The Master and His Master

Kristýna Petišková
Bard College, kp3286@bard.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2019

Part of the Music Commons, Other Theatre and Performance Studies Commons, and the Playwriting Commons

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License.

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2019/191

This Open Access work is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been provided to you by Bard College's Stevenson Library with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this work in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@bard.edu.
The Master and His Master

Senior Project submitted to
The Division of Arts
of Bard College

by

Kristýna (Iris) Petišková

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
May 2019
This piece of work would not have been born without the care I have received from my theater teachers at Bard, without the embracing love from my partner, my mother, without the impatience of my grandmother, without my daydreams and nightmares, and without the suggestions from my critical friends.

I dedicate this piece to everything and everyone who consciously and unconsciously influenced the conception, three trimesters and birth of this play.
Contents:

1. Conception............................................................ pp. 1-7
2. First trimester.......................................................... pp. 8-13
3. Second trimester....................................................... pp. 14-16
4. Third trimester......................................................... pp. 17-20
5. Birth........................................................................ p. 21
6. Bibliography.............................................................. p. 22
7. Performance Pictures............................................... pp. 23-25
8. Performance Poster.................................................... p. 26
9. Performance Program............................................... p. 27
10. The Master and His Master..................................... pp. 28-47
Conception:
Karel Čapek, T. S. Eliot, Hafiz, and Myself

When, in Spring 2018, I took a theatrical adaptation class with Gideon Lester and was choosing a short story that would be interesting and challenging to adapt into a script, I remembered the Czech author Karel Čapek (1890-1938) whose writings I have always admired; humorous and serious, light and heavy, happy and sad – in my eyes he is the master of using both sides of the coins simultaneously.

As a child I read most of his novels, such as War with the Newts, The Absolute at Large, or Krakatit, and most of his theater plays, including R.U.R., The Mother, The White Disease, Pictures from the Insects’ Life, The Makropulos Affair, or The Outlaw, so I thought that I have had a good notion of the ways in which he approaches the material he writes about. However, apart from his novels and plays, he would write many collection of short stories (some of them he would write together with his brother, Josef Čapek, who was also a writer and a wonderful painter) which I didn’t know at all. My mother would read Dashenka, or the Life of a Puppy to me when I was a little kid but now I realized that apart from Dashenka there were many more decades of stories to explore.

As I was going through Čapek’s short stories, I came across the collection titled I Had a Dog and a Cat in which, as the title suggests, Čapek describes his experiences with his own dogs and cats. One of the stories from this collection, Minda, or the Breeding of Dogs, made me particularly amused (and, at the same time, gave me the shivers).

When I first began adapting the short story about Minda I attempted to stay as true to the original text as possible. However, by doing this I soon realized that I was overcomplicating things – by following the storyline I was losing the spirit of the story. Perhaps I am doing the right thing in a wrong way, I thought. So I tried more and harder but nothing had been
improving. All I knew was that it did not feel right. My mindset was too rigid. I needed to change my strategy and approach the text differently, or else I would get crazy. Therefore, I negotiated with the storyline and focused on the spirit. I reread the short story many times in order to extract the spirit, or rather to extract some ideas that resonated with me. When I found what I wanted, I glued all the ideas together and created the spirit I was looking for.

In the text, there were three main passages that I drew my inspiration from:

- “I took myself a dog chiefly because of my surplus energy; it seems as if I had a desire for some living creature in this world to obey me (Čapek, p. 7).”
- “…already in the first few days I discovered that keeping a dog fulfils many objects except one; I wanted to be lord and master of my dog, and it seems to me now that instead Minda is becoming the lady and mistress of me (Čapek, p. 10).”
- “…if you have any desire for a bit of theoretical preparation you find yourself in the threshold of mysterious and great things, called Eugenics. Why shouldn’t we try to direct the course of Nature, and impose upon her higher tasks? Why not prepare for the birth of a Super-dog… remember, Minda, you are destined for greater things (Čapek, pp. 19-20).”

