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From theatre to cinema: analysis of the creation of the characters in the play Tío Vanya and their translation to cinema in Vanya en la calle 42

From theatre to cinema: analysis of the creation of the characters in the play Uncle Vanya and their transfer to the cinema in Vanya on 42nd Street

SUMMARY

Vanya on 42nd Street (Malle, 1994) is an adaptation of the play Uncle Vanya (1899) by Anton Chekhov, performed as if it were a theatrical rehearsal. Its documentary start is soon transformed into fiction, which will allow us to determine our objective, which is to analyse the method with which the actors work, looking for analogies and characteristics typical of the Stanislavski system, but framed in the cinematographic medium. To achieve our purpose, we will study the narrative followed by Malle to create this adaptation of Chekhov's play, as well as the construction of characters under the Stanislavski system. The research will be carried out using the film as the main source, followed by bibliographical sources elaborated by Stanislavski, as well as other scientific documents. Through the analysis, the work of the performers according to the Stanislavski system and their adaptation to the work in front of the camera can be verified.

KEYWORDS:

Vanya on 42nd Street, Louis Malle, Stanislavski, cinema, acting, theatre

ABSTRACT

Vanya on 42nd Street (Malle, 1994) is the adaptation of the work of Uncle Vanya (1899) by Anton Chekhov as if it were a rehearsal. Its start in the form of a documentary is immediately transformed into fiction, which will allow us to determine our objective, which is to see above the method with which the actors work, looking for analogies and characteristics of the Stanislavski system but adapted to the camera.

To achieve our purpose, we will study the narrative followed by Malle to create this adaptation of Chekhov's work, as well as the construction of characters under the Stanislavski system. The research will be carried out from the use of the film as the main source, followed by bibliographic sources prepared by Stanislavski as well as other written resources. Through the analysis carried out, it is possible to verify the work of the actors following the Stanislavski system and their adaptation to the work in front of the camera.

KEYWORDS:

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1. Introduction

Vanya on 42nd Street (Louis Malle, 1994) could be defined as a theatre within the cinema, since it is a performance of Chekhov's play *Uncle Vanya* (Дядя Ваня, Anton Chekhov 1899), carried out as if it were a theatrical rehearsal. Through a documentary-like opening, its director, Louis Malle, introduces the spectator to what the performance itself will be. It works from the cinematographic language with camera turns and actors who represent their characters according to this technique.

Before explaining what this study will consist of and the objectives we set ourselves, we will talk about the work itself and how the idea of filming *Vanya on 42nd Street* (1994) came about in order to provide a contextualisation.

André Gregory, the theatre director of *Uncle Vanya* in Malle's film, at a time of crisis of financing and audience attendance, decided to risk an alternative performance in an abandoned theatre in the New Amsterdam district for a small group of spectators.

The old theatre had already witnessed the peculiar theatrical experience promoted by the avant-garde director André Gregory: as it was impossible to use the stage on which part of the roof had fallen down, the play was performed in different parts of the theatre, to which audience members were guided between acts. (Ayala, 1996, p. 135).

This crisis was partly fuelled by the ideas and the critical tone with which it dealt with the American dream, very much in line with the ideas of Mamet, screenwriter of *Vanya on 42nd Street* (1994). In any case, Gregory, in order to avoid demotivating the cast, did not want to stop rehearsals of the play. In this way, his project became increasingly popular, with the addition of audience members such as Robert Altman and Woody Allen, among others.

It was an invitation to attend an unusual performance: two hours of "live" theatre, without costumes or artifice, with many breaks and snacks between acts, the small audience (among others, names such as Susan Sontag, Robert Altman, Richard Avedon or Woody Allen were exceptional spectators) shared the entrails of a theatrical production surrounded by superb performances and a magical atmosphere. (García Cívico, 2018, p. 18).

