student actors – according to their roles – portrayed a dignified company that pretended to put themselves in the role of peasants and the vulnerable girl, changing parts from episode to episode (Fig. 28).[197] According to their roles, the characters' at first distant attitude toward cruelty changed into increasing empathy during the performance.

Another element of the first production that has appeared in all three adaptations is the use of choral works. The songs were transformations of folk songs related to the story; however, they were not embedded in the dramatic situations of the performance – they were always sung as individual, separate entities. The theatrical elements like the distant acting, the individual choral works, and the episodical dramaturgy made the production similar to a post-dramatic *oratorical performance*.[198] These elements

[197] See it in Section 6. Figures.

[198] Post-dramatic theatre focuses on the performance itself, prioritising visual, physical, and sensory experiences over plot-driven storytelling. More on this, see: Hans-Thies Lehmann: *Postdramatic Theatre*, 1999

created the alternating duality of emotional involvement and keeping distance from the story.

This demonstrative performance style was far from a realistic illustration of the different situations; it was based more on symbolic signs and stylised movements, which stimulated the imagination of young performers and spectators. In this way, an inflated red balloon could become the image of the rising sun, or a green military helmet could become a melon rind. The representation of the farm environment was the result of the soundscape produced by the actors: they recreated natural sounds and animal voices, as well as the sound of the cane used for beating. We used milk in the performance as a symbol of orphanhood. Orphalina does not like milk because she has never tasted breast milk; her disgust expresses the lack of the maternal bond. None of the posh characters in the show could drink the milk, even when it was poured into champagne glasses: after toasting, they all gag. This motif carried over into the second adaptation but – due to the change of genre – was completely transformed in the third, present one.

The text structure of the first production – which I broadly kept in the other two versions as well – was characterised by two fundamental aspects: fragmentation and free change of context. Details of the story, such as Orphalina being taken by three different families, were blurred; the various foster parents became a permanent, impersonal entity in a continuously changing form. Outlining the dramaturgical arc of the performance, I list the episodes adapted from the novel which shows significant similarities with the third – current – version: Dawn on the farm; Orphalina does not drink the milk, which is followed by punishment; She has to take her shirt off; She goes with the cow to the field; She fetches a watermelon for which she gets punished (burning coals in her palm); Her foster mother gives her a lecture about not possessing anything; The neighbour farmer (Kadarcs) rapes the girl, but neither she nor her step-siblings understand what happened; Her foster mother comforts her; The cow gives birth to a calf that she finds miraculous; She meets people (imagined ghosts) who scare her with a terrible story of another orphan girl; A lady from the authorities takes her from the foster family; She gets scared by dolls she finds in an unfamiliar place; At Christmas, she does not get any presents, but she needs to bring some wine from the pub; She finds the innkeeper (inspired by the old man of the novel) dead;

Orphalina is praying to the sun to meet her mother; She dies in the fire. It can be confirmed that, despite the episodic nature, Orphalina's fate emerges, even though many details mentioned in the novel have been left out of the adaptation. As I mentioned, we did not intend faithful storytelling; the chain of events chosen by the students split the girl's ordeals into sections — in other words, stages of the Passion. Since Orphalina and her ill-wishers could not be identified, the performance undoubtedly moved towards a more general interpretation of the topic. The role of the spoken speech adapted from the novel is similar in all three adaptations. As I alluded to earlier, in the vast majority of instances, the utterances do not want to give the impression of reality but exist as independent stylistic units. Certain parts are recited in a poem-like, repetitive manner, while at other times, the emphasis is on the stylistic value of the sentences illustrating varied rural accents.

The *second adaptation*, made in 2010, can be treated as a development and enrichment of the first one, from which I would highlight only a few elements that influenced the third version. The role and the presence of the bourgeois group of people on stage became more precise: they were members of a choir who performed choral works and presented the orphan girl's story with distance and frigidity. Their roles were indicated not only by their elegant attire (tuxedos and evening gowns) but also by the music sheets they held in their hands, from which they quoted not only the carols but also occasionally prose (Fig. 29).[199] This context was strengthened through the inclusion of more choral works in the performance - thirteen instead of eight - and the chapters of the production were separated from each other as musical movements. The musical construction of the performance was also emphasised by giving the movements psalm titles, each of which was announced by an actor, and the scenes were accompanied by live cymbal music.

An important change – pointing toward the third adaptation – was that the visual concept of the performance has been enriched, in which additional symbolic objects played an important role. In addition to the champagne glasses of milk, military helmets and balloons – already used in the first adaptation – muddy rubber boots, plastic fruits, medical electrodes and ashes were built into the second production.

[199] See it in Section 6. Figures.

Although none of the objects was animated by the actors in this version, they were all given a new meaning. Keeping all that in mind, the semiotic system of the production should be consistent and therefore 'readable' for young audiences. In addition to the carols, only a few new episodes from the novel were included in the second adaptation, of which just one was also incorporated in the third version – in a revived form: Orphalina goes to the church with the old man and identifies herself with Jesus. This was the only scene in which we used intertext recited by the preaching priest (whose sentences were not written in the novel). I will cover the content of the text in more detail in the next chapter.

Although I did not draw from the *film adaptation* of the novel in any of my stage adaptations, I still find it useful to highlight some important aspects and the specifics of this version. The Hungarian movie (made in 1976, titled in English *Nobody's Daughter*) was not available to me at the time of the production, which was not critical because, from memory, I knew the world of the film was completely different from what we wanted to capture from this story, and in any case, the film's target audience was not young audiences. Nevertheless, for my current research, it is important to consider my stage adaptation against this remarkable, highly influential film classic. It can be stated that the film version is in stark contrast to the stage adaptation in almost every artistic and content-based respect. As I mentioned before, the era in which the film was made may have been decisive for the interpretation of the story. The dominant reading of the novel at the time (1970s socialist Hungary) highlighted primarily the social critique layer of the story, in which the iniquity of society before the Second World War is revealed. The existential vulnerability of the peasant class and the corrupt and callous behaviour of some well-off farmers in the film version can thus be viewed as an imprint of a bygone era. At the time the film was made, the prevailing social system aimed to lift peasants out of this miserable existence – at least, this was ideologically proposed. In addition to this, the unlimited defencelessness of the orphan girl, in which she is given and taken as an object, demonstrates the lack of a secure and transparent institutional background. In other words, the authentic presentation of the novel's world in itself earns a socially critical context, which – fortunately – has since disappeared.

In contrast to the stage adaptations, the imprint of the era can be seen in the complete avoidance of biblical references in the film – as ideologically foreign elements. It is also characteristic of the period – and causes discomfort for today's audiences – that the film openly depicts the nakedness of the little girl. Nevertheless, this naturalistic representation is consistent with the film's entire visuals and dramaturgical system. The movie reproduces with perfect authenticity the setting of the story, the behaviour of the people living in it, and especially the heart-breaking fate of Orphalina. The creators clearly did not make any compromises in this regard, as if we were watching a documentary in which the difference between reality and its representation is blurred. The girl playing Orphalina – only eight years old at the filming – does not display any sign of 'acting' or 'pretending' in her on-screen presence, which gives the film its power and effect that is still apparent today.[200]

In contrast to my theatrical adaptations, the emphasis in the film – even more strongly than in the novel – places the little girl at the centre; the cruel world around her only appears in flashes. Focusing on Orphalina's feelings and thoughts, the film's subject shifts from the events to their *impact* on the girl. In service of this, the story of the novel was significantly changed and restructured in the film version. Altering the sequence of events, combining or omitting them, all strengthened the dramatic force in the story and gave way to the display of the protagonist's emotions. It is worth highlighting two significant changes among the many: it is not the Gentlewoman who takes her away from the first family, but she escapes alone, thus returning to the orphanage; and at the end of the film, it is not the carelessly lit candle that causes the fire by accident, but she intentionally lights a straw, from which the flame spreads and causes her death.

This film is a perfect example of how, through adaptation – using the motifs of the source material – the story can be shaped in the service of the formal language of the motion picture. On one hand, it utilises the impression of reality in the film by creating an authentic, naturalistic representation of the environment and characters; on

[200] Zsuzsa Czinkóczy (born 1967) award winning, untrained actress, today owner of a cleaning company. Her debut was *Orphalina (Nobody's daughter)* (1976) directed by László Ranódy. She worked in several internationally acclaimed films until the mid '90s, directed by – among others – Márta Mészáros, Miklós Jancsó.

the other hand, thanks to the most original means of expression of film, i.e., the close-ups, it builds extensively on the individuals, instead of events. It is important to emphasise that this film adaptation does not use spectacular film solutions or emotionally manipulative music; it remains in the 'background', documenting the events as a neutral observer. In doing so, it is fundamentally different from the aesthetic and narrative concept of my stage adaptations.

c) Genre of the production

The third version of the stage adaptation – the subject of this research – differs from the previous two primarily in its *genre*. The characteristics of puppet theatre – in a broader sense, animation theatre – shaped the dominant aesthetic and dramaturgical logic of the production, which was intentionally combined with components of prose theatre and oratorical play.

There were two main aspects that determined my decision in favour of puppet theatre: the production was made as the final exam performance of puppeteer students[201], for which I was looking for suitable material. The other – more decisive – aspect was that, based on the experience of the previous stage adaptations of *Orphalina*, I was convinced that puppets and animated objects as tools of stylisation could provide an appropriate formal opportunity for putting the novel on the stage for young audiences.

Below, I briefly highlight an essential attribute of puppet theatre, which determined the current *Orphalina* adaptation deeply: the relationship and proportion of the *text* and the *image*. As I mentioned earlier (Chapter 3.2. The elements of theatre considered by adaptation work), for a long time, the dramatic *text* was treated as the sole subject of the theatre; i.e., the artistry of theatre was almost exclusively given by its inseparable relationship with literature. Since one of the most basic features of puppet theatre is that it operates with relatively little text; images and visuals play a more significant role. As Peter Schumann states: 'The radicality of the puppet theatre includes a redefinition of language as not merely a tool of convenient communication.' (Schumann, p 77). Puppets cannot usually engage in long monologues or dialogues because their realistic power of expression is usually weaker

[201] University of Arts Târgu-Mureş, Romania

than that of a live actor.[202] In addition to this, since puppets are visually expressive objects, they can carry a rich meaning merely by their appearance. For this reason, puppet theatre can express its subject with more complexity if it operates more with images and less with spoken words. Since the visual, expressive power of animation theatre is manifested in abstraction and the symbolic meaning of objects, it affirmed my aspiration to create a theatrical adaptation that relies dominantly on visual representation and actions rather than text. This solution also seemed more promising in terms of stimulating the imagination of young audiences. The first two *Orphalina* versions also contained a reduced amount of dialogue; as I have noted, we mostly utilised the text as an individual stylistic corpus. used spoken words in an unconventional, post-dramatic way. The starting point of this adaptation work was, therefore, how the *mise-en-scène* of the production could be modified to the visual system of animation theatre – keeping some of the motifs of the earlier versions, such as some parts of the script and the choral works. The basic concept of the previous two versions has not been changed either in that we did not primarily strive for storytelling or for faithful illustration of the plot but for a broader representation of *orphanhood* and *vulnerability*. The core of my concept was to create a production that presents senseless suffering, which can be experienced by anyone regardless of age, social affiliation and place.

4.6.5. The directing process – as the core part of the adaptation

a) Visual concept, style of the production

As the example of *A Monster Calls* showed, the creative process in puppet theatre is characterised by the final outcome of the script being closely related to the visual concept and the puppet technique used. When planning the visual concept of *Orphalina*, although I decided to use parts of the existing versions of the script, we worked as if we were imagining the world of the production from scratch. Since it was certain that we were not trying to realistically recall the setting of the story – for the reasons analysed above – we created a space that could symbolically enrich the portrayal of the girl's fate.

[202] More on that, see: Peter Schumann: *The Radicality of the Puppet Theatre*, 1990

The first step was to decide on the visual representation of the little orphan girl. Similar to *A Monster Calls*, the artistic possibility of having an actor play the girl had to be considered. In the film, Orphalina was played by a little girl who was perfectly suitable from a semiotic point of view for the role, whereas this would not have been possible among adult actresses in the theatre performance. This quasi-realistic solution would have made it difficult for young audiences to get involved. Since we wanted to keep Orphalina – and thus her fate – at the centre of the production, both in terms of content and visuals, we decided to use a puppet. To clearly separate her from the other characters and emphasise her solitude, we decided to create only *one* puppet and not operate with this visual option when portraying the other characters of the story. It followed that the puppet should only interact with the live actors and not with other puppets. In terms of design and mobility, we were looking for a solution that was both anthropomorphic and relatively detailed in its movement. A simplified version of the 'bunraku' type puppet seemed most appropriate for this. Similar to the Conor puppet, this type can give the perfect illusion that the puppet is moving by itself, although the (actors) are positioned around the figure throughout the animation. (Fig. 13)

We were looking for a form that, although it gives the impression of a child whose age and gender cannot be determined, its elaboration is seemingly rudimentary and undeveloped, so its simplicity can give space to the young audience's imagination. Eventually, we envisioned a medium-sized puppet with a neutral, clean shape covered in white linen. Her clothes and 'skin' were made of the same material; she is naked and wearing clothes at the same time. Her outfit only consists of a small skirt, which in Móricz's novel can be equated with her shirt. Its whiteness symbolises the character's purity and innocence. Only her closed eyelids – folded back from her own 'skin' – are visible on her face, yet she seems to have an open, longing gaze. Her mouth is not featured, which indicates that she cannot express her individual opinion or thoughts.

Figure 13. Design and realisation – Orphalina puppet
(Design: Ákos Mátravölgyi; rehearsal shot: György Vidovszky)

The fact that Orphalina is represented by a simplified puppet expresses the character's vulnerability and personality in itself. The clumsiness and helplessness of inanimate material represent her life situation intensively. The defenceless puppet is subjected to actual abuse: the continuous small changes in her body reflect the horrors that have happened to her – more on that later – even simply during the course of the performances, it gets dirty from use. The puppet's impersonal appearance embodies not only the character of Orphalina herself but also reflects on the role of the victim. This almost abstract look invites the young audiences to a broader interpretation and a safer, less personal identification.

It is important to highlight another unconventional procedure: the actors completed the making of the puppet themselves with their own hands based on the plans (Fig. 30).[203] Under the guidance of the designer, the puppeteers developed the puppet's body parts and mobility. This not only strengthened their relationship with their 'actor colleague' but also made them understand the puppet's physical capabilities and limitations.

[203] See it in Section 6. Figures.

The most defining element of the set is a platform reminiscent of a *concrete block* placed in the middle of the space. Its angularity, insularity, roughness, and harsh grey colour are meant to be in contrast with the softness of the puppet and to give the impression of lifelessness and extinction (Fig. 14). In terms of functionality, we looked for dimensions – height, width – that would be suitable for so-called 'tabletop puppetry'.[204] From this point of view, the set shows similarities with the set of *A Monster Calls*, the rectangular central element of which served a similar practical function. This single platform, which gives the impression of a heavy block, is divided into four sections, which are highlighted by LED strips on the edges and in the cross-section. The concrete imitation of the set wishes to refer to reality, while the lighting placed inside makes it abstract and theatrical; hence, it is characterised by a similar duality as the Orphalina puppet: real and abstract at the same time. Throughout the performance – except for the final scene – the puppet is in direct contact with this spatial element. This island-like territory, like a torn piece of the world, marks the living space for Orphalina and works as the stage of the world. At the beginning of the production, the puppet is born from it, and it is bound to her while she is alive.

