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Lost detectives: intermedial adaptations of nineteenth-century Russian crime fiction. A conversation

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Abstract

This conversation took place over three recorded sessions between Carol Adlam and Claire Whitehead in St Andrews and Nottingham between April and May 2023, to mark the culmination of the first four-year stage of a multi-media crime fiction-adaptation project, 'Lost Detectives: Adapting Old Texts for New Media' (funded by the University of St Andrews' Knowledge Exchange and Impact Fund, led by Whitehead). Bringing together Whitehead's research specialism in early Russian crime fiction and Adlam's expertise in visual and textual adaptation, the aim of the Lost Detectives project is to draw on a large body of neglected works of early Russian crime fiction (1860–1917) as a corrective to the prevailing, canonical understanding of Russian literary culture, contributing deep historical perspective to the new and unfolding public socio-cultural and political discourse around ways in which Russian culture may take a proportionate place in our shared human legacy. From 2019 to 2023 Adlam made five cross-media adaptations, as follows: (1) *The Bobrov Affair* (2019): exhibition and proof-of-concept graphic material adapting Semyon Panov's novella *Tri suda, ili ubiistvo vo vremia bala* (Three Courts, or Murder During the Ball; 1876); (2) 'Spade and Sand' (2019): libretto adaptation of Nikolai Timofeev's short story 'Ubiistvo i samoubiistvo' (Murder and Suicide; 1872); (3) *Today in 1864* (2020): 45-minute audio-drama adaptation of Nikolai Timofeev's *Zapiski sledovatelia* (Notes of an Investigator; 1872); (4) *Curare* (2021): 45-minute audio-drama adaptation of Aleksandr Shkliarevskii's 'Sekretnoe sledstvie' (A Secret Investigation; 1881); and (5) *The Russian Detective*, a 120-pp. graphic novel (Jonathan Cape, 2024). An eponymous podcast documents the project. The discussion has been edited for clarity.

What are the distinguishing characteristics of early Russian crime fiction and how do these condition the task of adaptation?

Whitehead: Knowledge of nineteenth-century Russian literature is dominated by the realist novels of writers like Fedor Dostoevskii and Lev Tolstoi to such an extent that many Russians are ignorant of their country's history of crime fiction. People might, at a push, think of Dostoevskii's *Crime and Punishment* (1864). However, there were around thirty writers producing numerous works of crime fiction in both story and novel form, more or less contemporaneously with Dostoevskii. Some of these works were wildly successful but almost all are now wholly forgotten within Russia, and unknown outside

the country. Only Dostoevskii's and Anton Chekhov's crime fiction has been translated into English.

Crime fiction in Russia emerged in the very early 1860s, slightly later than in some other countries, as an indirect consequence of Russia's crushing defeat in Crimea in 1856. The new Tsar, Aleksandr II (r. 1855–81) introduced a programme of sweeping reforms, the most consequential of which was the Emancipation of the Serfs in 1861, which liberated an estimated 30 million people, profoundly altering Russia's social organization and causing rapid urbanization. An expectation that the Emancipation would lead to civil unrest prompted the introduction of major judicial reforms in 1860 and 1864. The first of these included the introduction of a key figure in the new judicial landscape: the *sudebnyi sledovatel´* (judicial investigator), who assumes responsibility for the pre-trial investigation of crimes and has wide-ranging powers. He (and it was always a man) investigates crime scenes, gathers material evidence, organizes autopsies, interrogates witnesses, and remands suspects to prison. When he concludes his investigation, he sends a dossier to the local procurator, who decides whether the case comes to trial. As the closest we get to a detective in late imperial Russia, he is the figure required for crime fiction to begin to be written. The police exist as well, but with different, and lesser, jurisdictions and responsibilities. In 1864, broader reforms to the judicial system are introduced including: the separation of the legal and executive branches of the state; the equality of all citizens in the eyes of the law; and a more open, oral, adversarial system, including trial by jury and the role of barrister. Concomitantly, the relaxation in censorship in 1856, the creation of free market conditions that allow publishing houses to be established and new journal publications to flourish, and the increase in literacy rates achieved by educational reform, all contributed to the success of crime fiction. I outline this background in my monograph (Whitehead).