With no costumes, no publicity and no props, but with some experienced actors, he created this different show aimed at theatre lovers, even introducing changes to Chekhov's play until he managed to create a careful but original atmosphere. "The bare scenography and staging of *Vanya on 42nd Street* manages to combine theatre and cinema in a unique experience, drawing on the strength of the text and the faces of the actors" (Balagué, 1996, p. 27).

Louis Malle, Gregory's friend, was amazed by the project and decided to embark on the filming of *Vanya on 42nd Street* (1994). With hardly any resources, and returning to the origins of the *Nouvelle Vague*, he would make his homage to the theatre in a totally casual but no less risky way. "*Vanya on 42nd Street*, on the other hand, emerges as



one of the most solid films of the nineties, a decade where navigation against the tide is much more difficult than in the sixties" (Riambau, 1996, p. 21).

The purpose of our study is to analyse the actors' construction of the characters in the play and to observe which parts of the Stanislavski system are fulfilled, given its links with Chekhov's theatre. His system enters the USA through the Moscow Art Theatre, which will later evolve into the Method; from this encounter there are great similarities and important approximations between the two techniques. In order to observe analogies and differences between working the play for the theatre or for the camera, we have resorted to the study of its authors (director and scriptwriter), to the narrative of the film and to the analysis of the interpretation of the protagonists according to the main points of the Stanislavski system, which we will refer to by observing their respective work in front of the camera.

2. Methodology

This article is based on the case study of the film *Vanya on 42nd Street* (1994). First of all, our aim will be to analyse the narrative of Malle's film and how, in an avant-garde way, he transforms a work created to be performed in theatre into cinema within the theatre itself. To do so, we will approach Louis Malle as director, the scriptwriter David Mamet and Anton Chekhov as author of the play *Uncle Vanya* by means of a bibliographical review of these three creators. Secondly, we will analyse the work carried out by the play's performers, placing them in relation to the Stanislavski system, which arrived in the USA through the Moscow Art Theatre and evolved into the so-called Method. "In 1920 a part of the Moscow Art Theatre went on a long tour of the United States, which was a great success and made a deep impression on audiences and critics because of the veracity of the actors' interpretation" (Saura, 2016, p. 11).

Our research is based on a descriptive methodology through a two-dimensional analysis of narrative on the one hand and character creation on the other. As a primary source we have the film itself: *Vanya on 42nd Street* (1994), to which we have applied the categories of Stanislavski's acting system by systematically reviewing his two main works: *The Actor's Work on Himself in the Creative Process of Experiencing* (2019), *The Actor's Work on Himself in the Creative Process of Embodiment* (2016). This separation of training is due to the fact that Stanislavski considered it relevant to separate character psychology from characterisation, body language and diction. In addition, this research work has been expanded with other bibliographical sources that have allowed us to contextualise and interpret the object of study.

In this sense, we observe other authors such as Flores Huelves and Montes Vozmediano (2017) who for their study, *Construyendo cultura visual a través del cartel de cine. Análisis de afiches de las sagas cinematográficas* (2017), have used a content analysis methodology, supported by the contributions of other authors. "The methodology used in the study is content analysis, focused on the so-called manifest variables [...] The



definition and values of the manifest variables of this research were extracted from the contributions of the authors already referenced" (Flores Huelves and Montes Vozmediano, 2017, p. 133).

We believe that this methodology is appropriate to carry out this research because we can analyse the analogies and differences in the interpretation of a play adapted to film from the theatrical interpretation itself. Moreover, *Uncle Vanya* (1899) was a play directed by Stanislavski in 1900, and in this adaptation we find Method actors of whom we can, through non-participant observation, see which points of his system are fulfilled.

For the development of this work we have opted for a qualitative methodology, used in the field of Social Sciences and therefore applicable to our work. Given that interpretation, as such an art, is neither measurable nor quantifiable, we will resort to observation and analysis of the work of the actors in order to draw the final conclusions.

The (explanatory) case study comes from and goes to theory. Before starting fieldwork, the study must be preceded by the development of a theory that enables the observation. Observation is always accompanied by a theory, even if it is incipient. The development of the first theoretical outlines clarifies and deepens the components of the case (Yacuzzi, 2005, p. 9).