Two further set elements surround this platform: a movable lamp hanging from above and six *music stands* placed on both sides of the stage. When the concept was developed, the music stands were not included in the plans; they became part of the set during the rehearsals. The reason for this was that when developing the concept, we focused on the living space of the main character, i.e., the puppet, and did not see the need to define the environment outside of it. However, the necessity of this arose during the rehearsals. On one hand, the music-stands – because of their contrast with the concrete block – highlight the central element of the space, and on the other hand, they create the narrative context of the performance, the position of storytelling. Similar to the concept of the second adaptation, but going beyond it, the actors as singers recall the stages of the girl's passion from movement to movement, from psalm to psalm. When they are not participating in the action of the given scene on and around the concrete block, they stand at their music stands as observers who frame the scenes and the actions taking place in the centre.

[204] The 'tabletop' style of puppet performance is usually with the performer(s) in view behind or at the side of the action, which may not include a table as such. (For more on this, see: wepa.unima-org).

Figure 14. Set design of Orphalina (design: Ákos Mátravölgyi)

I found it necessary to shape the storytelling similarly but in a more explicit, overt way than in the adaptation of *A Monster Calls*. This time, the actors are 'only' performers; they do not become part of the world of the story they are conveying. This distant attitude of the actors – that they can step in and out of their roles at any time – supported the episodic storytelling and reinforced the ritual nature of the performance. As I mentioned earlier, the exact context of the storytelling is important for the young audience in literature as well as in a theatre performance. This can be a homodiegetic narrator – as in *A Monster Calls* – or heterodiegetic – as in *Orphalina* – but the important defining it precisely because that provides the reference point to the additional layers of the production.

The *pendant lamp* hung above the concrete block marks off and illuminates the girl's living space. At the time of planning, we envisioned it with several functions, the most important of which was the representation of the watermelon, which is why the lampshade was given a green colour. The lamp is part of both the scenery and the manipulated props used in several functions in the production.

Two distinct symbolic objects with multiple meanings became part of the visual dramaturgy: the large *transparent hemisphere* and the *circular mirror* with a hole in the middle are clean, abstract objects in contrast to the concrete block and the dented lamp. Their alienness in the space reinforces their meaning according to the function they fulfil in the moment (Fig. 15). Both objects, in addition to their clean form, are characterised by their deficiency. The sphere is a symbol of completeness and perfection, but this totality is not present in the production because the object appears incomplete, only as half. A piece is also missing from the mirror; the gaping hole in the middle creates a feeling of absence, and the person looking into it can only partially see himself or herself in it. The hole in the centre of the circular mirror represents the loss of the epicentre, a deficiency. For Orphalina, the centre of the world is her unknown mother, which is confirmed by the faces of each actress appearing in this centre throughout the production. Both objects suggest incompleteness because what is visible from each means as much as what is missing from them. I will discuss their symbolic use in the production in more detail below.

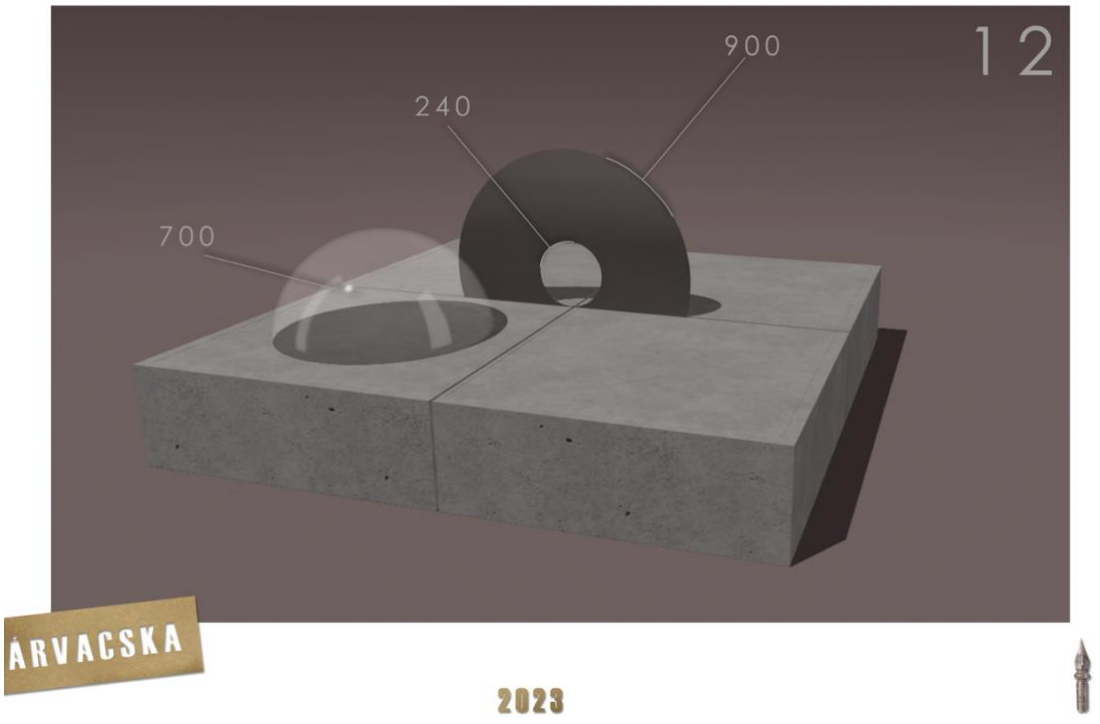

Figure 15. Design of the transparent hemisphere and the circular mirror – Orphalina (design: Ákos Mátravölgyi)

Two additional objects played an important role in the production: a rope and some transparent plastic sheeting. Due to their material properties, plastic sheets can be

used in a variety of ways, while, because of their industrial nature, they can easily be linked aesthetically to concrete blocks, metal lamps, and ropes.

The visual concept clearly shows that our starting point was not to give back the novel's material world but rather to construct an environment that would allow the unique exposition of our chosen focus. This visual context left enough freedom for us to create an independent universe that operates according to its own theatrical semantic system and gives the young audiences many possibilities for association.

b) Method of the creation

As mentioned above, the final script was formed during the rehearsals, thus allowing the language of theatre to determine the scenes rather than the pre-written dramatic transcript. This method of adaptation was much more radical than how I worked on *A Monster Calls*. Since I used the script for the rehearsals – which was a shortened version of the one used in the second production – only as a guide or, better to say, as a synopsis, I approached the creative adaptation work from a different direction. To give the puppeteers a chance to familiarise themselves with all the objects we offered, including the Orphalina puppet, I asked them to create short scenes free from the content of the novel (Fig. 31).[205] The goal of these practical tasks was for the actors to understand the functions, meanings, and effects of the objects and the puppet by concentrating only on their physical properties. An important condition was that the scenes should not have any narrative meanings; only the relationship between the objects, the puppet and the actors should be explored. During the exercises, we focused on the following connections and mutual effects: What kind of relationship can be established between the puppet and the human body? What kind of relationship can be discovered between the puppet and its animator? How does it work when the actor is both the animator and acting partner of the puppet? What kind of relationship can the puppet form with the hemisphere, then with the mirror separately and simultaneously? What kind of relationship can the actors themselves – without a puppet – have with the above objects? How can the rope or the plastic film be harmonised with these elements?

[205] See it in Section 6. Figures.

These sketch scenes without text not only provided ideas for the subsequent creation but also outlined the language of the performance, which was primarily fed by the theatrical potential inherent in the objects and the set. Consequently, the stage adaptation of *Orphalina* started from two directions: on one hand, the draft script based on the novel marked the basic *dramaturgical directions*, and on the other hand, the open creation with the material components used in the production determined the *theatrical narrative*. My task was to sew these two sign systems into each other in order to put the discovered theatrical solutions at the service of the storytelling and let the stage language be nourished by the text at the same time. In this method, I consider it of particular importance that since the formal ideas were born through the actors' free associations, they are, therefore, free from didacticism and illustrativeness. As a result, there is a greater chance that the young spectator will not feel that they have to intellectually 'solve' the formal 'riddles' of the production either but can interpret them freely. I aspired for the production to function semantically like an 'open text', i.e. to provide space for experimentation and playfulness, allowing different meanings based on the context of the actual scene and the spectators' perspective.[206]

Since I wanted to preserve the production's fundamental music material from the previous theatre versions, the actors had to learn and adapt the polyphonic choral works in addition to their stage work. I will reflect on the musical world of the production later; here, I will only emphasise the effect of music and songs on the creative process. The production's fundamental concept is the ensemble collaboration, which, in addition to the joint animation of the objects and the puppet, was most evident in the polyphony of the choral works. The songs not only strengthened the actors' cohesion but also symbolically emphasised that they can only exist in relation to each other and are dependent on each other. The production does not rely on individual acting expressions; although each puppeteer has individual moments, these are always borne as part of the group. The concept of the community as a protective environment for the individual, as the spiritual and physical pledge of creation, emphasises Orphalina's exclusion and her belonging nowhere. The abuses against the girl never come from a definable character but either from the faceless community or

[206] More on 'open text', see: *Le Plaisir du Texte* (1973) by Roland Barthes.

from a prominent figure representing it; similarly, the positive moments that affect the girl – such as her birth or her encounter with her imaginary mother – are also created through the group. Due to their basic properties, puppets only come to life with external help; this also applies to the Orphalina puppet, which is mostly animated by more than one person. Her 'life' is at the mercy of her animators, as the intertext in the production describes Orphalina: 'The »protagonist«, the suffering subject of these stories, cannot change anything in her life situation; she just drifts. (...) …she cannot have her own clothes or will, and her own body is not hers either.' (O-GV3, p. 235). This subordination relationship, the contrast between the vulnerable individual and the strong community, made the representation of Orphalina as a puppet artistically justified and legible. In addition, since the focus is thus on the victim, it creates a stronger possibility of identification for young viewers.

c) Shaping the script alongside the stage realisation

In this section, I summarise the dramaturgical arc of the production, highlighting the dominance of visual representation over the text. With a more detailed analysis of some scenes, I seek to shed further light on the semiotic language of the production, emphasising how I transferred certain motifs and episodes of the novel to the stage with the help of various theatrical means of expression.

The narrative frame of the production was formed in the second phase of the creative process. First, we started working on selected episodes from the novel. The book's opening begins with a perceptive – and poetic – description of the rising sun, the approach of dawn over the 'puszta' (wasteland).[207] The first human being mentioned is Orphalina, who stands alone in the field as if she had just been dropped there:

> ... she stands there as God created her, naked beneath the upward gaze of the sun. (O-N, p. 18)

The poetic image, the rich, almost exalted description of nature's awakening (O-N, p. 17-18), evokes the association of the birth of a girl thrown into the world. This

[207] For more on this, see in Chapter 4.6.3. Motifs of the novel in light of the adaptation.

interpretation is reinforced by the novel's closing image, the fire at night that buried all life under it.

> Not a trace was visible that here a house had stood, and that people had lived there, and these people perished beneath the snow. (O-N, p. 255)

The two images give the impression of life as a whole, the cycle from birth to death. In the adaptation, we sought to demonstrate this interpretation and shape it on a poetic level instead of illustrating the novel's physical environment. My goal for the opening and closing images was to express the meaning of completeness: the never-ending circle. The solution was an extensive, non-verbal birth scene constructed only by stage actions. Orphalina lies on the large and cold concrete block in the middle of the stage, under the hemisphere, covered with plastic sheeting – as if surrounded by a kind of foetal enamel. The foetal image is also strengthened by the lamp placed on the covered sphere, which suggests an incubator. After the lamp gradually rises, the plastic sheet under the hemisphere slowly disappears, revealing the figure of the crouched puppet lying inside. This image can be linked with the death of Orphalina, that is, with the closing image of the production, where the puppet lies in the hemisphere with the open side up, which gradually gets covered by the plastic film as if surrounded by the smoke of the fire. My intention was that just as the two positions of the hemisphere – turned down at the beginning and up at the end – give a complete form, this symbolic representation suggests that the orphan girl's life was a whole.

The birth scene continues with a 'trick' that is generally unusual in puppet theatres: the puppet moves by itself, seemingly without the help of an animator.[208] This 'miracle'[209] is meant to express the mystery of life and birth (O-SR, 00:06:16-00:06:50). The actors light up their arms with torches and reach towards the hemisphere as a visual reference to 'creation' before the 'foetus' veil that protects the child opens. After the child starts crying, the actors sitting around her pass it to each other from hand to hand; none of the 'mothers' want her; the ever-lengthening 'umbilical cord' binds them in a knot until finally, one of them cuts it, and the child falls silent (Fig. 26). The helpless child falls back into the hemisphere, which now

[208] One of the actors pulled a string tied around the puppet's waist, hidden behind the set.
[209] The importance of stage-miracles for young audiences is more fully explored in Chapter 4.3.2

looks like a cold container. By that, Orphalina becomes part of a cruel world, left alone like an object, who only ‘wakes up’ on the ‘puszta’ after an intense and dark storm, which is evoked in sound by the actors. Like in the unpredictable rhythm of the raindrops, the image of the dawn described at the beginning of the novel is heard, broken into syllables. The sun displayed by the mirror ‘looks’ for the girl, who – as if with God’s eyes – looks down at the world, i.e., the concrete block where she will live.

With the above description, I wanted to demonstrate that the birth scene manifests almost all the particular means of expression of the production, such as giving the elements of the set symbolic meaning; the actors exist not only as animators but also as partners of the puppet; they act as a group; the atmosphere is created in sound; the spoken text is primarily a stylised element.

Figure 16. Production shot – Orphalina (photo: Zoltán Rab)

I followed this coordinated system of signs – in other words, theatrical language – to express our *interpretation* of the novel throughout the entire production. Although I believe that the semiotic system of the production is quite solid, the above analysis is only one of the possible others: it leaves room for young audiences to develop their own reading.

In the two previous theatre adaptations (2006, 2010), milk, which Orphalina does not like, was given particular symbolic importance. As a reminder, the bourgeois company spat the white liquid back into their champagne glasses; later – in the Christmas scene – the filled champagne glasses were lined up on the floor like a mass of candles. In this version, the same solution would not have been coherent and valid, partly because of the actors' dissimilar identities (roles) and partly because the selected objects and props used in this production were not identical to the ones we used earlier. While in the other two versions, the unusual presentation of milk on stage highlighted this motif, it was not given such importance in this version. In the scene when Orphalina does not want to drink the milk she is offered, I wanted to clarify and emphasise the reason for her aversion to milk instead. We demonstrated it as described below: The actors sit around the hemisphere – which this time gives the impression of a milk cone – drinking milk while Orphalina stands bewildered. The milk is represented by a sheet thrown into the pot, the corners of which are sucked by the actors playing other children. Their drinking resembles the way babies drink their mother's milk. Orphalina, confused, turns to the breast of the foster mother standing next to her, trying to drink from it. The mother pushes her away several times in disgust, accompanied by some impatient, cursing sentences. Orphalina's aversion to milk refers to the lack of a mother: she never drank breast milk. This instinct, which she has never experienced, bursts out of her when she turns to her foster mother's breast. This gesture significantly reshapes the meaning of milk for the audience; it becomes a symbol of motherhood.