While such features as interrogations, material searches, and autopsies in early Russian crime fiction may look broadly familiar to Western readers, a key difference lies in the structural role of the confession. In the Russian legal system of the time, all the evidence in the world (material, circumstantial, witness testimony) pointing to one culprit was likely to be insufficient to secure a conviction without the criminal's confession—the gold standard of proof. Although we need to return to the question of the porous border between literary fiction and documentary or quasi-journalistic reporting, Russian crime fiction did reflect the essential nature of the confession. So, in many of these early works, you frequently know 'whodunit' almost from the outset. The possession of this knowledge does not mean that there is no suspense: instead, the suspense comes from the question of how the detective figure can use his skills as an investigator, a psychologist, and an empathetic human being, to persuade the culprit to confess.

Adlam: These were important features for me to grapple with when adapting. Some aspects were familiar to me: there were, for instance, the technological advances that we are familiar with in nineteenth-century Western Europe that took place in Russia at more or less the same time, such as photography for taxonomic and surveillance purposes; forensic analysis of blood; reconstructions of boots from footprints in snow; and so on. In my latest and most substantial adaptation, the graphic novel *The Russian Detective*, I use a fairly familiar genre convention of seeding such forensically loaded elements as clues, so in the opening endpapers you see: an air balloon, diamonds,

razors, boots, books, a ladder, cameras, and giant red herrings for sale in a shop window. These are the trappings of investigation that are familiar in both cultures (Fig. 1).

But there was much that was unfamiliar, not just to me but to any potential Western audience. Such elements include both religious (Orthodox) and superstitious belief systems (the latter particularly evident in the Nikolai Timofeev text), as well as idiosyncratic institutional structures, many of them new to Russians themselves at the time, which meant that, for instance, the judicial investigator's relationship to the police does not map onto a Holmes-like distinction between public servants and private agents, but rather describes an overlap between sometimes contradictory or even antagonistic arms of the state. There are procedural devices such as the adversarial spectacle of the *ochnaia stavka* (face-to-face confrontation), which was a particular means of extracting a confession by having accuser and accused stand face-to-face, inches apart, until one of them cracks, and which goes back to the psychological significance of the moment of confession you have just mentioned. There is a critical concern about irregular familial and economic relations during this period, and so we see a variant of incest (father–daughter-in-law incest, or *snokharchestvo*) being expressly codified in the legal reforms; this, too, appears in several examples of early Russian crime fiction (Whitehead: 248).

Such features of crime fiction of the time are confusing and potentially alienating for a modern Western audience, but they also offer dramatic and narrative opportunities to me as a creator. For example, I use the 'face-off' in my audio play *Today in 1864*, where it becomes the high point in the deliberately anachronistic, breaking-news radio format I use, as a point of 'live', unfolding tension. The shape of *The Russian Detective* was

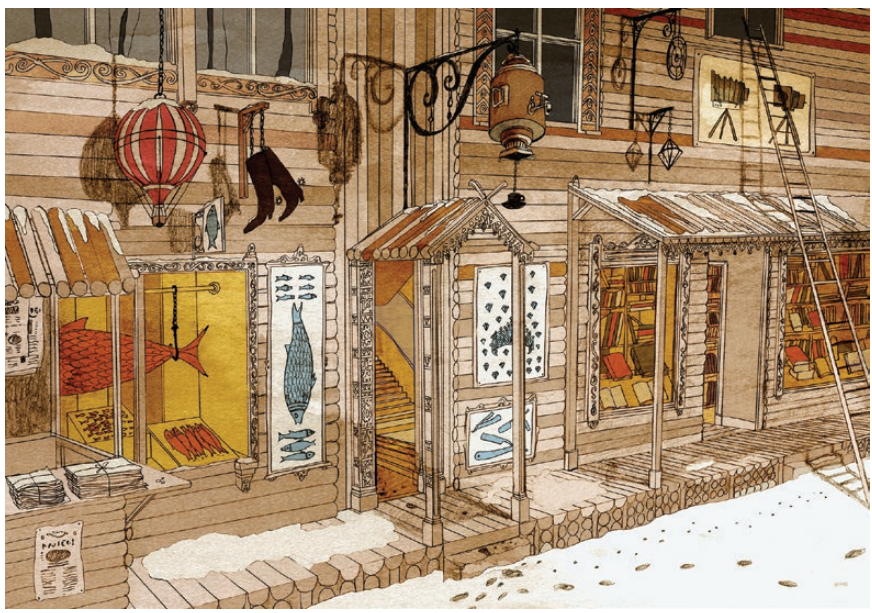

Fig. 1. Front endpapers. Carol Adlam, *The Russian Detective*. London: Jonathan Cape, 2024. Copyright: Image is owned by Carol Adlam.

determined by my understanding of the early revelation of the criminal and the late extraction of the confession, where the latter informed my decision to create a double mystery around the identity and motives of my detective figure, Charlotta Ivanovna: she is a liar, a thief, a kidnapper, and (going back to the social-juridical history I have just mentioned) from an incestuous family.

