

Victoria Kawēkiu Ka‘iulani Lunalilo Kalaninuiāhupānui Cleghorn: Creative writing and adaptation

Hubert Klimko-Dobrzaniecki

ORCID: 0000-0001-5123-7305

There were two cinemas in the town where I was born. One was called the “Ludowe” [The People’s Cinema] and it was grand. At least, it was grand to small-town people. Far away from big cities, units of length, size, and volume correspond to local circumstances. When the locals tell you that the church is far away, they envision a long journey, but for a city dweller, it is really just a short walk. The “Ludowe” cinema was grand because it could hold as many as one hundred people. Well, the “enlargement syndrome” may only be diagnosed once you move to a big city. Already on the first day, the old units of measurement shorten and decrease dramatically. Thus, the “Ludowe” cinema was grand for us, small-town folk. It had a grand front door, a grand marquee above the door, and a grand box office. Grand movies were shown on the grand screen. The best movies were foreign movies. Although some Polish movies were also good. I fell in love with movies even before I fell in love with literature. I was four years old, and my mother took me to the cinema for the first time in my life. It was the so-called “Sunday morning screening.” Afterwards, my mother could not make me leave the cinema. I liked it so much, my fascination was so great, that leaving the building was out of the question. The old purple velvet armchair was my stronghold. My mother made a number of unsuccessful attempts before she finally managed to make me move from my seat. Cinema had seduced a little boy with its magic. Nothing was ever the same.

I fell in love with literature the following year. And although I do not remember the titles of the animated features that I watched on the big screen, I remember the title of the book which I got for my fifth birthday. It was *Dar rzeki Fly* [The Gift of the Fly River]. I learned the name of the author later. It was Maria Krüger. It may be hard to believe, but right there and then, in my little head, I had the idea for a movie based on this book. I wrote my first screenplay when I was seven years old. Neither my school nor my family found it interesting. I quit screenwriting. And writing in general.

I do not know when the “Ludowe” closed; I must have been living somewhere else at the time. I remember when the other cinema, the “Słowianin” [The Slav], was closed. It was smaller and located in a backyard, somewhere in a different part of town. Germans and Evangelicals used to live in that part of town. This fact is quite important in my story. To enter the cinema, you had to pass through a narrow street lined with tenement houses. In front of the cinema, there was a stone crucifix which the Germans had left behind. Local small-minded and very religious ladies would say that the cinema was closed thanks to Jesus. Apparently, in this way he saved the town (or at least some part of it) from the indecency of film. Progressive Catholics, including cinema fans, laughed at them, saying that no German Evangelical Jesus would ever worry about the morality of Polish invaders. It was not Jesus who closed the cinema. The town authorities came to the conclusion that one cinema was more than enough. There were three cinemas in Dzierżoniów Śląski, only five kilometers away by bus. Well, they were still five kilometers away...

How does a small town in Western Poland become the end of the world? According to some, when they take away the town’s city rights. According to others, when the railroad closes. Some say that it happens when they close down the cinema. My town was closed twice – when the railroad was shut down and then when the cinema was closed. Last year, the railway connection was restored after almost 45 years. The cinema is still closed. I imagine that the building where the “Słowianin” used to be could now appear in the movie *Cinema Paradiso*. And this movie is and has been a kind of obsession that I nurture, encourage, and do not want to free myself from. I take the movie with me wherever I go, like a holy icon, and cherish it. It took it to Poland, Iceland, and Austria. I will probably take it somewhere else when I leave Vienna. I know that many people identify with Salvatore’s story. But this is the magic of cinema. Perhaps literature stimulates the imagination more. Perhaps it makes us grow in a way that cinema simply cannot envision. Perhaps this is all true. Perhaps it is also true that cinema without text, words, and literature does not do well. A great script is half the battle. But I, too, was very much in love as a teenager. I, too, waited in the rain for the light to go out in my beloved’s bedroom. And, like Salvatore, I was the son of a single mother. We were relatively poor. Like Salvatore, I lived in a small town and went to the movies whenever I had the chance. Like Toto, my mother slapped me when I spent the money she had given me to buy groceries on cinema tickets. I kept photos of famous actresses, newspaper cut-outs, in a metal cookie box. I hoped that no one would ever discover my secret. And although I managed to avoid military service, while Salvatore did not, for many years, like him, I was unable to shake off the burden of my first unrequited love. Can a heartbreak be turned into art? Into literature? Into a movie? One has to tread lightly – the whole affair may come across as trivial. I think that the Italian director succeeded, although some accused him of being too sentimental. A matter of taste.