The scene can be the subject of further analysis from two additional stylistic aspects. One is the relationship between the puppet and its animator, and the other is the question of the puppet's capacity for speech. In the scene, the actress who plays the mother is also the animator of the puppet. The actress has to separate her own presence from the presence of the puppet. She has to split the thoughts and reactions of the two characters and express one through her own body and the other through the puppet she is controlling. This duality of being both partner and animator of the puppet simultaneously delivers an additional meaning – beyond the technical feat (O-SR, 00:15:00-00:16:58). The fact that the mother is not only above the puppet in terms of status but also 'controls' it, affirms the girl's vulnerability, lack of will and the predictable consequence of her actions.

However, according to the rules of the puppet theatre genre, it is acceptable for the 'dumb' puppet to speak with the voice of its animator; the rehearsals still showed dissonance with Orphalina's utterances in this regard. Two factors caused the problem: on one hand, according to the physical design of the puppet, it did not have a mouth, that is, it gave the impression of speechlessness, and on the other hand, since more than one actress played Orphalina throughout the production, it was not possible to identify the girl's utterances with the voice of one selected actor. It occurred to me first that I would keep the character silent for this reason, but ultimately, I chose a different solution. In this first part of the above-analysed scene, Orphalina does not speak; she does not answer the mother's questions, who angrily tells her:

> STEPMOTHER Csöre, to hell with you. Don't want the milk? You can't even talk right. Csöre! (O-GV3, p. 217)

Then Orphalina seems to say something that could not be heard, so the mother screamed at her again:

> STEPMOTHER What are you muttering there, you fool? (O-GV3, p. 217)

As a reaction, the puppet whispers in one of the actors' (children's) ears, who then speaks out what Orphalina said. All the other actors (children) also follow her, one after the other, speaking as Orphalina, as if forming a complaining children's chorus. This solution resolved the difficulty of the puppet's first utterances and the issue of 'multivocality' by using the production's already established stylistic language. This also confirms that Orphalina – in other words: the victim – can be anyone, which can help the young spectator's identification process with the character.

The next moment of the production highlights this, supplemented by the fact that one can not only be a victim at any time but also become an aggressor – which is one of the driving ideas of the adaptation. One of the 'children' suddenly turns into an adult, takes over the role of foster mother and screams at Orphalina:

> STEPMOTHER You come here! You'd better apologise! (O-GV3, p. 219)

I consider a further analysis of this scene important because it provides insight into the stage version's narrative technique, i.e., into my dramaturgical concept of the adaptation. After Orphalina does not apologise for her behaviour (that is, refusing the milk), the foster mother grabs the child by the neck. In this way, the actress portraying the mother becomes the puppet's 'partner' again and not its animator. The motionless, almost 'lifeless' puppet thus becomes the symbol of physical vulnerability, while the mother's rough gestures foreshadow the physical abuse. As soon as the foster mother throws the puppet – the helpless girl – to the ground, the actors playing the other alarmed children suddenly run away from the scene of the beating, making animal noises. This sudden 'change of roles' – the transition from children into animals – only appears in sound. The increasingly loud yells of the animals are an acoustic expression of panic, an emotional preparation for the coming physical terror. Two actors, almost protecting the girl lying on the ground, express Orphalina's fear with their posture. In other words, because of their 'solidarity' and compassion, they become Orphalina's later animators, while the others step back to the music stands, turning them towards themselves as if they would read the continuation from it. As soon as the foster mother raises her arm like a conductor, the animals fall silent, and an alarming stillness ensues. The crescendo of the animal sounds works as a musical effect that prepares the silence before the terror. The raised arm of the mother swings to beat, followed by a sound in sync with it: those standing behind the music stand imitate the sound of the swish and snap of the cane while the animators deliver Orphalina's cry. The movement and the sound effects are repeated several times, and although the puppet is not directly hit, its body convulses again and again like an electric shock hits it as it tries to escape on all fours on the ground. By separating the representation of the aggressor and the victim stylistically, I wanted to draw the focus on the girl's suffering and to distance it from the natural presentation of physical aggression, which usually causes the opposite reaction for young audiences.[210] I was convinced that it is not the person of the aggressor that is important, nor that the

[210] Many times, physical aggression depicted 'realistically' on stage causes laughter among young audiences due to the shock, so they try to distance themselves from the forced effect. Metaphorical representation generally has a stronger effect due to the imagination. More on this topic, see: *Emotional and Cognitive Responses to Theatrical Representations of Aggressive Behaviour* by Alexandru I. Berceanu1, Silviu Matu and Bianca I. Macavei (2020)

physical violence is shown on stage in its reality, but that the mental and physical pain inflicted on the child should be born in the audience's imagination. In the service of this, the beating does not come from anger but a cold-headed, planned, repeated act ('read' from the music sheets), which depicts only that much of the physical aggression that stimulates the audience's imagination. I consider this stage dramaturgy based on active mental and emotional engagement to be particularly important when addressing young spectators. This narrative technique is free from the trap of superficial, all-showing representation and gives enough space for the young audience to act like a 'co-creator'. The movements, the sounds, and the text, as signals that work separately, only come together in the viewer's mind to form a meaning, a fusion, thus retaining the possibility of individual interpretation and the degree of involvement. As Emma Willis emphasises in her essay on the depiction of violence on stage: 'The intention was not a softening of the depiction of violence to make it more palatable, but a recognition of the complexities of giving inner experience outer form.' (Willis, p 28)

As a result of the last 'hit', a piece of material is torn from the puppet's body. This is not just a sign but an act of destroying the puppet as an existing object, followed by more throughout the play (pins on her hands, sewing needle at her groin). These actions are meant to make the young audience see the puppet as a sentient being. The 'injuries' that appear on the puppet's body are connected to its material, thus becoming experienceable in the spectator's mind with the help of the transference of sensations, believing that it 'hurts' the puppet. The young audience experiences the reality of the story while being aware of its nature of fiction.[211] This twofold state can lead to safe self-identification.

Continuing the semiotic analysis of the scene, when Orphalina has to kiss the mother's hands, another role swap occurs between the 'stepmothers'. This constant change not only tries to convey the guardian's impersonality but also refers to the novel's cyclicality. The three families depicted in the book – although they do not treat the girl exactly the same way – are basically interchangeable and conflated. The

[211] The issue is more fully explored in Chapter 2.4. The healing aspect of children's literature – dealing with trauma in TYA.

film, for example, condenses the horrors into two families, while the stage version conveys this, on one hand, with continuous role changes, and on the other hand, with the free restructuring of the sentences articulated by the different foster parents.

Analysing the scene, I highlight two further moments. In Orphalina's hand kiss, the focus is on the puppet's detailed movements. This is the first elaborate, long sequence of movements in which the puppet's illusory existence can be experienced. With its detailed movements, the puppet, which previously only represented the orphan girl, really comes to life and identifies with her. This is the first moment when the young spectators can perceive it as a 'human being': her movements, gaze, and breathing seem to be the result of her 'inner' decisions; she becomes almost independent of her animators. In other words, she gets a personality (O-SR, 00:18:49-00:19:28).

The other moment I underline is how Orphalina becomes naked in the theatre performance. After the foster mother orders her to take off her shirt, Orphalina runs away and hides behind a mirror placed by the actors in the middle of the concrete block. After the mother pulls off the puppet's skirt through the hole of the mirror, visible from its dark side, Orphalina's 'nakedness' can be perceived from her shameful hiding behind the mirror. In the next moment, the mirror, which has served as protection until now, serves the mother's beautification, and the skirt becomes the mother's hair catch. Every element can instantly take on a new meaning; nothing is certain – just like in Orphalina's life. Since the removal of the skirt did not create a significant change in the appearance of the puppet – due to the same material – the shameful nudity could not be grasped emotionally either. In order to express this, we used a solution similar to the later physical injuries: the actors inserted two pink buttons into the child's body as nipples. Nudity, therefore – based on the formal language of the adaptation – leaves a visible mark on the puppet's body as a kind of stigma throughout the entire production (Fig. 32).[212]

The previous examples well support the dramaturgical process of how the text was subordinated to the images and actions during the rehearsals. As I mentioned above, the first version of the adaptation (2006) shows significant similarities with the third

[212] See it in Section 6. Figures.

one in terms of its dramaturgical arc and in the selection of episodes of the novel. Referring to the list of scenes described earlier, I outline the plot of the current adaptation, underlining the identical events that appeared in different forms in both adaptations: Birth of Orphalina; Dawn on the farm; Life on the farm (with proud animals and mocking children); Orphalina does not drink the milk, which is followed by punishment; She has to take her shirt off; She goes with the cow to the field; She fetches a watermelon for which she gets punished (burning coals in her palm); Her foster mother gives her a lecture about not possessing anything; The neighbour farmer (Kadarcs) rapes the girl, but neither she nor her step-siblings understand what happened; Her foster mother comforts her; The cow gives birth to a calf that she finds miraculous; A lady from the authorities takes her from the foster family; She gets scared by dolls she finds in an unfamiliar place who tell her a terrible story of another orphan girl; She goes to the church and identifies herself with Jesus; At Christmas, she does not get any presents, she is send out to the yard hoping that her wishes come true; Orphalina is praying to her mother to take her with her who appears in her imagination. She dies in the fire. The list above plainly shows the production's story framework, which is predominantly (c. 70%) identical to previous adaptations in this respect. Therefore, the sentences taken from the novel are primarily equivalent in these adaptations, too. However, beyond these similarities (selection of episodes and transferred lines from the book), the productions (i.e., the adaptations) are significantly different in every sense.

d) Challenges

During the rehearsals, some dramaturgical challenges arose when the episodes taken from the novel 'resisted' the semiotically coherent stage presentation. Since my goal was not to illustrate the individual events of the novel, I looked for solutions that follow from the production's (that is, the adaptation's) own means of expression. Below, I would like to analyse two scenes in more detail that were difficult in terms of finding the exact formal solution that harmonises with the devised language of the production and meets the young audience's anticipations.

Without a doubt, Orphalina's most brutal punishment is when an ember is placed in her palm to teach her not to take other people's possessions. The novel describes this slowly developing horror rather objectively but with some sympathy woven into it.

> (...) Mrs. Dudás held the girl's small hands between her thumb and index finger, like little flowers, and Dudás put the ember on them (...) Little Chick-Chick only now sensed the burning on her fingertips, at the nails of her tiny hands, and began to scream. (...) She shook over her entire little body… (O-N, pp. 42-43)

The repetition of the words 'little' and 'tiny' increases the weight of the inhuman act and reinforces the girl's vulnerability. The film version faithfully follows the novel's description, depicting the moment of the burning itself longer while highlighting the physical injury and the child's unstoppable, deep-seated cry with an unvarnished, almost documentary fidelity. Both versions suggest that the punishment is not done out of a sudden impulse, unlike when the girl is repeatedly hit and pushed all of a sudden at other times. The act is well 'organised', almost ceremonial: they close the door first, the child's hand must be held, and then a piece of coal is carefully taken out of the stove and placed in the child's palm in a coordinated manner. This cold-hearted act makes the otherwise unjustified punishment even more cruel.

In each stage version, we emphasised the metaphorical nature of the identical act. However, the different semiotic structures of the productions induced diverse stage solutions. In the first version (O-GV1, 2006), the actress who played Orphalina in that scene was forced into a stocks-like frame, and the other actors placed the military helmet – which represented the melon rind – on her protruding hand. While a bit of gasoline was sprinkled on it, all the actresses snapped their bra straps, imitating the sound of fire. Then, the helmet's surface was set on fire, accompanied by a long, panic-like group scream from the actors (O-SR/1, 00:17'-00:18'). In the second stage version (O-GV2, 2010), the hand of the actress playing Orphalina were pressed to a chair, and while sparks from a welding machine could be seen in the background, the actors screamed similarly to the first version (O-SR/2, 00:19'-00:20'). In both versions, the burnt hand was then represented with a coloured rubber glove.
In these two stage adaptations, the reality of the sight of the fire was combined with a magnified acoustic (thus stylised) representation of panic and pain. In other words, we used poetic means of conveying feelings: the sight of the flame and the acoustic effect

functioned as a collage, and through that, the meaning of it was multiplied. Both actions created the impression of a coordinated, jointly executed deed – referring to the attitude analysed earlier in the novel – which gave the scene a ritual character.

None of the above-mentioned motifs would have been coherent in the current adaptation (O-GV3, 2023), so they did not serve as a reference point for the creation. I was looking for a solution that does not unnecessarily illustrate the action described in the novel but is both metaphorical and real. Since the action is preceded by a repeatedly recited verbal climax, which reveals what kind of punishment they are preparing for, this not only enables but supports the avoidance of illustration. Because the spoken words predict what will happen, the young audiences can comprehend the metaphorical language of theatre easily. Since the spectator verbally gets a hint about the real context of the upcoming act, he/she interprets the mise en scène (the theatre presentation) related to it. However, this dramaturgical structure does not mean complete freedom in the creation. I am convinced that the theatrical solution should not treat the verbally described event as the starting point and look for a theatrical 'correspondence' to it. The starting point of the creation should always be – in my view – the production's own theatrical language and the use of its means of expression to create a scene that can be emotionally powerful. In this specific case, I was therefore looking for a solution in which the puppet's 'suffering' can be experienced emotionally because it is theatrically authentic and is only supplemented by the articulated verbal information. After several experiments, I focused on the puppet's material and the ritual nature of the act. Eventually, the puppet's soft body brought me closer to the solution. Since the puppet's material worked like a pincushion, I continued to build the motif of the buttons representing nipples, which were applied with needles to the chest. Although the placement of the buttons – i.e., the needles inserted into the body – was not visible to the audience, I decided to use the feeling of pain associated with the perceptible act of needling. The red-tipped pins inserted into the puppet's hand caused the aching sensation of being damaged. As a result, the suffering of the puppet – that is, the child – became easily readable, the act left a real mark – an injury – on the puppet, and the colour of the pins connected it with the association of burning (Fig. 17).

Figure 17. Production shot. Marks caused by burning her hand – Orphalina (photo: Tibor Jakab)

The scene was thus structured as follows: While verbally abusing, the actors tied a rope to the puppet's arms and then pulled up the child hanging from the lamp, i.e., the watermelon. Then, the actors impulsively stuck pins into the puppet's hands. Despite the effectiveness of the individual elements, the scene did not work well; it seemed more illustrative than coherent. The ground of the problem was the lack of rite. The solution lay in cooling the temper of those who committed the abuse; the act had to be carried out with a ritual distance. The difference could be particularly grasped in the manner and quantity of needle pricks. In the final solution, each actor sticks one needle into the puppet's hand and does it all with ceremonial slowness and without emotion (O-SR, 00:27'-00:28'). The disturbing elevation of the deed is highlighted by the music, but more on that later. The aim was to depict pain for the young audiences in an abstract way, which is both primal and relatable and, at the same time, distant and analytical.