In this sense, we have analysed Malle's narrative, the study of part of Mamet's and Chekhov's work, and then, through Stanislavski's theory, we have been able to offer a vision of the performances of the actors in *Vanya in 42nd Street* (1994).

With reference to the Stanislavski system, we have based ourselves on the main points of the Stanislavski system: the magic B, the given circumstances, the knowledge of the work, the imagination, the tempo-rhythm, the listening and the super-objective.

This set of rules proposed a series of basic principles such as, for example, knowledge of the play, the given circumstances of the characters, imagination, action-reaction, physical actions and emotional memory, etc., all subject to modification. (Caffarel-Rodríguez, 2019, p. 210).

The Stanislavski system is much more extensive, but given our methodology of observation, and the fact that we are dealing with the analysis of the film, we have considered these to be the most relevant and verifiable in their application by the actors.

3. The Authors: Louis Malle, David Mamet and Anton Chekhov

To contextualise, we need to mention Louis Malle, David Mamet and Anton Chekhov because their reflections, trajectory and way of understanding art and social relations are three pillars on which *Vanya on 42nd Street* (1994) is based.

Louis Malle, French director and screenwriter, was part of the French Nouvelle Vague, although at first he did not feel that he belonged to this group, as we can deduce from his words as quoted by Samaniego: "with this generation, cinema became an adult art, we wanted to make our films with a different technique, shooting and budget. Now that



the years have passed, I think that I was part of this phenomenon" (Samaniego, 1978).

His filmography deals with social issues such as prostitution, loneliness or incest, but from a distant point of view that does not imply criticism, but witnesses the evolution of a society so that the spectator can reflect and draw conclusions for himself. In the interview conducted by Samaniego for *El País* in 1978, he says the following:

My approach to film was very theoretical at the beginning, but now my relationship to film is as if I were a painter or a musician. I am less intellectual, I am concerned with problems of form and expression and, above all, with aspects that link cinema to the senses [...] At the beginning of my career I wanted to investigate different systems and directions, but in recent years my work has evolved towards a thematic one. (Samaniego, 1978)

In the same sense, Aldarondo (1996) points out in his article how Malle's cinema is the result of a constant evolution, although always maintaining its essence.

The last stage of Louis Malle's career can be seen as a point and apart that comes to restart his cinema in order to take up some of his constants in a different way, with the aftertaste of everything he has learned, until leaving an open door with *Vanya on 42nd Street* (1994), which comes to be the perfect ending for someone who based his cinema on imposing a different challenge on each occasion than the one before. (Aldarondo, 1996, p.74)

His filmography responds to this criterion, but his interest in theatre cannot be overlooked, hence his adaptation of *Uncle Vanya* and the creation of the film under study. The play was adapted into a screenplay by David Mamet (1947), one of the great figures of American literature and theatre in the mid-20th century, winner of the Pulitzer Prize in 1984. Mamet graduated from Goddard College in Vermont and also from the Neighborhood Play House School in New York, where he began to make a name for himself as a playwright. This school was under the direction of Sanford Meisner, a follower of the Stanislavski system, which later evolved into the Method. Although he was trained in schools, he is against following any method, as we can deduce from his words: "the actor is on stage to communicate the play to the audience. This is the beginning and end of the play. To do this, the actor needs a powerful voice, good diction, a supple and well-proportioned body, and a rough understanding of the play" (Mamet, 2011, p. 15).

Mamet's work is influenced by the theatre of O'Neill and his continuator Arthur Miller. Following the trends that were already emerging through the Actor's Studio, and despite being against it, Mamet conceives the stage realistically, creating characters with deep and different psychological profiles tainted with disenchantment and with a tendency to be somewhat dark. "One of David Mamet's authorial trademarks is his tendency to re-create negative spaces, understood as those fictional universes in which a pessimistic or disenchanted image of a society predominates" (Echart, 2012, p. 3).