On the general question of how to approach these texts for adaptation, the task was complex. I read Russian, and I am familiar with Russian visual and literary culture of the Reform period, so the more obvious barriers did not apply. The barriers lay in the texts themselves, which did not look like crime fiction as I knew it. Some were oddly digressive, such as Semyon Panov's novella *Murder During the Ball*, or lacking in apparent affect, such as Timofeev's gruesome *Notes of an Investigator*, which was particularly horrifying in its depiction of the endemic degradation of women (Whitehead, 'Abject Realism'). I wrestled with questions of the function of this literature. I was familiar with the theory that crime fiction can serve to reinforce the status quo and, in the case of Russia, to educate readers about the reforms (McReynolds). But the relationship between appetites for sensationalism and the genre needed further exploration. Many of these writers were journalists and court reporters, so I felt obliged to address the possibility that these were true crime accounts, their formal textual features determined by genre and material conditions, the latter of which, I surmised, might include the exigencies of serialization and even conditioning elements such as the placement of text 'below the fold' on a broadsheet publication. When I was adapting Timofeev's *Notes of an Investigator,* for instance, which is presented as a set of semi-fictionalized 'case files', I became concerned with the material and historical circumstances of these texts' production. The word *zapiski* (notes) in his title snagged my attention because of its indeterminate generic status, slipping around as it does between the autobiographical and anthropological-ethnographic and the literary. I became convinced that these were 'true crime' accounts of the terrible experiences of women now lost to history. So I looked at verbatim theatre, and then libretto, as possible vehicles of adaptation, because I felt a responsibility to find a form that would be emotionally more capacious and would have room for outrage and suffering rather than just dry observation.

Whitehead: In Timofeev's foreword to *Notes of an Investigator* he claims there is a gap in literary practice in Russia—specifically with regards to psychological realism—which can be filled by crime writing. He contends that 'no man is born a criminal' (Timofeev 1) and that only by looking at the interaction between socio-economic factors and individual psychology can we understand crime. For him, the judicial investigator, in a dual role as empathetic instrument of the law and literary narrator, is the ideal figure to guide readers towards this deeper understanding of collective and personal responsibility for crime. So this attitude speaks to the theory that this body of work was educative in some way, reinforcing the new requirements of the legal reforms. But you are right that we need also to address the question of the commodification of crime and drivers of consumption, the tension between entertainment and instrumentalism. Incidentally, the huge appetite for crime fiction, alongside adventure and romance genres, was fed by foreign works as much as Russian ones: Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* (1859) and *The Moonstone* (1868) were widely read in translation, and the French writer Emile Gaboriau was very popular although he is little discussed today (Reitblat;

Whitehead, 'Spaces of Mystery' 2019). Arthur Conan Doyle comes to have immense influence in the 1900s through a series of quasi-adaptations in works by Petr Orlovets, in which a Russified version of Sherlock Holmes appears, sometimes even doing battle with Nat Pinkerton.

Adlam: This wider trans-cultural context also informed my work. On the subject of Pinkertons, I drew on accounts of women in real-life detection such as the Pinkerton Kate Warne and the undercover stunt journalist Nellie Bly. In my graphic novel *The Russian Detective*, I used the real-life experiences of these women to create my own character, Charlotta Ivanovna, *aka* Charlie Fox. She is a hybrid of Warne and the governess of the same name in Chekhov's play *The Cherry Orchard* (1903), where she is a bizarre, fleeting, scene-stealing figure—a magician with a dog who eats nuts, and who makes people disappear, and who does the *salto mortale*, the leap of death. I was curious about the porous zone between detection and journalism, and how women operated at the intersection of these worlds because their low status meant they passed unremarked, as governesses or servants, for instance (McReynolds). Warne is particularly interesting because she conducted campaigns that we would nowadays consider quite immoral, terrorizing, and gaslighting suspects into confessing (Enss). I was also very interested in the connection between university education for women and their participation in proto-Revolutionary movements in late nineteenth-century Europe which the historian Barbara Engel has cast light on. These histories of women and subterfuge in the public sphere, and their intersections with crime and detection, emerged quite early on for me as key points of interest.