Another scene that caused serious challenges was the depiction of the girl's rape, which is an even more sensitive topic for teenagers. In addition to the feasibility of the act in the spirit of the production's semiotic language analysed above, the lack of men in the company caused another challenge. While in all the other scenes, I considered it

irrelevant to Orphalina whether she was in connection with a man or a woman, in this one scene, I saw the exact gender representation as essential. It was clear that the way the 'man' would be represented, it would relate to the way the rape would be portrayed on stage. The structure of the episode also differed from the ember's scene in the sense that I did not want any verbal hints to be given in advance about what would happen to the girl. Keeping the previously analysed mystery of the novel – and the film version – I looked for a solution that would maintain this tension and ambiguity in the audience but still capture the horror of the act.

As I mentioned in the brief story outline before, Kadarcs, the farmer who committed sexual violence against Orphalina, scares the children by dressing up as a ghost one night in a later episode of the novel.

> Renewed fright coursed then through the children. A ghost came in a white sheet, uttering ghostly moans, hoots and howls over them, frightening them… (O-N, p. 82)

This motif provided the concept for the visual representation of the man: the large white sheet held against the high-hanging lampshade gave the shape of a ghost. The 'puppet'[213] animated together with the lamp from behind looked huge compared to Orphalina; its appearance evoked surreality and fear (Fig. 18). The character's masculinity was expressed by its voice, which, although it was not given by a man, had the effect of being one thanks to the technical distortion. The incomprehensible, almost surreal nature of the sick act was conveyed by the actors' pre-recorded words, but spoken backwards.[214]

The bizarre presentation that he is the furthest from a human shape was also justified by the fact that this character has the most unforgivable sin. The deed is expressed by two separate stage actions, keeping the obscurity of the scene. The first is that the ghost 'takes over' the Orphalina puppet, i.e., puts her under his control, and the puppet drifts like a helpless object. This is reflected in the description of the novel:

[213] More precisely: it is an anthropomorphized object.

[214] We recorded the text by reading it backwards, which we played back backwards again. Thus, the text became comprehensible again, but the accents and rhythm show a distortion that created the necessary effect.

> He flung her up into the air, the child flew, not knowing when she would plop into the ground but just as she was about to, farmer Kadarcs caught her, hurled her up high again, and played with her as though she were a ball. (O-N, p. 54)

Figure 18. Production shot. Sexual violence – Orphalina (photo: Tibor Jakab)

The second is the painful and bloody act of penetration, which – following the previous motif – we created again with a needle sticking into the puppet's body. After three red threads run down the ghost's body, from the head down to where Orphalina is being held captive, a long sewing needle 'sews' the thick red thread into the child's groin (O-SR, 00:35:05-00:35:47). The audience can easily recognise the sight of the thread as blood and the needle and cord sticking out of the puppet's body as the permanent injury of violence. The stage action uses the poetic power of emotional transmission again, but it is also closely connected to the linguistic metaphor of the dialogue following the scene.

GIRL 3 Why are you all bloody?
CSÖRE The stake poked me.
GIRL 2 What stake?
CSÖRE The Kadarcs.” (O-GV3, p. 227)

The words ‘stake’ and ‘poke’ both refer to the rape and the affair seen on stage, thereby giving a deeper embeddedness to the stage realisation. At the same time, it strengthens the interpretation process of the young audience by the fact that the performance does not say or show specifically what happened. Compared to the solitude of reading a book, a theatre performance is a group experience mixed with a crowd of known or unknown people. Watching such extreme, emotionally horrifying content together with other people can cause a sense of shame and discomfort in the young spectator if the depiction is too explicit. Such an abstract representation, on the other hand, elevates the event to the realm of interpretation because the dreadful act itself does not even materialise on stage.

e) Reflection on the dramaturgical and stylistic function of the stage text

In this section, I provide a brief insight into the structure of the sentences spoken in the production and their role in the mise en scène. Continuing the previous point of discussion, the dialogue excerpted above is longer in the adaptation compared to the novel, where the same scene consists of only four replicas. Sentences taken from the novel are often structured as repetitions, with subtle, minimal changes in the adaptation. In the above-quoted dialogue, the repeated questions and answers are articulated from different attitudes, reflecting the behaviour of the audience and the victim towards violence. Orphalina starts from naive, childlike ignorance, and through denial and shame, she eventually understands what happened to her, although she does not articulate it, thus leaving the young audience to have a free, individual correlation.

The dialogue of *Scene 4 – Watermelon* (O-GV3, pp. 221-222) forms a similar dramaturgy of text. There is no equivalent of this situation in the novel. Orphalina goes to the melon field with the cow instead of the cornfield and rips off a melon without hesitation (O-N, p. 38). The dialogue in the adaptation is both playful and fairytale-like, but at the same time, it suggests a bad omen. The cow’s utterance is a

projection of a child's imagination; the animal – with whom she spends the most time during the day – is her best 'friend', so at a later point in the novel, Orphalina speaks to the cow as if it understands her (O-N, p. 49). The basis of the dialogue assembled in the adaptation was partly based on these utterances of Orphalina to the cow and partly on the warnings of her foster mother. In the first half of the dialogue, Orphalina warns the cow where not to go, while in the second half, this is reversed, and, with a few modifications, the cow warns the child not to go near the watermelon. Repetition makes the dialogue almost poem-like but, at the same time, creates an opportunity for enhancement, which is reinforced by the limited vocabulary of the speakers.

I already indicated above that I intended the spoken words (dialogue, monologue) to play an independent stylistic role in the adaptation, freeing it from the illustrative trap of 'theatre of illusion'. An example of that was the above-mentioned description of the dawn (O-GV3, p. 215), when the text is spoken in the rhythm of raindrops, conveying both the word's content and its theatrical context.

In contrast to the novel's story, the adaptation does not define the various sets of foster parents, rather leaving the idea of foster parents as a more nebulous whole. Thus, the source of their words taken from the novel is also arbitrary. In the script, I indicated the source of the quoted sentences with a footnote, which clearly shows that the dialogues were mostly constructed from parts of the novel that are occasionally far from each other. I made the decision that the stylistic depravity/corruption of the sentences and the human frailty behind them can be accurately perceived even without a situational context. The structure of *Scene 7 – Gehenna* (OGV3, pp. 231-232) is based on this concept, where individual insults – taken out of their original context – are spoken between the sung lines of a choral work as if they were part of the musical construction (O-SR, 00:30:22-00:32:36).

Scene 12 – Providence (OGV3, pp. 236-240), when the Gentlewoman checks on the foster parents, is an adequate sample of how the modified repetition of the sentences can empower the substance of the scene. In this scene, Orphalina is constantly interjecting into the dialogue between the Gentlewoman and the foster mother, repeating the other's sentences. These repetitions always confirm the statement made before, most of the time to justify the mother's sly answers. Since Orphalina is not

aware of her origin and her relationship with her foster parents, she instinctively fears the official person and supports her mother, most of the time claiming things that she knows are not true. She only confronts her mother once, repeating the Gentlewoman's question when she is asked about not sending the girl to school. In the novel (O-N, p. 90), Orphalina is only an earwitness to the adult's conversation; she does not say anything, but in the adaptation, she becomes an active character: her awakening to self-awareness, her painful naivety and her desire to belonging to someone are expressed through this expanded version of the scene. This solution hence strengthens the child's point of view compared to the novel and thus offers more identification to the young spectator.

I would highlight two more scenes to analyse the stylistic and situational role of the text. Both alterations to the novel strengthen the child's point of view in relation to the depiction of the outside world, thereby strengthening the connection of the young audience. The dialogue at the end of *Scene 13 – Dolls* (O-GV3, pp. 233-234) is based on the novel Third Psalm when relatives ask Orphalina about her origin (O-N, p. 70-71). In the adaptation, this dialogue is delivered in a completely different context and meaning. In the novel, the arrogant questioning of the insensitive relatives only 'informs' the reader about the greedy circumstances of the adoption; Orphalina does not understand much of this and does not apply it to her own fate. In the stage adaptation, this dialogue is the moment of self-recognition, the inevitable turning point of facing her own fate. Left alone, Orphalina sees herself in the mirror and confronts herself literally and symbolically for the first time. The 'doubled' child confronts herself with her own destiny by asking herself.

As I mentioned earlier, the Priest's preaching in *Scene 14 – Church* (O-GV3, p. 234-236) is an intertext that I borrowed from an Orphalina analysis of a literature textbook. The text's objective and distant style reflects on the tone of a typical educational material, while it – unintentionally – confirms the parallel between the story of the little girl's suffering and Jesus's. The girl tries to talk into the priest's boring, monotonous speech, but she is constantly silenced. The rejection indicates hypocritical sympathy; the subject of the speech does not get a say; they talk over her head; there is only 'preaching' instead of real help (Fig. 19).

Figure 19. Production shot. Church scene – Orphalina (photo: Zoltán Rab)

Orphalina impudently pushes the priest away and takes his place; she reads the last line of the sermon in syllabified, which is also a foreshadowing of her own fate.

> CSÖRE "...we-d-on't-tr-ust-that-th-ings-will-tur-n-for-her-bet-ter…" (O-GV3, p. 236)

Thus, the quoted literary text analysis works as a self-reflection for the main character and as a 'meta-text' reflecting on the whole production. By confronting her existence, which makes her realise the hopelessness of her life, she gradually gets closer to being freed from earthly suffering. The phases of this awakening may be set out as State name (understanding that she has no mother); breaking free from the rope; destroying the dolls; talking to herself; waking up to her own suffering in the church; and then Christmas, which closes everything.

The examples above demonstrate my concept of the text's function in the adaptation. One of the most essential corner points was that the text should operate as an equal element of the production's entire semiotic system. In other words, its symbolic and stylistic value should be on par with the other components of the *mise en scène*, as a result of which the adaptation only includes text that was dramaturgically and compositionally justified, i.e., could not be expressed in any other way.

f) Theatrical manifestation as a rite

As I mentioned earlier, the biblical reading of the novel made it possible to highlight several motifs in the adaptation that strongly determined the production's semiotic system. Since the novel's biblical references are strongly embedded in the common knowledge of Christian culture, these basic elements need no specific explanation. Therefore, the production's symbolic images that refer to the well-known representation of Christ, the Last Supper, stigma, psalm, or the afterlife rightly can also count on the audience's – in this case, even the young spectator's – prior cultural knowledge. Since these motifs appeared vastly as visual symbols, this determined the expressive system of the entire production: the puppet, the objects, the set, and the colours all also refer to something beyond themselves; in other words, they are signs that gain new meaning by putting these already known elements into a yet unknown structure. This symbolic thinking permeated the production's theatrical language, which builds on the decoding of abstract visual, linguistic and musical signals as well as actions.[215] These are unusual enough to attract the attention of young spectators, but at the same time, they can be interpreted through the narrative of the production.

I believe that the above-mentioned examples taken from the production well support this artistic approach. For the symbolic construction of the production, the rite-like nature of the performance served as a suitable framework. This allowed the theatrical signs not to be elements of the illusion of a pseudo-realistic environment, but rather, their 'synaesthesia' creates the context of the performance through constant actions. The choral parts serving as the dramatic and structural framework of the performance defined the actors' relationship to the story they portrayed. They 'only' demonstrate the events with the help of objects and props endowed with constantly changing meanings. This shifts the communication from purely cognitive to more sensory and emotional channels. The actors' 'communication' with the audience is more direct throughout the performance; consequently, the spectators can be more aware of the performance as a constructed event – according to the characteristics of post-dramatic theatre. The fragmented narrative structure, the recurring entry and exit of roles,

[215] For broader discussion on rites in theatre, see: Nadja Berberovic: *Ritual, Myth and Tragedy: Origins of theatre in Dionysian Rites*.

reinforces that the actors acknowledge the artificiality of the performance and draw the audience's attention to the process of theatre itself. This reinforces the ritual and the performative quality of the actions which are all meant to convey meaning.

I will try to prove the above remark with two examples from the production. *Scene 10 Birth* (OGV3, p. 235) refers to the episode in the novel when Boris the cow gives birth (O-N, p. 76-82). The prose describes this process in detail, which Orphalina experiences as a miracle; she rejoices over the little calf as if her own brother had been born. In the stage adaptation, the scene begins with the image of the pregnant foster mother comforting the girl. In the novel, the first foster mother and Boris are pregnant/prenatal at the same time. (The stage representation of the pregnant mother is associated with the description of the mother earlier in the novel: 'The woman looks as though she's swallowed the largest melon in the field whole…' [O-N, p. 19]) When the mother suddenly cries out and indicates labour pains, the actors announce the birth of the cow.

> NEIGHBOUR 4 Go and send someone to help since Boriska's calving! (O-GV3, p. 228)

The interfusion of the two characters is symbolic: it simultaneously signifies the foster mother's 'animal' nature and the anthropomorphisation of the beloved cow in Orphalina's eyes and in the audience's interpretation. Those helping to conduct the birth suddenly lift a huge foil crumpled into a ball from the belly of the woman/cow. The abstract-shaped material, which refers to the same foil that covered Orphalina's body at the beginning of the production, slowly goes through a metamorphosis: the material, almost miraculously, transforms into the shape of a calf (O-SR, 00:39:07-00:39:55). The essence and the intention of the stage action is the *creation* of a miracle[216], thus the symbolic representation of the mystery of birth. This aspect is supported by the music, which I will write about later. In other words, while the episode can be seen as a happening that is only part of Orphalina's story, the theatrical, rite-like representation of the event refers to a sacred context.

[216] The significance of stage-miracles for young audiences is more fully explored in Chapter 4.3.2. The spectator's shared experience is a key element in ritual theatre. More on this, see: Roger Grainger: *Ritual and Theatre: The Impact of Early Ritual Forms on the Theatre of the Modern World* (2014)

The essence of this stands in the *theatrical action as creation*. Creation can be generated through transformation and metamorphosis on stage. The depiction of change provokes the audience to a new interpretation, thus making them a co-creator. This is a particularly important aspect for young viewers because this theatrical language is based on the spectator decoding the signs of the production again and again, giving new meaning to the same object, event, sound, and movement. For this, it is essential that the production's references are coherent and rely on the assumed knowledge of the target audience. The reinterpretation of symbolic signs based on shared knowledge with the audience gives the production the character of a rite. In this scene, the symbolic unity of the foster mother and the animal, the interpretation of the plastic sheet as a foetal enamel, and the perception of the shape formed from it as a calf all build on the act of transformation and reinterpretation. Hence, the young audience witnesses the symbolic connection between birth and the transition of the material.