David Mamet maintains Aristotelian principles and is against, in principle, anything that does not follow them; he understands a theatre that has expository clarity and the spectator can find his true feelings, although his taste for metaphors and symbolic figu-



res can be observed. The dialogues are strengthened by placing more emphasis on the social inequalities between the countryside and the city, adapting them to the present day. As García Cívico points out, "Mamet's style, as is well known, is very direct, very cold and penetrating, full of symbolic figures and metaphor games" (García Cívico, 2018. p. 32).

While for Stanislavski, Chekhov is the perfect author to put his techniques into practice, directing through the Moscow Art Theatre, *The Seagull* (1896), *Uncle Vanya* (1899), *The Three Sisters* (1901) and *The Cherry Orchard* (1904), for Mamet they are perfect because of their subject matter. They allow him to approach contemporary socio-cultural criticism because of his great devotion to the theatre that was being forged in the 1950s and 1960s on the New York stage, searching for the realism and psychologism so present in Anton Chekhov.

Anton Chekhov (1860–1904) was a doctor, but his passion for literature and his reading of authors such as Pushkin, Goncharov and Turgenev, as well as Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, led him to become an important author. García Cívico (2018) gives an approximation of what literature meant to Chekhov:

Chekhov also understood that the purpose of fictional literature is to please, not to instruct; it is not intended to inform or indoctrinate, not even to raise awareness... it is rather to generate beauty where it does not seem to exist. If the reader's interest is in current problems, he should not read novels or short stories, he thought, but scientific works on the subject (García Cívico, 2018, p. 24).

This is how we understand Chekhov's works, which start from the aesthetic because their aim is to please and entertain, although the themes proposed are the social changes that are taking place around him so that the spectator can draw his own conclusions, just like Malle, then the union is perfect.

The film is painfully close, very direct, as befits a rehearsal of a Chekhov play like *Uncle Vanya* in which the actors feel all too identified. Louis Malle chose to frame the rehearsals rather than the actual performance of the play in keeping with the provisionality that seems to surround everything, particularly the lives of the film's protagonists. (Gómez García, 2019, p. 39).

Anton Chekhov was characterised by the creation of the so-called indirect action, a new dramatic technique in which what happens off-stage or what the characters do not say with words becomes more relevant. We would be talking about the subtext, which we could associate with Stanislavski's search for the given circumstances, that is, the search through the imagination for everything that is hidden behind the text, as well as with the *Si mágico*, the latter concept being understood as a conditional that allows the actor to formulate questions that lead to an action. "You have understood and experienced for yourselves how, through the word 'if', internal and external actions are created in a normal, organic, natural way" (Stanislavski, 2019, p. 63). For all these reasons, Chekhov's plays were in line with the new form of representation of the Moscow Art Theatre, since the psychologism of the characters was sought after and also in the face



of texts that were suitable for cinematographic representation because the language of shots facilitates the capture of this subtext. "The 'if' always begins the creation; the 'given circumstances' develop it" (Stanislavski, 2019, p. 67).

But we will continue with the indirect action, which consists in the fact that the action does not have to be reinforced with dialogue because what is left unsaid is what becomes more relevant. Silences acquire as much importance as what is verbalised if they are transmitted through expression or gestures. If we transfer this to cinema, as Malle did, we can, through observation, appreciate that search for emotions and that realism that Stanislavski was looking for on stage.

4. Narrative analysis in the film *Vanya on 42nd Street* (1994)

The story is set in the present time, which we indirectly sense to be the end of the 20th century. Malle begins the film in the form of a documentary, although it is framed within fiction. With the use of a telephoto lens, he introduces the actors, records their conversations and their meeting with the small audience that is going to witness this rehearsal, which will be uncut, as Gregory himself points out in one of the scenes.