Lastly, my approach was shaped by our own contemporary genre and even register conventions, because of the requirement to make a text accessible to a modern audience. A key example is that essential moment of confession we have just discussed: structurally speaking, this is quite different from our own modern understanding of how genre works. Conventionally, our modern-day dramatic structure requires that around three quarters of the way through you get a crossing-over or inversion of the protagonist and the antagonist in some way, where the protagonist learns something about herself that undoes everything that has gone before (Yorke). I have tried to accommodate this in my work: in the Aleksandr Shkliarevskii adaptation, *Curare*, the victim—a woman who is initially mistaken for a dead body, but who has in fact been injected with the paralytic and non-analgesic drug *curare*—rises from her bed to inject her would-be murderer with the same drug; he is condemned to the 'spirophore', an artificial breathing apparatus, while she becomes the head of the medical institute that her husband runs, from which he has been conducting experiments on animals and women. In the Timofeev adaptation *Today in 1864*, the cocksure guest editor is undone when the woman whose trial the programme showcases kills herself. In *The Russian Detective* Charlotta renounces her journalistic career in the cosmopolitan capital.

In what ways do the properties of each medium inform the adaptations?

Adlam: This question requires an answer in two parts. We are familiar with the idea that each medium has its own characteristics: for example, that audio drama's worldscape is predominantly built through sound, the novel's preeminent feature is immersive, expansive interiority; visual media lends itself to plot-driven externalization, symbolic

representation, and so on. But it would be better to describe these as propensities that are available to perhaps differing degrees in different media, and to distinguish between these and any given medium's inalienable properties. So, in *The Russian Detective* (which is primarily a visual piece), I invoke interiority through visual as well as textual devices, such as dreamscape, captions, and silences. Similarly, my libretto experiment 'Spade and Sand' is as much about performed, visually apprehended symbolic forms as it is about language. Self-evidently these characteristics are not in fact unique to one medium or another, so they are not insuperable barriers to remediation. That said, there are some properties that are emergent, in that they appear to reside in the medium but are called forth in the act of reading, viewing, listening, and so on. To take the graphic novel medium as an example, in it I deliberately exploit an emergent property that arises from, on the one hand, the page turn (and within the page, gaps between images or frames), and on the other, social conditions such as reading bias (conditioning the order in which we apprehend images on a page), and even physiological conditions such as our capacity (tendency, even) to extrapolate narrative from the gaps between contiguous or proximate images. These properties inhere in the conjunction of material or medium and the human encounter; these in particular shape my decisions as I go about the process of adapting.

The second way of looking at this question is to consider the role of analogy or isomorphic forms across media. This relates to what I have just said about the 'translatable' nature of certain properties, which allows me to develop a set of analogues to some devices that are found in the original texts. For example, a marked characteristic of some of the source texts is that they have dispersed narrative focalizers. This is particularly evident in the Shkliarevskii text, where the story is told through five embedded narrators. Such devices raise interesting questions about where authority and knowledge reside, particularly in crime texts which are, fundamentally, exercises in epistemology. In my response to Shkliarevskii, the audio drama *Curare*, I address the baton-passing element of the original by creating a poetic form with multiple voices, each of whom echo or pick up on a word or phrase from the previous speaker. At the end, these are revealed to be a montage of extracts from police interviews, recorded on a scratchy phonograph. Here's a brief extract:

PHOTOGRAPHER:	I got the flashlight ready, the ribbon of magnesium was in my hand, the aluminium powder, the sodium perchlorate, and there I stood, thinking how I might compose
INVESTIGATOR:	yourself, man, I said, to Kebmezakh. I need a steady hand, to hold a light aloft! Professor! I said, tell us, is there indication of violence? No bruising? Vomiting? No sign of
MOZHAREVSKII:	Poison! I said. I looked closely, but I could see nothing on her body—other than the tiniest scratch under her chin... But wait—
INVESTIGATOR:	wait—
KEBMEZAKH:	wait?
INVESTIGATOR:	Her eye—a shade—a flash of light—I thought it moved, a fraction—I see... the—I—

PHOTOGRAPHER: the eye, it sees the murderer! I whispered as I let the flash explode. It was so quick, so white a light I heard a gasp […] The retina is like the photographer's plate, and on it lies the impression of the very last thing it sees—the guillotine! the flashing blade! The poison dart! The murderer's face, so small, but then, enlarged—

INVESTIGATOR: dilates! I cried. I see it, now! Her pupil, it dilates! and now contracts! Look!