This dramaturgical thinking is followed by how the mirror placed in front of the preaching priest in the church – which gives the association of a halo – turns into a tray on which Orphalina lies as if being served for sacrifice in the Christmas scene. In the church scene, the position of the actor lying on the concrete block and the loincloth worn clearly refer to Jesus. Due to the position and posture, it is easy to decode for young audiences, although the reference to Mantegna's famous depiction of Christ[217] is probably only meaningful for adult viewers. In the next scene, the concrete block turns into a table covered with a white sheet. In the next picture, the same set element turns into an unclimbable wall, at the base of which sits Orphalina, separated from her animators. The composition suggests complete separation and exclusion from the world: the block that used to be her living space rises above her. Leaving the puppet alone is symbolic because Orphalina's story 'ends' here, and what follows in the production is a figment of her imagination. The girl's whispered 'prayer' is an expression of her desire for her birth mother to come for her.

ACTOR 5 Get a rope, tie me and take me with you. (O-GV3, p. 238)

[217] Andrea Mantegna: *Lamentation of Christ* (1480), location: Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan.

In the next moment, a rope flies over the concrete ‘wall’, and Orphalina clings to it. The rope – which used to be a sign of captivity – now appears as a symbol of escape. The upper end of the rope cannot be seen; it comes from above, which the audience easily gives a symbolic meaning to, reinforcing the spiritual nature of the action. As Orphalina clings to the rope, the transparent hemisphere appears at the upper end of the rope as if it were a balloon. The harmonic movement of the puppet and the ‘balloon’ and their interaction turns into a joint playing. Not only does the child play with the sphere, but the sphere also plays with the child. The personification of the sphere reinforces its symbolic meaning and can be associated with the transcendent representation of the mother. This interpretation refers back to the meaning of the glass veil at the beginning of the production when it was associated with the womb. At the end of their play, Orphalina climbs into the hemisphere – as if reunited with her mother. After Orphalina’s last sentences - which in the novel refer to the lighting of an imaginary candle (O-N, p. 243) – the girl is covered by the plastic sheeting as if surrounded by the smoke of a fire.

ACTOR 1 My sweet mother, I have a candle, and I have matches, and I’ll light it for you, Mama. I really will. (O-GV3, p. 239)

The meaning of the objects, formed by the language of the performance, is constantly transformed, creating the essence of the narrative on stage. The meaning, the ‘fusion’, relies on the young audience’s imagination, which means not only understanding the ‘story’ but also all the associations induced by the theatrical signs.

g) Role of music in the production

Below, I will discuss the decisions that determine the musical world of the production, with particular regard to its dramaturgical and content effects on the entire adaptation. Needless to say, the interpretation of the musical structure and the system of allusions cannot be expected from young audiences; they should treat it primarily as an emotional or as a mood element of the performance. The complexity of the system of allusions may have strengthened the artistic structure of the performance, as we intended, but at the same time – since there are many folk songs – the young spectator may have a personal connection to one or the other. The following summary

is intended to present the complexity of musical decisions from the perspective of the creator.

Live music, which predominantly includes choral works and folk song adaptations, is one of the production's most defining structural elements. This heavy musical embedding characterised both previous (O-GV1; O-GV2) adaptations, although the number of songs changed and the musical accompaniment was also transformed. While in the first version, the songs were sung only acapella, in the second version, the musical image was supplemented by the sound of a Hungarian folk instrument, the dulcimer. In the current adaptation, a solo violin can be heard, mostly as an accompaniment to the songs and as an interpreter of a defining musical quote: the XXXIX aria (*Erbarme dich – Have mercy)* of Johann Sebastian Bach's Matthew Passion.[218] The citation of Bach's work explicitly supports the interpretation that Orphalina's fate is depicted as a Passion in the production. This aria – played by a solo violin – is the principal musical motif of the production; it is heard three times in the show: at the birth of Orphalina, at the birth of the calf, and when Orphalina meets her mother in her imagination, which also means her death. It is also heard one more time, distorted – from a recording, played backwards – in *Scene 5 – Embers* (O-GV3, p. 222-223) when Orphalina's hand is burned. On one hand, the quality of the sound reinforces the unsettling surreality of the scene, and on the other hand, the reversed playback direction can – as I intended – be seen as a grotesque withdrawal of sacredness.

Although the aria is not sung in its original form, with lyrics, the text of the piece reinforces the justification of the choice of music: "Have mercy, My God, for my tears' sake; Look hither, Heart and eyes weep before thee bitterly."[219] This supplication can be closely paralleled with Orphalina's fate; it could even be her complaint. Lamenting – as a sacred form – is one of the cornerstones of the production's dramaturgical framework. As I mentioned earlier, Móricz named the chapters of the novel Psalms. This unusual titling – in addition to emphasising the

[218] The theme of the work is the suffering and death of Jesus Christ according to the Gospel of Matthew.
[219] 'Erbarme dich, mein Gott, um meiner Zähren willen! Schaue hier, Herz und Auge weint vor dir bitterlich.'

lyricism – suggests a sacred reading of the novel, which aspect I considered particularly important in the adaptation. Psalms refer to the poetic prayers and complaints of religious rites. Seeing that the Psalm is a form of complaint in its Old Testament, which, according to tradition, addresses God and the members of the community at the same time.[220] In addition to the direct expression of a complaint, its essence is a request for help, a desire to end suffering and misery. In this sense, the novel and – following this reading – the Psalms of the adaptation can also be understood as a series of whinings. I sought to confirm this with the voiced titles of the individual Psalms, which divide the performance into dramaturgical units; they initiate the audience, and by that, they inform the members of the community about the next station in the story of suffering: *The Ownership Psalm* (I) contains scenes of not belonging anywhere; it can be understood as a complaint of this lack. *The Love Psalm* (II) is a complaint about the lack of love, about lovelessness. *The Birth Psalm* (III) depicts the opposite of Orphalina's unblessed birth with the ennobling, miraculous birth of the calf. The *Providence Psalm* (IV) shows an apparent hope, but it expresses a lack of providence. *The Psalm of Hope* (V) is an expression of a parallel with the fate of Christ, that is, a projection of becoming a victim: there is no hope. *The Homecoming Psalm* (VI) expresses the longed-for and missing home, the absence of the mother, which can only be soothed in fantasy and death.

The Psalms in the Old Testament complain about the abandonment by God and hope to restore the world's imperfection by saying it. The novel – and I hope the adaptation as well – can be interpreted the same way: as an artistic representation of unexplained physical and mental misery in the hope of redemption. The novel's stylistic and content motifs not only expand the interpretability of Orphalina's fate vertically (that is, in a transcendent direction) but also horizontally (that is, on a social level): Orphalina is not the only one who suffers, but the lives of all the characters in the novel are obscured by irredeemability and misery, no one has a chance for true happiness.

The art and folk songs performed in the production – although they are not psalms in their genre – fulfil the above-analysed function of psalms: complaints or whinings

[220] For more on psalms, see: https://www.britannica.com/topic/Psalms.

about orphanhood and unlovedness. Just as the actors speak instead of the 'silent' (mouthless) Orphalina – as I referred to it previously – so the songs convey the girl's feelings and thoughts, mostly sung in first person. The vast majority of these songs are quotations from different regions[221]; thus, the girl's complaints expand socially, as they can carry new associations for the audience by knowing these melodies.

Beyond that, music and songs help in emotional deepening and also fundamentally determine the style of acting, a heightened and more direct sense of presence. As I mentioned before, the songs do not merge into the storytelling but interrupt it; they are heard as independent units. This concept is enhanced by the music stands in the scenery, which is often used as the position of singing. These reflective songs provide the basic structural element of the production and break up the performed episodes. The songs also differ from the depicted story in their performance attitude; they are always sung 'frontally', facing the audience. As a result, the 'fourth wall' known in the theatre is broken down. This effect reinforces the ceremonial aspect of the performance by reminding the audience of the barrier between them and the production. The awareness of it highlights the production's constructed nature and has a reflective impact. Our aim was to stress this and contextualise the role of music and the acting style with the original choral work at the start of the production. It is a grotesque contemporary work, a parody of art when it is insensitive and elite. It is both a formal jest and the evocation of the main character; its sound foreshadows the mockery that will be heard later in the production.

4.7. Reception

4.7.1. Audience experience and feedback

One of the goals of the production's formal complexity, analysed above, was to make a difficult topic accessible and relatable to young audiences through stylisation. However, we were aware that the unusual theatrical language of the performance could be a challenge for some viewers, but we hoped that the solid semiotic system would make the adaptation valid and clear for young audiences. Similar to *A Monster*

[221] Hungarian, Slovakian, Romanian folksongs. Their origins are listed in the adaptation – see below.

Calls, the combination of the audience was varied, and we did not use any known method to measure their reaction, so the experiences described below are largely based on our subjective experiences. First, I will address the general reception of the production, and then I will describe our experiences with the two-step pedagogical session connected to the performance.

Unlike *A Monster Calls, Orphalina* was played in very different circumstances and in front of diverse audience combinations over the last one and a half years.[222] The premiere was held in the studio venue of the university, where the production was performed several more times, primarily to professional audiences.[223] Since the production was intended originally for high school students (16+ years old), the university organised young audiences (school groups) for two performances. On those occasions, we had the opportunity to implement the two-step drama pedagogical outreach programme connected to the production with the aim of preparing and processing the dramatic experience through discussions and play. During the afterlife of the production, as I mentioned before, it was invited to several festivals, mostly performed for adult audiences, and was also taken on the repertoire of the local theatre for young audiences, where they play it occasionally for the target age group.[224]

Before getting into the general analysis of the audiences' reactions, I need to point out some basic differences between the two adaptations. Unlike *A Monster Calls*, the audience – including young people – could already identify the topic of the production based on the title. As stated before, we could rely on the audience being aware of the story, at least certain elements and motives, based on their prior reading experience. At the same time, since very few theatrical adaptations have been made based on this novel so far, the spectators very likely have not yet encountered this story in the form of a performance, so they have no basis for comparing the current adaptation with any other previous versions. In other words, on one hand, there is a very well-known literal base, and on the other hand, it is completely novel since it is

[222] The production has been performed 15 times to date.
[223] University of Arts Târgu-Mureş, Romania.
[224] Ariel Theatre for Children and Youth (Teatrul pentru Copii şi Tineret Ariel), Târgu Mureş, Romania.

not part of the theatrical canon. These two aspects could have made the adaptation work more difficult, but in the end, it increased the freedom of creation and reception.

On one hand, due to the familiarity of the literary material, it was easier for me to give up on 'retelling' the *story* of the novel; it was enough to refer to some scenes and motifs, which the audience could involuntarily add to his/her previous knowledge. At the same time, this significant deviation from the canonised source material could have caused unfulfilled expectations in the spectators, as I alluded to this phenomenon in the chapter on adaptation theory.[225] In contrast, my experience was that since the stage realisation did not aim to illustrate the novel but instead created an individual context completely different from the book's world, the spectator's possible expectations based on literary material were automatically reduced. In other words, the audiences did not expect the adaptation to visualise their reading experience but accepted it as a potential interpretation of the novel, as an original work.

In general, it can be said that the stylised theatrical language of the production did not cause difficulties in the reception for adult as well as for young audiences. Although we did not conduct a survey in this regard, we derived this experience from the primary audience's reactions to the performance. This can perhaps be best expressed by the last sentences of one of the most recent reviews written by a young adult critic: 'The spectacular images of the production and the mournful psalms that sound like an oratorio create a throat-tightening atmosphere and tension that lasts until the end of the performance. At the applause, I feel like I'm breathing for the first time in a long time.'.[226] The main goal of the production was to achieve an emotional impact and only through that to convey an intellectual experience, relying intensively on the spectator's co-creative imagination.

As in the case of *A Monster Calls*, due to the difficulty of the topic, we considered it important to provide a preparatory and reflective program for young audiences. It

[225] For more on this, see: Chapter 3.1 Originality and fidelity in art.
[226] Translated from the Hungarian original: 'Az előadás látványos képei és az oratóriumként felcsendülő gyászos zsoltárok olyan torokszorító atmoszférát, feszültséget teremtenek, ami az előadás végéig kitart. A tapsnál úgy érzem, hogy hosszú idő óta először veszek levegőt.' Zsófia Bálint: Blood flower, 2024, thealter.hu.

cannot be emphasised enough: the purpose of this is not to explain the production or to give assistance in its interpretation but rather to provide a reflective opportunity in relation to the *topic* raised by the performance. In this case, the drama teachers touched on the themes of orphanhood, vulnerability, humiliation, and solidarity with the students, closely connecting to the emotional and intellectual experience that the production affected. Although the program does not directly measure how much the young audiences understood or liked the production, the session can only be successful if the students were touched by the performance.

The preparatory phase of the outreach program started twenty minutes before the performance in a separate room, i.e., not on the stage. The young spectators encountered a large sign: ORPHAN. The drama teachers asked the students to say their associations connected to that word. Among the terms, there were usually synonyms, metaphors and words expressing emotions. It was important at this stage that the young spectators should not only think about the social definition of orphanhood but also expand their thinking in a more general sense. It was a firm decision of the drama teachers not to refer to the novel, not to ask the students to recall their reading experience, and not to tell the story of the book or its individual episodes. There were two reasons for this: one, that by mentioning the compulsory 'school' reading, the forthcoming production would have inevitably become part of the 'curriculum' in their eyes. We definitely wanted to avoid this. (See more about this aspect in Chapter 2.4. Stage adaptations for young people.) The other reason was to avoid treating the production 'only' as an adaptation but to let it be experienced without prior expectations. Based on our knowledge of the cultural reception of the novel, we knew that the young spectators would be familiar more or less with the story of the novel, but we did not test how much this 'prior knowledge' would be incorporated into their reception of the performance.

After the show, in the reflective phase of the outreach program, there is no mention of comparison with the novel either because we intended to avoid an aesthetical or curriculum-based analysis. Only at the end of the program, if the young audiences had questions about the style of the performance, the drama teachers were willing to give them some hints as needed. The focus of the reflective phase was the creation of a simplified sociometric diagram with Orphalina in the centre. The students were asked

to surround Orphalina with cards of the characters mentioned in the production and to place them at any distance from the girl. The young people always listed the characters without fail, such as ‘foster parents’, ‘Kadarcs’, ‘other children’, ‘animals (Boris, the cow)’, ‘Gentlewoman’, ‘dolls’ and her ‘blood mother’. The drama teachers then asked the young audience to describe the relationship of the characters to Orphalina with one word each, and vice versa: Orphalina’s relationship to these characters. (These questions can only be answered if the spectators had no problem interpreting the theatrical language of the performance.) Based on the answers, the drama teachers led a guided discussion in search of the answer to what motivated the aggressors in Orphalina’s environment to treat the girl in this way. In this stage of the reflection, the young audiences often talked more generally, even mentioning examples from their own environment or experience, with particular regard to peer abuse, loneliness, humiliation and vulnerability.

One of the undisclosed intentions of the production and mainly of the outreach program is to sensitise young people to vulnerable fellow human beings and strengthen their feeling of solidarity. The production tries to achieve all this indirectly, without being didactic, expressly with the power of solid theatrical presentation, by affecting emotions, while leaving room for free association in terms of both content and form. Based on the audience’s feedback, an important role in this was played by the fact that the protagonist was represented by a puppet and that the actors alternated their roles: sometimes portraying the vulnerable girl, sometimes the aggressor. The puppet helped with the more general, internal interpretation while leaving room for the identification of the young audiences. Even though puppetry may be ‘childish’ for young adults, as there was only one puppet in the production, it functioned more as a stylisation device than as an element of the puppet theatre as a genre.