However, unrequited love is not a question of taste or the lack thereof. It is a fact. It hurts. It torments you for years. Sometimes until the day you die. It may still haunt you in the afterlife.

Our first apartment in Vienna was at Prinz-Eugen-Straße. The bedroom windows overlooked the Belvedere, where the legendary Prince Eugene of Savoy used to live, but what was even more exciting was the fact that our house was right next to the publishing house where Freud had published his works! A publishing house? Freud? This whole mess that had been tormenting me for years? Freud's publishing house did not accept my text. From the Austrian point of view, spontaneity is harmful and extravagant. A translator of Polish literature is a serious expense, and a Polish writer with no connections... The Znak Publishing House from Kraków decided to publish my parody of psychoanalysis and autobiographical literature. The writer's ego was intact. After all, Kraków was also an imperial and royal city. The collection of short stories *Rzeczy pierwsze* [First things] was published in 2009. I insisted that it should be advertised as an autobiographical novel, in which I wrote the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Truth is not a literary category, but my experiment was successful. The power of storytelling gave me great satisfaction. Sometimes the effects were surprising. At times, readers believed that all the described events really happened. Someone once said that literary scholars and psychologists discovered long ago that no one can tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth in an autobiography. Because everyone is trying to present themselves as slightly better or worse, according to their liking. Apparently, it is all about getting as close as possible to the truth about just the essential things. And my obsession with unrequited love was such a thing. Everything fell into place. Vienna. Freud. Psychoanalysis. The publishing house. I finally had to move past this! In addition, and this is true, a private practice psychoanalyst lived above us. The man was completely detached from reality, and maybe that is why he had so many patients. I used the money from my advance from the Znak publishing house to pay for a couple of sessions. And then there was literature. In the short story *Hawajski różaniec* [The Hawaiian Rosary], my psychoanalyst, Dr. Gruber, tried to teach me concentration through distraction. In short, Gruber would perform dangerous stunts and thrust his upper body out of the window. He suggested that repeating a mantra would help with my OCD – my obsession with repeating in my head the name of the person who broke my heart. Whenever the name would appear in my head, I was to pick up a rosary and, instead of the “Hail Mary,” I should recite the name of the last heir to the throne of the Kingdom of Hawaii (Yes, there was such a kingdom. Yes, there was such a prince): Victoria Kawēkiu Ka‘iulani Lunalilo Kalaninui-ahilapalapa Cleghorn! In the last session, I recited the exotic name without any problems. My old love faded into oblivion, but Dr. Gruber told me that it was not unrequited love that was my main problem. My biggest problem was my relationship with my mother. I never had closure. The doctor promised complete recovery. However, I did not learn the details, because he fell out of the window during one of his stunts. He died on the spot. The protagonist had a new obsession. Anyway, this is how my collection of short stories ends, but this is not how the story ends. I decided to turn words into moving pictures. It took me nine years. You could say that this was a long time. Or perhaps not long at all. I say that everything has its time. We must have dreams because they are free, and they sometimes do come true. What is great about books, and not so great about movies, however, is that you do not need a team of people to write a collection of short stories. The cost of the project, apart from the intangible cost, is very low. And you can shoot almost the same story without skipping anything, as you do in

re-releases. You can even turn it into a deluxe edition that is revised, expanded, and includes alternative endings. The magic of moving pictures works. Music. Live dialogues. In India, some movies even explore the sense of smell. Every country is different...