MOZHAREVSKII: Look lively, she is—

INVESTIGATOR: alive! But she could not speak.

(Adlam 2021: n.p.)

In *The Russian Detective*, it is the interaction between different visual and textual languages that permits me to ventriloquize a variety of quasi-authoritative textual voices, as analogues to the multiple diegetic strands in the source text by Panov. I relate fragments of the story through, for instance, newspaper headlines, an instructional card about how to make your own Pepper's Ghost illusion, the patter of a peepshow-man, the announcements of a Magic Lantern Master of Ceremonies, a page from an album of 'types' or 'typebook'. These textual transpositions are afforded by the shifts between visual contexts; for me, these are inseparable: visual field determines textual register (Fig. 2).

The controlling narrative voice, by contrast, belongs to Charlotta, my journalist-cum-detective, and it is conveyed through captions on scraps of paper. On the final page, Charlotta rips up her notebooks and lets the pieces fall from the hot-air balloon that carries her and Netochka away. So she tears up her own authoritative voice. My hope is that, at this point, the reader realizes that what they have just read is not a whole, perfectly controlled narrative, but a kaleidoscope of reconstituted fragments that are carried on the wind. This overarching and retrospective movement is an analogue—both textual and visual—for that disseminated, almost decentralized narrative I found in many of the originals.

What distinction, if any, do you draw between adaptation as theory and as process?

Adlam: Theories of adaptation as a non-destructive, palimpsestic process of accretion or accumulation broadly chime with my experience as a creator, where I work through iterative processes, responding critically to the source text as well as to material constraints, medium expectations, the circumstances of production, and to the requirements of the audience. This is in line with the by-now well-developed language for talking about adaptation that avoids older, zero-sum 'fidelity' models of adaptation. I have found that there are many helpful frameworks of talking about adaptation even if some—such as 'appropriation' (Sanders)—run the risk of setting up value systems that might reinscribe the presumption of the source as superior by virtue of anteriority. A useful source for me has been Genette, not just for his comprehensive mapping of text relationships in a vast hypertextual network, but because of his ideas about hypertextual transformations. He talks about devices for 'proximization' or rendering texts closer to

Fig. 2. 'Typebook: The Seamstress'. Carol Adlam, *The Russian Detective*. London: Jonathan Cape, 2024. Copyright: Image is owned by Carol Adlam.

modern readers (303). I have kept my various adaptations in their original timeframes of the 1860s–80s, apart from the libretto experiment 'Spade and Sand', which I set in a post-Brexit dystopia in a fish and chip shop in Stoke-on-Trent. I did not particularly

seek accuracy in furnishings or dress or architecture: I went for eclecticism, which reflects the architectural, cultural, and even sartorial tensions between tradition and Westernization of the period more broadly (Brumfield; Kivelson). Instead, I rendered the texts proximate by thinking in terms of psychological motivations, specifically, what motivated these women to act in the way they did, especially because women in these texts are depicted not only as murderer and victim but sometimes both. Our own era's growing understanding of the dynamics of coercion and abuse offered possibilities for reframing what would otherwise appear as regressive, alienating representations.

However, while I am broadly in accord with such adaptation theories, particularly those which posit ideas of networks of adaptation, there are several points of tension for me as a creator and adaptor. One concerns Linda Hutcheon's definition of adaptation as an 'extended, deliberate, announced revisitation of a particular work of art' (170), and her distinction between 'knowing audiences', who experience adaptation through the pleasures of 'double seeing' or 'oscillation', and 'unknowing' audiences, about whom she has much less to say (120–2). Where does this leave a project such as ours, where the anterior texts are untranslated and largely unknown even to a Russian audience? This prompts the sort of questions about canonicity raised by Sanders about adaptations resting on presumptions of the canonical status of the source text (9). Similarly, I struggle with the parameters of adaptation suggested by Hutcheon's definition of it as an 'extended revisitation' (170). Again, what are the boundaries of this? Is adaptation quantifiable, and if so, how? For instance, in *The Russian Detective*, I draw on Panov, but I map it quite differently from the original, and I embed parts of the Panov story in layers of frame narration. The crime is taken from the original text, and is the proximate cause of the action, but it does not sit in the foreground, which is occupied by my detective character and her story. And, in terms of length, that crime occupies just a third to a half of my book.