The professional reception of the production was very positive. There was an ever-increasing interest for the production among students and teachers studying at the University of Arts, so additional performances had to be scheduled. It is a sign of professional success that the local theatre for young audiences has taken over the production from the university to include it in its own repertoire after the puppeteer students graduated. As I mentioned earlier, the performance received many festival

invitations, where we played the production for the most varied audiences. A selection of reviews and reports published in the press can be found in the Repositories.[227]

[227] DCU DORAS Repository.

4.8. Final version of the stage adaptation of *Orphalina*

ORPHALINA

(3rd adaptation – O-GV3) [228]

A stage adaptation by György Vidovszky
based on the motifs of the novel by Zsigmond Móricz
(2023)

Translated from Hungarian into English by György Vidovszky[229]

Created as part of Ph.D. on Artefact research study, Dublin City University (2018-2025)

Supervisors: Ms Marina Carr, Prof Eugene Mcnulty

[228] The adaptation forms the basis of the performance created at University of Arts Târgu-Mureş (Romania), co-produced by Ariel Theatre for Youth and Children in Târgu-Mureş (Romania). Cast: Eszter Bíró, Réka Stekbauer-Hanzi, Tímea Nagy, Szilvia Tőrös, Evelin Vén; Violin: Vivien Kiss / Janka Simon; Design: Ákos Mátravölgyi; Composer: Gábor Pap; Music director: Imre-István Strausz; Literary consultant: Boglárka Berecz, Zsófia Kósa-Szigethy; Director: György Vidovszky. Premiered: 25th January 2023.

[229] Dialogues taken from the novel are based on Virginia L. Lewis's English translation of *Orphalina* (2020), Library Cat Publishing.

I) OWNERSHIP PSALM

PROLOGUE

A big concrete block with an amniotic sac on stage. Both the sac and the concrete block are covered with plastic film. A suspended lamp is lowered all the way to just above the sac. The actors enter and line up behind music stands.

ACTOR 1 Psalm No.13: State.

CHOIR: *(singing)* State-child, State….

SCENE 1 – BIRTH

The actors wrap themselves completely in transparent film, like covered statues. They stand motionless. Meanwhile, Bach's Matthew Passion (Erbarme dich)[230] *sounds. ACTOR 2 pulls off the film from the foetal sac, then pulls it out from inside the sac too. The actors turn to the sac. CSÖRE*[231] *(a linen puppet) appears from under the film; she is in the sac in a foetal position. The puppet has an umbilical cord around the waist. The actors gather around the sac, pulling the film behind them like a train. The actors reach over/out with their hands to the sac, the puppet starts moving, and then the shell-shaped sac pops up. The music stops. The actors watch the little creature, who suddenly starts crying. The actors pass the baby from hand to hand. The baby whines, sometimes manages to calm down, and then screams again. No one wants to take care of it. Meanwhile, the umbilical cord gets wrapped around the actors, they put the puppet (CSÖRE) on it. ACTOR 1 cuts the umbilical cord, the puppet falls into the sac through the gap in the net. The actors throw off the umbilical cord in a rush.*

[230] Johann Sebastian Bach: *Matthew Passion* – BWV 244 / Part Two: No. 39 Aria (Alto).
[231] Pronounce it as 'Ch3:re'.

SCENE 2 – DAWN BREAKS ON THE PUSZTA[232]

ACTOR 1 takes the puppet out of the sac and lets it sit down. The actors stand at the music stands. A storm bursts. The sounds of the storm are given by the actors.

After a while, the rain seems to subside. The actors - in the unpredictable rhythm of the raindrops - speak.

Dawn-breaks-on-the-pusz-ta
The-harsh-re-lent-less-sun
nudg-es-up-ward-where-the-sky's-edge
meets-the-earth-like-the-under-deve-loped
egg-of-an-un-gainly-chick-en.

Meanwhile, ACTOR 2 moves the mirror over the concrete block like a sun, her face appears in it for a moment.

A-small-farm-stead-on-the-end-less-pusz-ta.
How-nice-to-be-a-child-here.
A-little-child-does-in-deed-stand-in-the-field.
Rubb-ing-the-sleep-from-her-eyes,
She-stands-there-as-God-created-her-naked.

In the meantime, the puppet (CSÖRE) comes alive and looks around. The lamp shines through the hole in the mirror. The "sun" looks at the little girl (puppet), who is trying to reach it but can't. The sun approaches her so she can jump onto it. She sleepily rubs her eyes and stretches. The puppet slides off the sun and falls to the ground.

[232] The Hungarian Puszta (Hungarian pronunciation: [ˈpustɒ]) is a temperate grassland biome of the Great Hungarian Plain. It lies mainly around the River Tisza in the eastern part of Hungary, as well as in the western part of the country and in the Burgenland of Austria. It covers a total area of about 50,000 km2 (19,000 sq mi). The characteristic landscape is composed of treeless plains, saline steppes and salt lakes, and includes scattered sand dunes, low, wet forests and freshwater marshes along the floodplains of the ancient rivers.

SCENE 3 – MILK AND SHIRT

The actors sit on the side of the concrete block facing the spectators and pose as if they were at a fashion photoshoot while imitating the sounds of all kinds of farm animals (chickens, ducks, geese, cows, horses, sheep). The puppet (CSÖRE) watches them, the animals receive her attention indifferently. In the meantime, a piece of paper is placed on her back, it is sewn into her like a price tag: "State-child". ACTOR 3 (STEPMOTHER) appears behind the animals and shouts at them.

STEPMOTHER The devil take your sorry hides!

The animal sounds stop. One of the actors presses CSÖRE's head down. The inscription on her back can be seen, everyone stands up. They laugh like mocking children while they throw CSÖRE to each other by her hands and feet.

CHILDREN State-child, state-child, state-child, state-child, state-child, state-child!

STEPMOTHER grabs CSÖRE, and holds her away from her, tearing off the piece of paper ("State-child"). The teasing stops. The children bring in the sac (this time as a trough), and they throw a white piece of linen into it.

STEPMOTHER Eat!

They all surround the trough, grab the end of the linen, and start eating (swallowing as if it were milk).

Here's the milk!

CSÖRE climbs onto the Stepmother's breast, but STEPMOTHER pushes her away.

To hell with you. Eat!

CSÖRE climbs onto the Stepmother's breast, but she pushes her away again.

Why aren't you eating? Eat that now!

ACTOR 4 offers the corner of the sheet to CSÖRE; the swallowing stops.

You, sensitive wimp![233] Here is the milk, drink it.

The children continue to eat.

Even a State child gets squeamish and finicky. What the hell, you won't drink the milk?

She tries to approach the trough; she smells it but gets disgusted. The children stop swallowing. (STEPMOTHER moves the puppet as if to help her (CSÖRE), but she gives up impatiently.)

STEPMOTHER Csöre, to hell with you. Don't want the milk? You can't even talk right. Csöre!

CSÖRE *(muttering)* Csöre. Csöre. Csöre. Csöre.

STEPMOTHER What are you muttering there, you fool?

STEPMOTHER leans closer to understand, but she can't. CSÖRE whispers in ACTOR 4's ear. ACTOR 4 speaks out what CSÖRE said.

CSÖRE Csöre.

STEPMOTHER Csöre-csöre. Don't want the milk? Why aren't you eating? Eat that now! Csöre, to hell with you.

[233] 'What a namby-pamby', p. 129 (Zsigmond Móricz: Orphalina, translated by Virginia L. Lewis).

The other children also identify with CSÖRE, put back the corner of the sheet, turn around, and hum:

ACTOR 4 (CSÖRE) Tohellwithyou, I'm just tohellwithyou. *(repeats)*
ACTOR 5 (CSÖRE) Csöre, Csöre. I'm just tohellwithyou. *(repeats)*
ACTOR 2 (CSÖRE) Csöre, Csöre. I'm just tohellwithyou. *(repeats)*
ACTOR 1 (CSÖRE) Don't want to. Don't want to.
STEPMOTHER Drink it!
ACTOR 1(CSÖRE) Cause I don't rike it[234]. *(repeats)*
STEPMOTHER You don't "rike", the devil should have taken you before I ever laid eyes on you. I didn't bring you here for you to "rike" or "not rike" my food. If you don't drink it, it'll stay here. What an ass, and can't even talk right.
ACTOR 1 (CSÖRE) Don't want any. Don't want any.

CSÖRE pushes the trough away while STEPMOTHER forces her head into it. The animals shout louder and louder.

STEPMOTHER The devil take your sorry hides![235]

The animal sounds stop. STEPMOTHER leans close to CSÖRE and talks into her face.

Is that how you treat your mother, who raises you and feeds you? *(ACTOR 5 takes over the role of STEPMOTHER, she continues)* Come here this instant![236] Now kiss my hand. *(ACTOR 5 takes over the puppet and leans CSÖRE close to her hand)* Kiss my hand when I tell you to. *(ACTOR 5 lifts up the puppet like a cat and looks into her eyes)* You're gonna disrespect me? You'd better apologise!

[234] O-N, p. 129
[235] O-N, p. 1
[236] O-N, p. 34

All the other actors hide behind the concrete block in fear and make animal sounds again, louder and louder.

I'll slice you in half.

STEPMOTHER drops the puppet on the concrete block, then walks over to the music stand. ACTOR 3 and ACTOR 4 step behind their music stands too. STEPMOTHER raises her hand, the animals fall silent. ACTOR 5, as if holding a twig in her hand, STEPMOTHER whips in the air. ACTOR 3 and ACTOR 4 make the sound of a swish. ACTOR 1 and ACTOR 2 move the puppet. CSÖRE falls to the ground from the hit, trying to escape, but has nowhere to go. STEPMOTHER 1 hits (whips) again and again. After the last blow/hit, ACTOR 1 tears off a strip of fabric from the puppet's back.

STEPMOTHER You come here! You'd better apologise![237] Say after me: "I apologise to mama dear for my bad behaviour. I'll never misbehave again." *(ACTOR 4 as STEPMOTHER steps onto the concrete block and reaches out her hand for a kiss)* So, what's it gonna be? You gonna kiss my hand now?

CSÖRE crawls in front of STEPMOTHER and kisses her hand.

STEPMOTHER Take it off! Take it off right now!
CSÖRE That's my shirt[238].
STEPMOTHER You wanna pipe down.
CSÖRE Mama dear, that's my shirt.
STEPMOTHER Shush! Just look at her, instead of getting on with her work, the little pig. You wanna just shut up? Escaping, you piece of worthless shit?

CSÖRE backs away slowly as she repeats:

[237] O-N, p. 36
[238] O-N, p. 22

CSÖRE That's my shirt. Mama dear, that's my shirt.

ACTOR 3 pulls the puppet through the hole of the mirror and pulls the skirt off her. Red head pins are stuck into CSÖRE's chest as if they were her nipples. She comes out from behind the mirror naked, ashamed. STEPMOTHER sits down on the edge of the concrete block, looks at herself in the mirror, and ties CSÖRE's skirt in her hair like a rubber band.

STEPMOTHER There's your switch. Off with you. Boriska[239] wants to graze already. But don't just wander about, follow the wagon track. You know our fields? You're not so dumb that you don't know them by now. You know them?

The violin plays the intro of the 'Chicken from Pest[240]' song.

CSÖRE *(singing)* Boris, I'd rather go out with you
'cause you don't hit me too.
CHOIR Why do you keep hitting me?
Why do you keep hitting me?
CSÖRE Come on, Boris, don't appeal.
I go out to the field.
I'd rather go out with you,
'cause you don't hit me too.
STEPMOTHER The hell with you.
Devil's spawn, you shrew.
You chicken from Pest.
So little, yet poisonous as a snake.
You chicken from Pest.

[239] Pronounce it as 'Borishko'. A typical name for a cow in Hungary. Other version of it: Boris (pronounce it as 'Borish').
[240] Pest is the Eastern part of Hungary's capital Budapest. 'Chicken from Pest' refers to a delicate girl from the capital.

So little, yet poisonous as a snake.

CSÖRE I'm not a chicken from Pest.
Boris won't me molest.

If I'm chicken, then Rozi is too.

If I'm from Pest, then she is too.

But mama dear never calls her a chicken from Pest.

Only I'm a chicken from Pest.

CHOIR I'm gonna go away then, I won't even look back then.

I'm gonna go into the round lake,

And let myself be eaten by a snake.

STEPMOTHER The hell with you.

Devil's spawn, you shrew.

CHOIR No matter what anyone says, be good till death.
You can cry over me, if the snake will eat me.
Drown me in a round lake instead, the shackles will fall off then.

STEPMOTHER Let the devil cry over you,
You bastard shrew.

SCENE 4 – WATERMELON

The actors are lying on their backs with their legs up, representing swaying plants [like reeds]. Boriska is similarly created from the bodies of the actors. The actors imitate the sounds of the field. A fly lands on CSÖRE's face.

CSÖRE: Boris, don't! Not there, youu…!

BORIS: To where, then? Csöre, to where?

CSÖRE: That way, hey. Boris not there, you…!

BORIS: To where, Csöre, which way?

CSÖRE: Not there. Boris, don't! Not there, youu…!

BORIS: To where, Csöre, which way?

CSÖRE: Not there! Go there!

CSÖRE sees a watermelon (the light above her head lights up red).

CSÖRE: *(focusing only on the melon)* Boris, not there! Go there!
BORIS: Csöre don't! Not there, youu…!
CSÖRE: Boris, not there! Go there!
BORIS: Csöre, not there!
CSÖRE: Boris, don't! Go there!
BORIS: Csöre, not there!
CSÖRE: Boris, don't! Go there, you!
BORIS: Csöre, not there!

She tries to reach the melon from Boris's back, but the cow does not help her. She jumps off, clinging to the reeds, she gets to the melon. She jumps on the lamp. CSÖRE examines the melon like a treasure, knocks on it, and listens to it from up close. ACTORS 1, 2, 3, 4 steps behind their music stands.

SCENE 5 – EMBERS

ACTOR 5 stays with the puppet (CSÖRE). At first, the others ask CSÖRE cheerfully.

ACTOR 4 Where did you get the melon from?[241]
CSÖRE I found it in the field.
ACTOR 2 Is it all right to pick the melons?
ACTOR 3 You wretch, is it allowed to pick melons from the field?
ACTOR 1 Don't you know, you miserable pig, that we have to sell the melons?
ACTOR 3 You dare go and pick them?
ACTOR 2 Is it your melon?
ACTOR 4 Am I raising you to be a thief?
ACTOR 1 You're gonna become a thief on me?
ACTOR 2 So, so, just keep an eye out once she stole!
ACTOR 4 She went to the melon field and picked the prettiest melon.

[241] O-N, p. 39

ACTOR 1 Which we could've sold.

ACTOR 3 She stole? Stooole? This piece of shit stole a melon?