The film begins on crowded 42nd Street in New York. With the tide of passers-by, actors and director mingle on their way to the rehearsal of Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*, which will take place in an old theatre, once splendid and now half-ruined. At the door of the theatre they will meet some friends and relatives who have come to act as occasional audiences for the rehearsal; just like us. (Ayala, 2006, p. 135)

We witness a doubling of roles, as on the one hand we have the director of the film, Malle, and on the other the director of the play, André Gregory, present in the film, introducing the audience, greeting the actors, preparing the rehearsal. It may look like an improvisation, but the language of the shots reveals the preparation behind it. His small role is in the external part of the film, that is to say, in what does not correspond to the play itself.

Wallace Shawn waits at the door of the theatre and talks to the director in a relaxed and colloquial manner, who has just arrived at that moment. Malle's intention here is to give a glimpse of the actor he has known for years, without any continuity, because when the performance begins there will be no difference between Wallace Shawn-actor and Wallace Shawn-Vania.

What looks like an improvisation on the outside also continues in the place where the performance will take place, which is very peculiar because it is a theatre in ruins but which has something special about it. This place will become the stage for both performances: that of the audience who come to see the play and the play itself. Amidst dust, fallen lights and a small catering service, the chats between the actors continue. The jazz music composed by Joshua Redman will play a very important role because it marks the transitions between reality and fiction. Jazz is "a genre not only dear to Louis Malle, but also perfectly akin, as is well known, to the tone and formal proposals of the French new wave cinema of the 1960s and 1970s" (García Cívico, 2018, p. 21).

The recording of the play will follow the same false improvisation guidelines and the



changes of shots are very subtle, precisely to prevent the spectator from stepping out of the recorded rehearsal. There are no props, but the lighting has been carefully crafted to maintain Chekhov's atmosphere. Warm lights fall on the characters and accentuate that summer warmth, the dark surrounding the ruined stage delimits the setting of the estate. And, supporting this theory, we have the opinion of García Cívico (2018):

Therefore, the fact that *Vanya on 42nd Street* takes place in an old theatre, between dusty corridors and abandoned lights or on a sofa confused between the audience and the stage, does not disturb, but allows, quite naturally, the focus to be on the dialogues, on the fluidity of the text (García Cívico, 2018, p. 97).

This is supported by Mamet's adaptation of the dialogue, bringing it closer to the psychological realism that Stanislavski sought so much. Thanks to this, it is possible to make this translation to the spectacle, adapting it to the present time and space.

We continue with the film: Wallace Shawn (*Vanya*) explains the history of the old theatre to the audience, the camera focuses on Larry Pine (*Astrov*) who chats with Phoebe Brand (*Nany*) about the rehearsals as they sit at the table, and *Vanya* lies down on a bench to sleep. The jazz stops playing, but the actors continue to talk until, suddenly, the viewer realises that the show has begun. Malle mixes short shots and hand-held camera sets for realism. Malle has succeeded in conveying the idea that there is no distinction between theatre and cinema, just as there is between life and theatre.

The main plot is the rapid pace of life and the wear and tear it causes, conveyed through the apathy and weariness that reigns in all of them. *Vanya* feels that her work on the farm, to which she has devoted her whole life out of admiration for her brother-in-law, has been a fraud; *Yelena* feels the same way for having married someone she does not love; *Sonya* because of the unrequited love of Dr. *Astrov*, who in turn resigns himself to being a country doctor who hopes that one day his luck will change; and finally, *Serebryakov*, *Vanya's* brother-in-law, who decides to return to the farm, fed up with life in the city. All the characters see their lives slipping away as time passes: either they stay that way or they confront reality in order to change it.

5. Towards the creation of the characters

After analysing the film, we approach the creation of characters who are already part of the work from the moment they appear on stage, walking through New York. Their main characteristic is a taciturn air so that Malle can make this transition from reality to theatre in a smooth and subtle way.