More generally, I am conscious of our current proliferation of media and resist the idea that adaptation is primarily a literary activity, and that visual media adaptation is about the moving image: mostly, film or TV. I look to people working on illustration and adaptation such as Jan Baetens, Simon Grennan, and the ILLUSTR4TIO group, who describe the complex interrelationship of fertilization and cross-fertilization between text and illustrated image, and between networks of illustrated works of different sorts (Adlam and Grennan).

As for the adaptation process, I experience this as a uniquely embodied and iterative process, which has over time forced me to confront the questions of adaptation theory. For instance, each iteration of work took me further away from any notions of fidelity or assiduousness to the point where I was responding to myself, my own layers of adaptation. The actual process of creation is much more about going into an almost trance-like state of dead-ends and mistakes and U-turns, going through uncharted territory, my eye far more on the anticipated audience than on the source material, which in itself was no longer a single text but an entire genre of work.

What is the relationship between canonicity and/or intertextuality and adaptation?

Whitehead: Arguably crime fiction in any national literary tradition is non-canonical, although in certain cultures it has attained a higher standing than in the Russian context

(Poe, Conan Doyle, Christie, etc.). As noted above, understanding of Russian literary history, whether inside that country or outside it, is still dominated by the great Realist novels of Turgenev, Dostoevskii, Tolstoi. The literary sociologist Avram Reitblat has done valuable research on the most-read books published in Russia in the late imperial era that demonstrates how what we now think of as canonical writers were vastly outnumbered by so many others who have been almost completely forgotten. There is of course the question of the economics of the media marketplace today that drives receptivity to canonical adaptation. We have both encountered a preference for canonical literature when we have presented our work in both academic and non-academic contexts, which means the same names end up being endlessly circulated. But the aim of the Lost Detectives project is precisely to interrogate the very idea of the canon in this context; to unpick presumptions of literary and genre hierarchy and even, dare we say it, cultural superiority, in the service of a more nuanced understanding of our shared human heritage.

Adlam: Intertextuality is intimately tied to adaptation, which is both an intertextual product, and a vehicle through which individual texts and broader constellations of texts—even canons—may be explored, cited, pastiched, and interrogated. For me this is also connected to intervisuality, that is, the relationships between different visual media and their presuppositions about register, viewing subject, and their intersections with genres of text and speech.

Let us take intertextuality first. I approach the idea of the canon throughout my work but particularly in *The Russian Detective* (the title itself is intertextual: its homophone, through not direct translation, is *russkii detektif*, which means the genre of detective fiction). So overtly intertextual elements include Dostoevskii, who features in the opening as a curmudgeonly train passenger, and whom Charlotta contrives to have arrested; there is a reference to Gogol's short story 'The Nose' in a poster; and Netochka Nezvanova (Nameless Nobody), Charlotta's duped lover, comes from Dostoevskii's unfinished novella of the same name. Charlotta's dream is from a famous passage in Pushkin's *Evgenii Onegin*. I have a seamstress gossip about her customers: Miss Marmeladova—'she's happy with rags' (Dostoevskii); Mrs Karenina—'I'm always gathering her in' (Tolstoi); Miss Larina—'a bit of a dreamer' (Pushkin); Miss Rostova—'very à la mode' (Tolstoi); and Mrs Ranevskaia—'a bit of a nightmare, between you and me' (Chekhov) (Adlam). There is some fun involved in scattering these references through the larger work, of course, but the wider point I am making is about inverting the canon. I give Panov his revenge for his posthumous relegation to 'lost' pulp fiction by having my version of him—an ambitious court reporter who just happens to be the son of the Chief of Police—usurp Charlotta as crime correspondent for the newspaper, the *Daily Balalaika*, itself modelled on a real tabloid broadsheet, the *Petersburg Flyer* (*Peterburgskii listok*) (McReynolds 1991; Neuberger). The *Daily Balalaika* in fact is the most prominent intertext in the entire graphic novel, both visually and in terms of plot, because people wanted to read about crime and politics and scandal and fashion. But I also signal from the opening half-title page the inseparability of intertextuality and intervisuality, where I include a censor's stamp which contains within it a scribbled drawing of a man in profile, with a quiff and sideburns, and eyelashes like sunbeams. My image is a rendering of the ending of Turgenev's *Diary of a Superfluous Man*, which