They speak to her more and more threateningly. Music played backwards: Bach: Erbarme dich

ACTOR 4 Come here, you won't be stealing anymore... *(takes the rope)*

ACTOR 1 You won't be stealing anything more, even if it sticks in your hand.

The actors step to CSÖRE and tie the puppet to the lamp with the rope.

ACTOR 3 Just close the door so she can't get out.

ACTOR 2 Grab her hand! *(repeats it)*

ACTOR 1 What are you gonna do to her?

ACTOR 2 I'm gonna teach this pig!

ACTOR 4 She is not gonna steal anymore.

ACTOR 3 Hold her hand.

ACTOR 4 Hold her fingers together and keep her hand still.

ACTOR 2 Hold it so that I can set the ember down on it.

ACTOR 3 Hold her hand!

ACTOR 2 She won't be stealing again, by God...

Each actor thrusts a red headpin into the puppet's hand. CSÖRE twitches every time a pin is inserted into her hand. ACTOR 2 pulls up the lamp, CSÖRE is hanging on it with her hands tied to the rope.

SCENE 6 – EMBER MOURNER

All the actors lie on the concrete block. While they talk, they snap their bra straps, sounds like fire crackling.

ACTOR 1 (STEPMOTHER) My sweet little girl, it's not all right to steal, didn't you know that?

ACTOR 4 (STEPMOTHER) I told papa dear because I'm too weak to teach you.

ACTOR 2 (STEPMOTHER) But he's taught you a hard lesson, come here, come, I'll put a little cloth with sour cream on your hand.

ACTOR 3 (STEPMOTHER) You see, my hand burned even more, my flesh even smoked, it burned so much when he pressed the ember down.

ACTOR 1(STEPMOTHER) So, don't steal anymore, my child, 'cause that's the greatest sin. Don't take what isn't yours.

ACTOR 4 (STEPMOTHER) Here everything belongs to others; you can't just take anything from anywhere, you know.

ACTOR 2 (STEPMOTHER) You can't take anything from anywhere in the world 'cause nothing whatsoever belongs to you.

ACTOR 5 (STEPMOTHER) Your skin that's yours, but nothing else is yours.

II) LOVE PSALM

SCENE 7 – GEHENNA[242]

ACTOR 4 No. 8: Love Psalm

All actors go to the music stands.

CHOIR: *(singing)* Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am nothing[243] (://)

Curses are heard during the singing. They say them as if they were reading from the music sheet.

ACTOR 4 You should've croaked it in your mother's belly. I can't stand to look at this lazy bitch.[244] Chicken from Pest, outta my sight…!

[242] Gehenna is abode of the damned in the afterlife in Jewish and Christian eschatology.
[243] Words cited from: *The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians # 13*.
[244] O-N, p. 45

ACTOR 5 Go to the field already. I've had it with you. Tomorrow you're goin', so I don't have to look at you day in day out, you're not much to look at. The devil's horse should carry you off!

ACTOR 2 Who'll do it if I don't? Goddamn me to hell, reduced to this by that little wretch. Why do I deserve this Gehenna…

ACTOR 1 Oh, you nasty beast, you're not sleeping with me anymore, you filthy beast, you've made a mess of my bed.[245] May the devil slap your stinking little mug, you brat.[246]

ACTOR 3 Just go, take the pigs out.[247] Rinse your head in the trough, then be on your way[248]. I'm not slaving away for this beast.[249] To hell with you, here it's better for you, no one hurts you here.[250]

ACTOR 4 and 5 untie the rope, they let CSÖRE off.

SCENE 8 – KADARCS[251] – THE SOLDIER

CHILD 1 Let's go to the vines and eat some grapes![252] *(brings the mirror)*

CHILD 2 Kadarcs's are sweet. Ripe and sweet.

CHILD 3 Let's go to Kadarcs's grapevines.

Meanwhile, the mirror is placed behind CSÖRE. She looks through the hole in the mirror but finds herself facing a puli[253]. ACTOR 2 sticks her head through the hole, big curly hair covers her face, and barks. CSÖRE makes friends with the dog in turn.

CHILD 1 Quick, out of the grape vines!

[245] O-N, p. 126
[246] O-N, p. 136
[247] O-N, p. 129
[248] O-N, p. 130
[249] O-N, p. 129
[250] O-N, p. 133
[251] Pronounce it as 'Kadarch' (a name of the neighbour farmer).
[252] O-N, p. 50
[253] 'Puli' is a small-medium breed of Hungarian herding dog known for its long coat. The tight curls of the coat appear similar to dreadlocks.

CHILD 3 Here comes Kadarcs, the farmer.

Deep sound. KADARCS, the farmer, appears. A large white sheet is hung over the lamp. The lamp is the farmer's head, the sheet is his body. The dog disappears behind the sheet. KADARCS's recorded voice sounds distorted.

KADARCS You stay here, the others go home.

CSÖRE Why do I stay here? I'll get b-beat-t-ten? Don't hurt me! I'll burn your fingers.

KADARCS What'll you do?

CSÖRE Burn them! Don't hurt me!

KADARCS *(grabs and lifts up Csöre)* So now I've got you! I've got you! Now you can't run away from me. Do you like bread with honey? Do you like sweets? You dirty little brat… now I'm gonna break all your bones, gonna eat you up, swallow you, devour you… I've been salivating after you for a long time now. Do ya know who I am?

CSÖRE The Kadarcs! Uncle Pista!

KADARCS No! I'm a soldier…

CSÖRE Uncle Pista!

KADARCS Won't you shut your trap! I'm a soldier! I just got back from the front.

Violin screeching. Three red threads run one by one in a stitch-like manner on the big white sheet from the lamp to the puppet. A large needle with the same red thread appears between CSÖRE's legs, piercing the puppet through.

KADARCS Go home. They're waiting for you.

KADARCS disappears. The red thread remains in the little girl. She just lies there and doesn't move. It's like she's dead.

SCENE 9 – BLOOD

ACTORS 2, 3, 4 (as GIRLS) sit near CSÖRE, staring at the puppet with curiosity.

GIRL 3 Why are you all bloody?
CSÖRE The stake poked me.
GIRL 2 What stake?
CSÖRE The Kadarcs.
GIRL 4 What Kadarcs?
GIRL 3 The stake poked you?
CSÖRE What stake?
GIRL 2 The Kadarcs.
CSÖRE What Kadarcs?
GIRL 4 You are all bloody.
GIRL 3 Why are you all bloody?
CSÖRE The stake poked me.
GIRL 2 What stake?
CSÖRE The Kadarcs.
GIRL 4 What Kadarcs?
GIRL 3 The stake poked you?
CSÖRE What stake?
GIRL 2 The Kadarcs.
CSÖRE What Kadarcs?
GIRL 4 You are all bloody.
STEPMOTHER Leave Csöre alone now. Don't kick her. Her behind hurts.

The girls leave in a rush. STEPMOTHER checks out the thread between the legs of CSÖRE.

Was that beast the Kadarcs Pista? He should go to hell. He's gonna pay for that. I'll show him.

STEPMOTHER tears the thread with her teeth and hits the needle against the music stand like a tuning fork.

III) BIRTH PSALM

SCENE 10 – BIRTH

STEPMOTHER looks as if she's swallowed the largest melon in the field whole. She lies on her back, she goes into labour, moans and shouts. ACTORS 2, 3, 4, as NEIGHBOURS are helping her.

NEIGHBOR 3 Die Borisch kalbt![254] Die Borisch kalbt!

NEIGHBOR 2 Haideţi, fată vaca![255]

NEIGHBOR 4 Go and send someone to help since Boriska's calving!

Music on violin. Bach: Erbarme dich

NEIGHBOR 2 Haideţi, fată vaca!

NEIGHBOR 4 *(to Csöre)* The calf is coming.

ACTOR 5, who is in labour as BORISKA (the cow), lets out a yelp and is relieved. The NEIGHBOURS pull out a large ball of transparent film from under her skirt, not yet able to recognise what it is. It turns into a small calf while they rotate it in the air. The calf tries to stand up but always falls. CSÖRE tries making friends with the calf, mirroring its movements. When the calf lies down, CSÖRE lies down next to him and tangles with him.

STEPMOTHER She's killing him! She's killing him![256] May the devil slap your stinking little mug, your brat![257] What're you doin'? Hey, what did he ever do wrong to you? What the hell! May lighting strike you![258] *(to the calf)* Now eat my sweet little beauty![259]

[254] In German. Meaning: Boriska's calving.
[255] In Romanian. Meaning: The cow's calving.
[256] O-N, p. 192
[257] O-N, p. 136
[258]O-N, p. 181
[259] O-N, p. 80

The calf drinks the milk as the children did earlier - holding the white sheet to his mouth.

I'll show that evil brat what for if she so much as touches you, sweet baby.

Indignantly, CSÖRE pulls the milk away from the calf.

IV) PROVIDENCE PSALM

SCENE 12 – PROVIDENCE

ACTOR 2 No.12: Providence Psalm

All actors kneel and turn to the audience. The violin plays a traditional Hungarian folk song.

CHOIR *(singing)* My mother's rosebush
I am its pruned bough
Where does the bough grow, where does it branch?
If its soil is dry, ha-de-ha.

I am the wicked one
On whose lips the word curses.
I curse the word, I also curse what I do
No wonder I get lost, ha-de-ha.

GENTLEWOMAN arrives with a rope on her shoulder and sits on the side of the concrete block. ACTORS 1, 4, 5 sit behind each other, they look like a three-head 'Mother-saurus'. They hold CSÖRE tight in their lap. (They take turns talking.)

GENTLEWOMAN Good day.
STEPMOTHER Oh my, how do you do, ma'am, how do you do?

CSÖRE How do you do, ma'am, how do you do?

GENTLEWOMAN Why did Orphalina run away?

STEPMOTHER She's a runner, ma'am, she's a runner, poor thing.

CSÖRE I'm a runner, ma'am, I'm a runner, poor thing.

GENTLEWOMAN And why hasn't she got any clothing on?

STEPMOTHER It's nothing, it's just her nature, she takes them off as soon as she puts them on. No one sees her here, and it's not cold either.

CSÖRE It's nothing, it's just my nature, I take them off as soon as I put them on. No one sees me here, and it's not cold either.

GENTLEWOMAN I told you already last year that I shouldn't see her naked, otherwise, I'll take her away from you.

CSÖRE I told you already last year that they shouldn't see me naked, otherwise, they'll take me away from you.

GENTLEWOMAN You are faced with a serious charge. Your foster child should have been attending school for the past year, but you failed to meet the enrolment deadline.

STEPMOTHER Am I faced with a serious charge? My foster child should have been attending school for the past year, but I failed to meet the enrolment deadline?

CSÖRE What's your answer to that?

STEPMOTHER is speechless.

GENTLEWOMAN What's your answer to that?

STEPMOTHER I know nothing about that, ma'am.

GENTLEWOMAN Perhaps the child was ill?

STEPMOTHER Yes, ma'am, she's always ill and a little backwards.

CSÖRE Yes, ma'am, I'm always ill and a little backwards.

GENTLEWOMAN How do things stand with the child's cognitive development?

STEPMOTHER She's a little dense, a little stupid. She'll never become a person.

CSÖRE I'm a little dense, a little stupid. I'll never become a person.

GENTLEWOMAN Come here, my child. Little Orphalina, don't be afraid of me. You know, Orphalina, you're as pretty as the prettiest flower in spring.

CSÖRE: I'm not Orphalina.

GENTLEWOMAN Then who are you?

CSÖRE Chick.

GENTLEWOMAN What?

STEPMOTHER No! Csöre, you silly.

CSÖRE Chick.

STEPMOTHER Csöre.

GENTLEWOMAN Orphalina.

CSÖRE Chick.

STEPMOTHER Csöre.

GENTLEWOMAN No, your name is Orphalina. Orphalina State. That's how your name is entered, you're little Orphalina State. Come here. Come on, I'm taking you to the village.

She calls the little girl, who doesn't want to go, STEPMOTHER won't let her either. They pull and drag her. The GENTLEWOMAN ties a rope to CSÖRE's hand. CSÖRE starts crying.

ACTOR 1 (AS STEPMOTHER) Don't cry, my child!

ACTOR 4 (AS STEPMOTHER) Don't cry now, sweetheart, little angel.

ACTOR 5 (AS STEPMOTHER) Dear child, my little dove.

The GENTLEWOMAN pulls CSÖRE away from STEPMOTHER.

CSÖRE Let me go!

GENTLEWOMAN But why do you want to stay with that nasty woman?

CSÖRE 'Cause my mama dear.

GENTLEWOMAN You fool, that's not your mother. She got money for keeping you. They paid her, you dunce. She didn't love you. She only loved the money she got for you.

CSÖRE climbs down and goes back to STEPMOTHER.

ACTOR 1 (AS STEPMOTHER) Oh, hell, damn you! Leave me alone! Don't I have enough to trouble myself with, saddling myself with you?[260]

ACTOR 4 (AS STEPMOTHER) To hell with you, you wretch![261]

ACTOR 5 (AS STEPMOTHER) May the devil take your sorry soul, can't a person get rid of you?

The three-headed STEPMOTHER leaves. GENTLEWOMAN ties a rope around the CSÖRE's wrist. Violin. CSÖRE She wants to go, but she can't, the rope is stuck. She tugs, pulls, and falls to the ground. She stands up and pulls on the rope again.

CHOIR *(singing)* Mum married off her daughter[262]
Far away from herself
She forbade her, she ordered her
Don't go toward me, daughter!

SOLO I will, I will make myself into the mottled bird
I'll fly to my mum
And sit there in the garden
On a white lily.

CHOIR Mum comes out: what's this bird?
What sings so sadly?
Hey, heshu, mottled bird
Don't break the lily!

SOLO You wed me to a bad man
In a foreign country
Truly, I feel bad, dear mum,
for being with a bad man.

CSÖRE notices that the rope has fallen from her wrist. Music stops.

[260] O-N, p. 48
[261] O-N, p. 36
[262] *Zadala mamka, zadala dcéru* – Slovakian Folksong listed by Béla Bartók in 1917.

SCENE 13 – DOLLS

The actors sit in doll positions during the song. It's dark. CSÖRE stands in the middle, lighting up the terrifying toy dolls one by one with a flashlight. The dolls make mechanical movements.

DOLL 1	Be careful, don't get salted like this other State child.
CSÖRE	How/what?
DOLL 2	Well, what happened was everyone left the house, only the nine-year-old stayed behind with the State child.[263]
DOLL 3	So, the nine-year-old told the little State child once they were alone:
DOLL 4	Come, I'll brine you. *(bursts out laughing)*
DOLL 2	With that, he grabbed the child and slaughtered her like his papa did the pig. He stabbed her.
DOLL 4	He cut off her hands and feet, gutted her and brined it all just as it was. *(bursts out laughing)*
DOLL 3	The parents came home that evening, then they asked, where's the State child?
DOLL 1	The nine-year-old said: In the trough, I brined her.

The dolls burst out laughing. CSÖRE crushes and overturns them all. In the end, she sits down in front of the concrete block in a toy doll pose and begins to move mechanically. ACTOR 2 places the mirror over the puppet, CSÖRE looks out through the hole in the mirror and notices her own reflection in the mirror. She talks to herself.