The old building of the Radio and Television Faculty at the University of Silesia in Katowice looked more like an old barracks complex than the seat of a school of cinematic arts. The time of the old barracks was coming to an end. The Faculty was moving downtown to a new state-of-the art building. I figured that it was the right time to try my hand at making movies. The moment had come to make my dreams come true. I had already made two short films. One had been purchased by a television network and broadcasted several times. This – as the critics called it – “experimental creative documentary” was devoted to Zenon, the legendary leader of the punk group *Jebana Ściera*. I felt that I was experienced enough to make a short feature. And it should be based on a short story. And this short story should be important to me. I wanted to re-tell the story of the Hawaiian rosary, and still keep the important details. I wrote the script and directed a 20-minute short movie about a janitor who works at the old Radio and Television Faculty building. The action takes place a few months before the re-location. The main character is not just a janitor. In his spare time, he makes music, writes lyrics for his songs, learns French, and dreams. However, he is still haunted by his past. He has been suffering from obsessive-compulsive disorder for years. The name of his ex-wife still haunts him. Artur is in his late forties. He regularly visits a beautiful prostitute. And even when he is with her, he cannot forget about his obsession. He cannot help but shout out his ex-wife’s name. The prostitute cannot take it anymore. From that moment on, the movie and the short story are identical: the crazy psychiatrist, crazy stunts, the rosary, reciting the name of the Hawaiian princess, the relationship with the mother, the doctor falling out the window. This is not the end. Artur realizes he is in love with the prostitute. And she is in love with him too. In the final scene, we learn that, for the first time, the man has not shouted out his ex-wife’s name during sex. He is cured and almost happy. Artur asks the woman to move to Corsica with him. For good. She does not answer. However, the audience knows that they both want to move. The movie *Hawajski różaniec* [The Hawaiian Rosary] was selected for screening and was shown at several Polish and international film festivals. I watched it on the big screen in grand cinemas in big cities. After the screenings, I kept thinking about my hometown and the “Ludowe” cinema. It was grand. For a small town. I think it will always be grand in my heart. Pure magic. For an audience of one hundred people.

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

KEYWORDS

Cinema Paradiso

Adaptation

ABSTRACT:

The author discusses the circumstances and the mechanisms of how personal experiences and fascination with literature and film intertwine and, after many years, lead to the publication of a collection of short stories. The collection of short stories is then an inspiration for a script, which is then made into a short movie by the writer-turned-filmmaker. The author also explains how creative writing can give rise to creative adaptation.

Hawajski różaniec

CREATIVE WRITING

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:

Hubert Klimko-Dobrzaniecki (b. 1967) – graduate of the Krzysztof Kiesłowski Film School at the University of Silesia in Katowice. In the distant past, he also studied philosophy at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań and the University of Wrocław, as well as Icelandic philology at the University of Iceland in Reykjavik. He is the author of novels, short stories, collections of short stories, children's books, and short films. He wrote, among others, *Dom Róży/ Krysvík* [Rosa's House/Krysvík], *Kołysankę dla wisielca* [Lullaby for a hangman], *Samotność* [Loneliness], *Zostawić Islandię* [Leaving Iceland], *Dżender domowy i inne historie* [Family gender and other stories], and *Złodzieje bzu* [Lilac thieves]. He has been nominated for the Nike Award, the Polityka Passport Award, the Cogito Award, the Angelus Award, the Silesian Literary Laurate Award, as well as for the European Literary Award and the Raymond Award. Finalist of the Polityka Passport award. His books have been translated into 12 languages. He has received two scholarships from the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage for his work in the field of literature. He has also been awarded scholarships by the ministries of culture of the Republics of France and Greece. He is a regular columnist for the *Odra* monthly. From 1997 to 2007 he lived in Iceland. He is also a citizen of Iceland. He translates dramas and poetry from Icelandic. Since 2007, he has been living in Vienna and the village of Krasne. |