Although we then analyse the characters separately, there is a work common to all, such as the mastery of pauses and silences, managing time and rhythm with a diction that conveys the text naturally, with a restraint in expressions and a narrative text adapted to the cinema and to the present day. Pauses, silences and tempo-rhythm are fundamental parts of the Stanislavski system, "The same is true of actor's work. Our



actions and words take place in time. In the process of acting we must fill time with moments of the most diverse movements, alternating with pauses" (Stanislavski, 2016, pp.231–232).

A super-objective can also be observed which is common to all of them, and which is understood as that idea or feeling of the author which is intrinsic in the work. In this case, all the characters have an inner struggle for a better life and this will be the driving force behind their actions. For Stanislavski, the super-objective or super-task plays a very important role within the performance, as it is the main idea of the author and through which the whole play is structured "Just as from the seed the plant is born, from a particular idea or feeling sprouts its work" (Stanislavski, 2019, p.327).

The construction of the characters is the responsibility of the actors, but Gregory's role is fundamental, with years of preparation and many rehearsals reflected in the organicity of the characters and the nuances. Gregory has managed to squeeze the life out of these characters and fill scenes that may seem flat with meaning. In this regard, we would like to point out a statement by William Layton in Emilio Peral's doctoral thesis:

Layton declared that the climate in Chekhov was everything and that it was necessary to offer all the ramifications of the subtext, which is why he advocated achieving a balance - "which is very delicate" - in the details, in behaviour or in the illusion of life. He also stressed that the Russian playwright's theatre was very difficult, because in the scenes "it seems" that nothing happens, with oscillations between drama and laughter, and with the story of human beings who are not allowed to live (Peral, 2017, p. 255).

Wallace Shawn creates Vanya out of listlessness, drudgery, weariness, moods that are present within her throughout the play with the resulting emotions of anger, frustration, sadness, resignation or falling in love. Wallace worked with Gregory for many months rehearsing the play and subsequently performed it at the 42nd Street Theatre for three years. They never thought of taking it to a larger stage. As Lambert (2011) states in the following quote:

Shawn and Gregory spent many months, spread over three years in the early 1990s, reworking Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*, mostly in rented lofts; they eventually performed the play in an abandoned, run-down theatre on 42nd Street in Manhattan. (Lambert, 2011)

The given circumstances of which Stanilasvski speaks can be studied through the performance of Shawn, who has constructed a character accustomed to serving, but also marked by a lack of will, dependent on family circumstances alien to a life expectation of his own. He admits his uneducated and smallness without rebellion, even the censure transmitted to him by his own mother who, in turn, is a victim of the circumstances of her life. Through questions in the conditional, that is to say the magic if and the given circumstances, Shawn has carried out a previous study with a research process developed over years of work and knowledge of the character and, in this case, what Anton Chekhov wanted to transmit through this character. "The if always begins the creation; the given circumstances develop it" (Stanislavski, 2019, p. 67).



We have said that it is not recorded theatre, but the whole film has been recorded in sequential order, which facilitates the emotional work of the character. The character of Vanya has had to be broken down into so-called units and tasks, as these small actions are what make her move forward to form a whole at the end of the play. "Dividing the play into chunks is necessary for us not only to analyse and study it, but also for another, more important reason hidden in the very inner essence of each chunk [...] it happens that in each chunk there is a task" (Stanislavski, 2019, p. 158).

With regard to Stanislavski's approach to the magic yes, it is the one concerning the waste of his life and the feeling of frustration. From the beginning, he wakes up tired and it is his own inaction that provokes the action. We observe a work in front of the camera of mastery of expressions and restraint. There is no gesture that leads to overacting and the technique used is cinematographic because there is no voice projection understood as necessary in theatre, there is no characterisation because he wears street clothes, but he does show from the beginning his state of mind that envelops the character.

Professor Serebriacov (George Gaynes) is the counterpoint to Vanya and the source of all the problems; he also presents an ambivalence common to the others, he is abhorrent and arrogant, but also vulnerable.