closes with an ekphrastic description of a censor's mark, described as I have drawn it, and a strange, stuttering note: 'this manuscript has not been approved, m…m…my dear Sir' (352). It is quite an odd moment in Russian literature, but I chose it because it allowed me to begin with a visual riff on adaptation itself, and to think about the possibilities of adaptation moving in a different direction (as ekphrasis does), from visual image to text, rather than the other way around.

So intervisuality is also crucial in *The Russian Detective*. In it I attempt to invoke a richly varied visual culture that, like its crime fiction counterpart, is at times obscured by a 'canonical' understanding of so-called 'high' art, the totemic moment of which is the so-called 'Revolt of the 14' in 1865 when a group of students at the St Petersburg Imperial Academy of Arts rejected neo-classical themes (Dmitriev; see also Kelly; Kivelson). So I divided *The Russian Detective* into 5 sections, each of which has a visual theme: Signs, Traces, Impressions, Projections, Reflections. Within these sections, I interrupt the conventional narrative flow with a variety of visual forms, so I have created *lubki* (woodcuts), adverts, street signs, shadow puppets, old comics, lithographs, photographs, *cartes de visite* and forensic photography, a peepshow, a thaumatrope, a magic lantern show, a Claude mirror, stamps, and official documents. These multiple visual languages relate back to the question of adaptation because they destabilize hierarchies of texts and they mimic the unstable narrative authority of the original Panov text (itself divided into multiple, sometimes repetitive sections, with different focalizers, as I have said, and tied rather uncertainly together by a bewildered narrative voice, that of the hapless investigator).

I tell and retell the story through these different visual languages, hoping to draw attention to first, the truth expectations attached to different visual media, and second, following Jonathan Crary's insights, the ways such visual technologies interpellate the viewer. Examples of how I explore the interface between media and truth expectations include my retelling of Charlotta's backstory in the form of a 'Sunday Supplement' comic, in which Charlotta's dog, Igoryok, who is otherwise shown as a small, scrappy mongrel, is a Borzoi called 'Grand Prince Igor the Third'; a newspaper 'family tree' plate which indicates not only the *dramatis personae* of the murder but implies a hierarchy of importance through size, placement, etc, which in fact has little bearing on the story as it unfolds; and an extended and melodramatic Magic Lantern show, in which all the characters are a bit more glamorous than they are in the main story, because the conceit is that they are being played by actors (this last also invokes the history of the original text, which was adapted to the stage as a melodrama) (McReynolds 2012) (Fig. 3).

I also explore how these multiple visual languages construct the subject as spectator or consumer or voyeur: knowing, gullible, amazed, etc.; seated, standing, viewing from a hot-air balloon, from the perspective of a wolf-pack, etc. I apply this idea of positionality and subject experience mediated through the visual into the real-world experience of the reader with my final trick, which is an anamorphic image on the penultimate page of the book. The image hidden in the anamorphosis reveals itself only when a cylindrical mirror is placed on the book's page, and the viewer looks down at it from a standing position: at this point the image of a fox appears, rising over the Siberian landscape. The fox, by the way, recalls Charlotta's nickname—Charlie Fox—and this device, which was called 'The Magic Mirror', was a popular parlour trick in