MIRROR CSÖR	Whose little calf are you?
CSÖRE	Nobody's.
MIRROR CSÖRE	No mother?
CSÖRE	No, just mama dear.

[263] O-N, p. 71

MIRROR CSÖRE Who brought you into the world, then?

CSÖRE I'm just the State's.

MIRROR CSÖRE Those foster parents have got it good, they pick a State child up out of the dirt, feed her for three months, pocket enough money to buy a young pig... How old are you?

CSÖRE I don't know.

MIRROR CSÖRE You don't even know that? However, many pigs are on the farm here, they've all been fattened off of this.

CSÖRE hugs her own mirror reflection.

V) HOPE PSALM

SCENE 14 – CHURCH

ACTOR 3 No. 5. Hope Psalm

ACTOR 2 *(singing)* I'm an orphan with no guardian[264]
I mourn even for water.

CHOIR I'm an orphan with no guardian,
I mourn even for water.
I'm an orphan, like a bird
Who soars in the clouds.
I'm an orphan, like a bird
Who soars in the clouds.

ACTOR 5 puts on a loincloth and lies on the concrete block with the position of Jesus Christ. ACTOR 2 and 3 (as ANGELS) place the mirror at the top of the concrete block, it looks like the glory over Christ's head. ACTOR 4 (as the PRIEST) looks through the hole in the mirror from behind. The ANGELS repeat, singing everything that the PRIEST says.

[264] Romanian folk song listed by Zoltán Kodály in 1910

PRIEST The "protagonist", the suffering subject of these stories, cannot change anything in her life situation, she just drifts. The scenes of her life, the people who hurt her, only change. Her fate is always and everywhere the same: vulnerability and humiliation. She cannot learn, she cannot have her own clothes or will, and her own body is not hers either. She is hungry and cold; she serves and tolerates the hatred and beatings that are constantly thrown at her. In the background of the artefact is the dreadful world of an entire social "ORDER". Its definition is: 'short story'. Everyone can be bribed, children are bought and sold as slaves.[265]

CSÖRE I'm gonna go to my mother and tell her that I'm always beaten.[266]

ANGEL Quiet, you mustn't speak.

PRIEST The suffering heroine naturally creates her own dream world, and fantasizes about her mother, who will come for her and take her with her one day.

CSÖRE How much longer is that ass gonna talk?[267]

ANGEL Don't talk so loudly and rudely.

CSÖRE pushes the PRIEST away and looks through the hole in the mirror. It looks as if her face were Christ's face in the mirror. She reads per syllable[268].

CSÖRE "...we-d-on't-tr-ust-that-th-ings-will-tur-n-for-her-bet-ter…" I'm a lot like Jesus because the State gives me wounds on my hands and my behind.

ACTOR 5 No. 24, Homecoming Psalm

<u>Violin.</u> ACTOR 5 comes off the concrete block. The actors cover the block with a big white tablecloth and place the mirror in the centre like a tray. CSÖRE lies on it (similarly to the previous picture with Christ); however, it looks more as if she was

[265] The Priest's text is the fragments taken from the analysis of Orphalina of the literature textbook accepted for decades in Hungary.
[266] O-N, p. 147
[267] O-N, p. 152
[268] Hungarian children learn to read by reading syllable by syllable.

served for the feast on the tray. The bottom of the concrete block is illuminated in different colours.

VI) HOMECOMING PSALM

SCENE 16 – CHRISTMAS

Different Christmas songs overlap each other.

CHOIR ‘Oh, beautiful, mysterious night![269]
Tiny rose leaf, sky-eyed child,
The sweet Lord as a babe
Smooths out in the crib
On holy Christmas night!’

CHOIR ‘Silent night, holy night![270]
All is calm, all is bright.
Round yon Virgin, Mother and Child.
Holy infant so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace.’

CHOIR ‘It came upon a midnight clear,[271]
That glorious song of old,
From angels bending near the earth,
To touch their harps of gold:
“Peace on the earth, goodwill to men,

[269] Evangelical Christmas carol. Melody was listed in Gimes (Transylvanian part of Romania), lyrics by Czikéné Lovich Ilona (1931) – (In Hungarian: ‘Oh gyönyörű szép, titikzatos éj…’).
[270] *Silent Night* (German: *Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht*) Austrian Christmas carol, composed in 1818 by Franz Xaver Gruber to lyrics by Joseph Mohr. English lyrics by John Freeman Young (1859) – (In Hungarian: *Csendes éj*).
[271] *It Came Upon A Midnight Clear* – American Christmas carol (poem written by Edmund Sears, melody by Richard Storrs Willis) – In Hungarian: ‘Soha nem volt még, ilyen áldott éj…’ (Hungarian lyrics by Károly Vargha).

From heaven's all-gracious King.'
The world in solemn stillness lay,
To hear the angels sing.'

ACTORS 2, 3, 5 as CHILDREN 'sit' behind the concrete block as if it was a big table. They act out their eating with flashlights. ACTOR 4, as MUTÉR[272], sits in the middle. ACTOR 1 is CSÖRE.

MUTÉR Now you can have your dinner and go to bed.[273]
CSÖRE The baby Jesus hasn't even visited me yet.[274]
CHILD 1 Baby Jesus won't come to such a mangy wretch.
CHILD 2 Baby Jesus was already here, he brought me two pretty dresses, a pretty pair of shoes, a coat. Three pairs of panties plus ribbons.
CHILD 3 And lots of candy. Even more than St Nicholas.[275]
CHILD 4 Oh, how little St. Nicholas does. The baby Jesus is the real thing. Topnotch.
CSÖRE What did he bring me?
CHILD 1 What would he bring to a mangy old State child?

The children are laughing. CSÖRE sits up.

CHILD 2 What are you gaping at, you ass, haven't you ever seen anything like that?
CSÖRE No, I haven't.
MUTÉR *(to the children)* Hey! *(to Csöre)* Get out of here, you're not allowed to cry under the Christmas tree. Get out, go to bed.

ACTOR 1 takes the puppet (CSÖRE) in her hands.

[272] Based on the German word 'Mutter' the way it was used among German-speaking Hungarians.
[273] P. 252
[274] In Hungary Santa Claus doesn't arrive during the night of December 24th. Rather, Jézuska (baby Jesus) and his helpers (the angels) come and drop off presents for good children.
[275] The Christmas season kicks off in Hungary with Mikulás-nap (St. Nicholas Day) on 6th of December when children polish their shoes and set them on windowsills in the hope that Miklós will fill them with small goodies during the night.

CSÖRE But I'd like to wait for the good baby Jesus to bring me something too.

MUTÉR Now get out and go to the yard, go around the well three times, then come back. Then your wish will come true.

The actors lift up the concrete block and place it on its side. Now it looks like a giant concrete wall. ACTOR 1 lets the puppet sit in the centre of the concrete block and leaves her alone. The actors partly hide behind the wall in the dark.

ACTOR 1 Come for me, kind, sweet mother, take me with you, I won't be afraid anymore…[276]

ACTOR 4 'cause a mother is allowed to tie her child's hands, and it doesn't hurt.

ACTOR 2 You wretched dog, you, why did you leave me here? Why don't you find your little girl?

ACTOR 5 Get a rope, tie me and take me with you.

ACTOR 3 'cause I could never ever lay my head on anyone's lap.

The actors repeatedly whisper their lines at once. Suddenly, the end of a rope falls from above, over the wall. Violin: Bach: Erbarme dich sounds. While CSÖRE climbs up on the rope, the see-through half bowl appears on the top of the wall connected to the other end of the rope. It bounces like a light balloon. The balloon plays with CSÖRE; it lets her fly. CSÖRE climbs to the balloon (or the sac) and sits in it. The sac slowly lands on the ground.

ACTOR 1 My sweet mother, I have a candle, and I have matches, and I'll light it for you, Mama. I really will.

Smoke (see-through film) comes through the gap in the wall. It swirls over the puppet and covers the sac with the puppet in it completely. The actors turn towards the audience.

[276] O-N, p. 242

CHOIR Her mother is not keeping her beautiful daughter for herself,[277][49]
Her mother is not keeping her beautiful daughter for herself,
She raises her in her arms and then lets her fly on her wings,
She raises her in her arms and then lets her fly on her wings.
She sees her from far away to be scolded and beaten by others,
She sees her from far away to be scolded and beaten by others.

Silence. The actors snap their bra straps, sounds like fire crackling. They softly imitate the sounds of farm animals (chickens, ducks, geese, cows, horses, sheep) as they sound from a distance. In the dark, only the sac is glowing. Slow fade out.

[277] Hungarian folksong in 'Csángó' dialect (from Western Moldavia – part of Transylvania, Romania). Listed by Péter Pál Domokos and Péter Balla in Bogdánfalva (1929).

5. FINAL REFLECTIONS

For a theatre practitioner, theoretical questions are not the most dominant aspect during creation. Although I have a strong foundation for analytical thinking through my previous studies, and this often comes into play during creation, I am more often engaged in thinking about practical issues and evaluating effects when making a theatre production. Intuition is the most decisive driving force of creation. Thanks to the opportunity this research presented, I have been able to interrogate and conceptualise different aspects of adaptation and TYA, which often only instinctively became part of my creative work. I hope that the findings of the theoretical research are reflected in my two adaptations. The research confirmed my previous practical experience that consideration of the specific age group is essential in TYA. At the same time, I have also become more determined that, in addition to the appropriate selection of a relevant topic, the precise and well-thought-out formal implementation of the production is the key element to reaching out to young audiences. One of the enduring aspects of this is that they should be made 'co-creators' while watching a production by stimulating them just enough to make their imaginations work. I hope that I have succeeded in justifying through theory my old belief that an adaptation can become truly valid if it makes maximum use of the differences between the art forms and does not fall into the false trap of 'fidelity' to the original. As a TYA director, one of my main motivations is that a theatre performance can affect the lives of young spectators, inspire them, make them think, and, when needed, help them to deal with trauma. I trust that the two adaptations that form the basis of my research pose valid and important questions in an engaging form for young audiences.

I hope that my observations have enriched both theory and practice related to adaptations in the field of TYA. I can say with conviction that I came across multiple findings whose consideration will fundamentally determine my creative process in the future.

6. FIGURES

Figure 20. Set design of A Monster Calls – with King Kong (Ákos Mátravölgyi, 2021)

Figure 21. Production shot of A Monster Calls – the hole in the centre of the set (photo Zsolt Mészáros)

Figure 22. Screenshot of the recordings – A Monster Calls – Conor and the Puppeteer
(Recording: Ágnes Kaczmarski)

Figure 23. Production shot – A Monster Calls – The nightmare (photo: Zsolt Mészáros)

Figure 24. Production shot – A Monster Calls – Conor as the Monster (Photo: Zsolt Mészáros)

Figure 25. Variations for Scene 6 GRANDMA – A Monster Calls
Rehearsal shot: György Vidovszky; production shot: Zsolt Mészáros)

Figure 26. Production shot – A Monster Calls – Scene 7 (photo: Jácint Nagy)

Figure 27. Scene 10 – The Second Tale (Belief Is Half Of Healing) – A Monster Calls

Figure 28. Production shot of the student production – Orphalina (2006)

Figure 29. Production shot – Orphalina (Nobody's daughter), 2010

Figure 30. Creation of the Puppet (Orphalina) by the actors. Workshop was led by Ákos Mátravölgyi

Figure 31. Improvisation on the rehearsal – Orphalina

Figure 32. Production shot – Orphalina with nipples (photo: Tibor Jakab)

Declaration of Contribution for PhD by Artefact

Section 1: Candidate's Details	
Candidate's Name	GYÖRGY VIDOVSZKY
DCU Student Number	18215168
School	English
Principal Supervisor	Prof Dr Eugene McNulty
Title of PhD	An exploration of the creative approaches to stage adaptations in the field of theatre for young audiences; working from selected novels for young adults
Section 2: Details of First Thesis Element Please replicate Section 2 and 3 for each substantial element created and submitted as part of the thesis	
Title of element and brief description of what it entails	*A Monster Calls* An original stage adaptations and theatre production based on the novel by Patrick Ness / Siobhan Dowd
List of creators in order of contribution, most significant first	
Publication or Performance Details (e.g. please provide details here of where the artefact/performance etc. was displayed and where the digital record can be accessed)	The adaptation forms the basis of the performance created in Weöres Sándor Theatre, Szombathely (Hungary) coproduction partner of Mesebolt Puppet Theatre, Szombathely (Hungary). Premiered 7th October 2021. The stage recording of *A Monster Calls*: https://youtu.be/VLRrsI7WlJM The performance was recorded on the 18th of January 2022 at Weöres Sándor Theatre, Szombathely (Hungary).
Section 3: Candidate's Contribution	
The central components of my PhD by Artefact were the original adaptations and playscripts for *A Monster Calls* and *Orphalina*. I am the sole author of these stage adaptations (my work as the theatre director of these productions was ancillary to the core PhD work).	

Section 4: Signature and Validation

I confirm that the information I have provided in this form is true and accurate.

Signature of PhD Candidate: György Vidovszky **Date**: 30 May 2025

I confirm that the information provided by the candidate is correct:

Signature of Principal Supervisor:

Prof Dr Eugene McNulty **Date**: 30 May 2025

In some cases, it may be necessary for verification to be given by both the principal supervisor and other collaborators. In this case, such collaborators should sign below (add additional lines where required).

N/A

Declaration of Contribution for PhD by Artefact

Section 1: Candidate's Details	
Candidate's Name	GYÖRGY VIDOVSZKY
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Title of PhD	An exploration of the creative approaches to stage adaptations in the field of theatre for young audiences; working from selected novels for young adults
Section 2: Details of First Thesis Element Please replicate Section 2 and 3 for each substantial element created and submitted as part of the thesis	
Title of element and brief description of what it entails	*Orphalina* An original stage adaptations and theatre production based on the novel by Zsigmond Móricz
List of creators in order of contribution, most significant first	
Publication or Performance Details (e.g. please provide details here of where the artefact/performance etc. was displayed and where the digital record can be accessed)	The adaptation forms the basis of the performance created at University of Arts Târgu-Mureş (Romania), co-produced by Ariel Theatre for Youth and Children in Târgu-Mureş (Romania). Premiered: 25th January 2023. To view the stage recording of *Orphalina*: https://youtu.be/cTrHkCpYlR8 The performance was recorded on the 28th of October 2023 at the Ariel Theatre for Youth and Children in Târgu-Mureş (Romania).
Section 3: Candidate's Contribution	
The central components of my PhD by Artefact were the original adaptations and playscripts for *Orphalina* and *A Monster Calls*. I am the sole author of these stage adaptations (my work as the theatre director of these productions was ancillary to the core PhD work).	

Section 4: Signature and Validation

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Signature of Principal Supervisor: Prof Dr Eugene McNulty **Date**: 30 May 2025

In some cases, it may be necessary for verification to be given by both the principal supervisor and other collaborators. In this case, such collaborators should sign below (add additional lines where required).

N/A

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