Gaynes is an actor trained at the Actor's Studio, as pointed out in the biography of actor and director Lou Antonio in which he talks about his time at the Studio and the opportunities it provided for students, citing examples such as Anne Bancroft or Gaynes himself: "It gave us a place to take a chance a place to practice. Some of the chance were a thrill[...] George Gaynes, in a far jump from his role in *Tootsie* and the *Policy Academy* movies" (Antonio, 2017, p. 33).

His character is difficult because it would be easy to stereotype him as an erudite man from a high social class who despises others, a womaniser who succeeds with young girls but is unable to empathise with anyone. One has to wonder why he is so moody, sleep deprived or a hypochondriac. One senses that Gaynes has worked with the given circumstances and manages to give the character nuances other than the expected ones. Stella Adler believed that everything must be justified; in the professor, every action has that justification that comes from the human point of view.

When the actor works in this way, he is activated on stage and moves the scene forward. The real creative work of the actor with respect to the text is the elaboration of these justifications, because for them to be effective they must shake the actor, they must be logical and close to him, but also activate him emotionally (Urraza, 2012, p. 58).

It is in the professor that we see more of the indirect action that Chekhov speaks of, as we know more about him from what the characters tell off-stage than from their appearances, and this is what is interesting about Gaynes' work. While everyone portrays his discomfort, we see a vulnerable man when he is finally confronted with his own reality.

When we talk about the beginning, Malle begins by giving us the main features of the characters. In the case of the professor, he walks through the city alone. His serious, thoughtful face is the only one who is not shown interacting with the rest of the characters. In the play, he is the one who interacts the least with the others, but everything



revolves around him. He is the only one who is characterised, with spectacles, a cane, both objects enhancing command and intellectuality, and a constant use of a handkerchief to wipe his sweat, denoting his ailments. Gaynes has worked the relationships in different ways depending on the character he is facing, which is very interesting because it offers many nuances, for in the same scene, he can enrich his character by showing the whole psychological universe of Chekhov's characters in the same scene.

Let's move on to the character of Sonya, played by Brooke Smith. She is an actress who graduated from the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. The school was founded in 1884 and teaches the Stanislavski technique in its different variations of the Method. Sonya is the teacher's daughter, she lives and works on the farm with Vanya with no other horizon in her life. Brooke Smith plays Sonya in the same vein as Wallace Shawn, maintaining an air of sadness and resignation from the kind, helpful and hardworking character who, together with Vanya, runs the farm. The actress has worked her character from despair, but searching her imagination to find subtexts that lead her to find the flow of emotions. "You know that our work begins with the use of the magical 'if' as a lever that lifts the artist from everyday reality to the plane of imagination" (Stanislavski, 2019, p.73).

Julianne Moore plays Yelena. She is a very beautiful woman who could be cold and vain, but she runs away from the cliché by assuming that she has made a mistake in her marriage, but she accepts it with resignation and governed by solid principles; she will not leave her husband, nor will she be unfaithful no matter how much she is attracted to Dr. Astrov. The relationship between Sonya and Yelena is very interesting with high quality acting, the former with what Stanislavski defines as plasticity of the body, her bodily expression has a helpful attitude, hunched back, joined hands; the latter is a very worked character from the point of view of the given circumstances and imagination.

His work in front of the camera is intensified by the off-screen monologue. Through his restrained gaze, we see the suffering and compassion he feels for Sonya. In this case, Malle chose to take a shot of Moore for a minute and a half and then insert the voice-over. In this way he intensifies Yelena's feelings about the situation she is facing. With this device, he flees from theatricality to introduce a cinematic effect in contrast to Vanya's monologue in which he breaks the fourth wall. In line with the above with regard to the close-up of the monologue we find this quote from Rongier (2018) in the book edited by Phillipe Met: *The cinema of Louis Malle: Transatlantic Auteur*:

This inner prayer of Yelena places us before an experience of prosopon: the cinematic speech (theatrical) character shows the face of the person (Julianne Moore) interpreting her character, all of which highlights, via close-up, a relation between the audience and the vacillation of the persona (Rongier, 2018, p. 262).