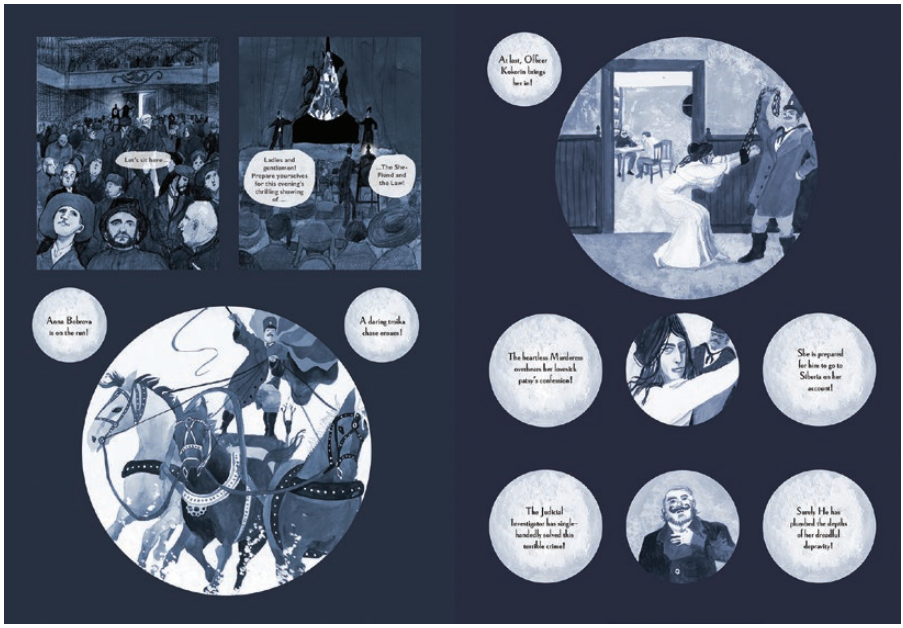

Fig. 3. 'Magic Lantern show'. Carol Adlam, *The Russian Detective*. London: Jonathan Cape, 2024. Copyright: Image is owned by Carol Adlam.

the nineteenth century. So in all these ways, I seek to elaborate on the richness and intersecting nature of both popular and 'high' cultures, and to question the limits and presumptions of both textual and visual canons.

What possibilities for academic-creative exchange does your work envisage? What are the possibilities for future adaptations?

Whitehead: Our work together has given my research a new direction. I am now looking at female crime writers, such as Aleksandra Sokolova, Kapitolina Nazar´eva, Liudmila Simonovna, and Valentina Dmitrieva from this same late imperial period, and their depiction of female characters. We are looking to open up the Lost Detectives project to more creative practitioners, particularly those from gaming and walking simulator games or Virtual Reality, and we intend to produce a critical anthology of some carefully selected and translated texts. More generally, I am excited by the thought that we are participating in a new space in which experts in different fields and across sectors can work together.

As for the future, I see a shift of emphasis in the next stages of the project where we think less about the sources per se and more on how adaptations might engage with the contexts in which we find ourselves today, in which we struggle to align technological changes with pressing societal needs. In the field of literature and language studies, key issues are, and will continue to be: how to talk about Russia as a historically and culturally significant force and as part of our shared human heritage, at the same time as

we confront the appalling, heinous acts visited upon Ukraine and earlier, Georgia and Chechnya, by Vladimir Putin and his regime; how to push back against neo-imperialist, canonical readings of that heritage, readings that both occlude the contribution of domestic, non-canonical cultural forms such as crime writing and distort Russia's place in a shared, trans-national cultural legacy (a distortion that has deep historical and political roots in the Cold War). Other questions present themselves, not least how to position women and minorities in a genre that has so exploited them.

Adlam: Each individual medium and adaptation has the potential to reframe material; but there is a cumulative, compounding effect that emerges out of creating a body of adaptations across different media, whereby we start to see new pathways for exploring a culture that may otherwise be lost to us, both historically and because of present-day events. In other words, while we have to date thought of this as an adaptation-remediation project, we are thinking about a transmediation project, where we offer multiple entry points into an extended story world of the Russian crime novel (O'Flynn). I am interested in how we might build an extended story world that can be entered through a variety of media including but not limited to VR/immersive experiences and games, enhanced by performance blogging, audience involvement in storytelling, associated products, and apps—all of which seem to me to offer newly distributed models of knowledge production and exchange. Such a body of work would also offer opportunities to understand better our own cultural priorities, including our deep immersion in crime fiction. Lastly, new technologies place subject choice, or at least a simulation of agency, at the heart of storytelling, and that is where we can start to talk back to the genre about its treatment of overlooked or exploited groups, whether because of ethnicity, sex, gender, or sexuality.

Such a project can never be comprehensive or redress historical wrongs, but it shows us where the gaps might be in our knowledge, just as the genre of crime fiction works by productive areas of uncertainty, and adaptation as a practice exploits excess or what the art world would call 'misregistration', when something is layered onto something else, but it does not quite match point-to-point, and then you get some surprise, like an unexpected colour, shape, or even an absence. And then, a new story emerges.

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