Moore realises a character arc through the division and dosage of information. This is due to the division into units that will lead to action and therefore movement. Although Yelena's goal will be to be happy, her expression of melancholy will be present in the subtexts.

We can observe that she is an actress who works on active listening with her partners,



which provokes an organic and credible performance with a character arc that starts from the imagination and the given circumstances, rich in nuances and far from clichés, with a control of cinematographic language thanks to her previous experience in television, with which she dominates the subtexts and expressions contained with meaning.

We will finish by talking about the character of Dr. Astrov, played by Larry Pine. Malle gives a glimpse of Dr. Astrov's personality right from the start, the only external member of the family. He walks down the street and turns to look at a pretty girl, he is a womaniser and that is how the plot progresses before he meets Julianne Moore. We meet him through Sonya and Yelena's dialogue, committed to his work, intelligent and handsome. But like all Chekhov's characters, their lives lack content.

Pine is an actor who reads the plays over and over again. In this way, he extracts the nuances necessary to visualise the character with imagination and a bodily expression that flows from within. Malle captures his attraction to Yelena through his gaze alone; there is no need to add text because the subtext is captured in the facial expression. Like the other characters, he blames their frustration on external circumstances when they themselves are to blame for the situation they find themselves in.



6. Conclusions

This is an avant-garde work in which its director, Louis Malle, works from a classical point of view, but with a groundbreaking staging that shows a totally atypical theatrical representation in which he introduces the spectator into the theatre in the manner of a documentary and achieves a seamless and imperceptible transition to cinema. With a brief remark, we indicate that the characters are good, vulnerable people who seek happiness and a fulfilling life that makes them abandon their miseries (super-objective, in Stanislavski's terms). The similarities with the Nouvelle Vague can be seen in its deeply human approaches to normal people.

The aim of our research work was to observe which points of the Stanislavski system were applicable to the creation of the characters in Malle's film and to establish a relationship when working with them on the part of the performers. The given circumstances, the magic B, maintaining a tempo-rhythm, the mastery of pauses and silences and a deep knowledge of the play are key parts of his system for achieving veracity. Stanislavski also avoided monotony on stage, and for this the actor must divide the work into units and tasks, a task that is evident in the film when observing these small changes full of nuances in each of the characters.

With regard to the actors, we stated at the beginning of this work that from the analysis of the actors' construction of the characters we could see the application of the Stanislavski System; this objective is confirmed and therefore we can affirm, after the process of analysis and observation, that they all work the text with veracity and organicity, which leads us to observe a work following the guidelines of Stanislavski's psychological rea-

lism. Each one brings his or her own particularities to the Method according to training and personal experience. Listening is present in all of them, just as there is a dosage of information, which, through the tempo and rhythm used, will promote the desired realism. Likewise, the work on silences will be key to understanding the true feelings of the characters and the relationship established with the rest, underlining the subtexts and the audience's understanding.

Vanya on 42nd Street was the culmination of years of experimentation, as it is neither cinema nor theatre, but it has been different because of the search for characters through the text, which has required a greater creative effort. It is a characteristic of Stanislavski to avoid monotony, as well as a profound knowledge of the work.

If we extrapolate all this to the performers' work in front of the camera, we can see how the Stanislavski system, initially devised for the theatre, can be followed, but is totally valid for acting in front of the camera. The restraint exercised by the actors and the language of shots used by Malle only enhance the emotions and feelings of the characters in Chekhov's play.

The non-existent characterisation and minimal props are no obstacle for the audience not to enter fully into the story, the characters and their emotions. This is due to the work of the performers and their constant search for internal and external actions.

We can conclude that there is a clear relationship between the Stanislavski system and the creation of the characters of *Uncle Vanya* (1899) in *Vanya on 42nd Street* (1994), and that Malle's camerawork and direction enhance the psychologism of the characters.

7. Bibliography

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8. Filmography

Vanya on 42nd Street (Louis Malle, 1994).