The power dynamic between people and between other creatures has been intriguing to me for quite a while, and seeing Čapek twisting the power dynamic between humans and dogs caught my attention. I thought more about the forceful domestication of wild wolves and dogs that suggests a form of slavery and, on the other hand, I thought about the loving bonds between humans and domesticated dogs that feel so natural and wholesome – just the opposite of what I imagine when the word slavery comes to my mind.
In Čapek’s story, I saw both lovingness and terror, although the lovingness often hidden in a pile of sarcasm and the terror in a pile of jokes. I found this combination to be a dangerous task for me – balancing between masked lovingness and masked terror and not falling off the edge of either one of them, that is, not becoming too horrible and not becoming too sweet. In order to prevent the play from being too horrible or too sweet, I decided to play with the nature of the characters a little bit.

I started with Minda, as her character seemed to be trickier to solve. I knew that having a real dog on stage would create some difficulties and would end up being too limiting. I considered it for a moment at the very beginning of the writing process when I was so eager to stay true to the original text.

However, after discovering Čapek’s passage on eugenics and his idea of a Super-dog I decided to turn Minda the dog into a supernatural creature who is half-human and half-dog. I thought that she should be played by a human being who looks like a dog and somewhat moves like a dog, yet who can lead witty and rebellious dialogues with the human master. Minda would become the dog who attempts to be a Super-dog, yet… a dog who attempts to do so in a wrong way. Instead of having her turn into a Super-dog (partly because I could not figure out what traits the super-dog would have, and partly because I still wanted to keep adapting the original text without adding too much of a new material into the script) I made her turn into an imperfect human being. She would slowly imitate the master, a human being, and become a lot like him.

No matter how human-like she would seem I didn’t want Minda to have too elevated ideas. The only thing she knew was that she was unhappy as a dog and the human being who was above her was causing this suffering. The human master was the one who was higher on the pyramid in terms of the power dynamic and Minda thought that reaching that place would
make her life more meaningful and happier. I wanted Minda to be fooled by this power
dynamic, so instead of reaching for something beyond the suffering of a dog Minda would
turn into a desperate human being with the worst possible traits – egocentric, mean, envious,
and disagreeable. This might have felt good for her in the short term, but would most likely
(hopefully?) not make her life much better in the long term.

While developing Minda’s character, I thought about my personal experiences and had been
trying to recall specific memories and emotions from my life that would relate to Minda’s
situation. Of course, I have never thought of becoming a Super-dog, but I sure have dreamt of
being someone else. Perhaps it cannot be helped, still having prominent traces of a monkey in
my genes, I would sometimes consciously and sometimes unconsciously imitate others in
order to reach that mysterious place “above” myself. And just like with Minda, it has almost
never proven to be a good idea.

After transforming Minda into the supernatural dog, it was clear to me that I have to approach
the character of the human master in an unusual way too. At this point of the writing process
I imagined the play being for only two speaking actors, Minda and Master, and I was
constantly putting the two characters on a balancing scale. I had the feeling that they both had
to drag a similar amount of attention from the spectators. They both had to look just a little
too odd and function as two natural and equally stimulating spotlights. Two spotlights
working together and fighting against each other in order to get the spectators’ attention.

The decision to make the master blind came to me one day when I forgot to put on my
contact lenses and, despite my not that terrible vision, completely disabled me for a day. I
was not able to properly follow powerpoint presentations in the seminars, and it even made it
difficult for me to recognize my friends from afar. Such disability, combined with despotism,
was exactly what I wanted to see in Minda’s master. First, it enabled Minda to move more
freely without being noticed or stopped by this blind man. It had to be a blind man who is terrified of ending up lonely in his dark world. A pitiful blind creature who attempts to tie Minda to his world through words, ranging all the way from evil and scary threats to sweet and manipulative promises. One should never be quite sure if he should be feeling sorry for the blind man or not.

While developing the characters of Minda and Master and writing the script, I was trying to hear the words Minda and Master speak as music – shorter and longer phrases, intonation, volume, dynamics, repetitions, accents, emphases, echoes. When Gideon Lester brought George Eliot’s book *Four Quartet*s to class and I skimmed through *Burnt Norton*, the first of the quartets, my eyes stopped on the following section, as it fully resonated with how I was thinking about my script:

“Words move, music moves
Only in time; but that which is only living
Can only die. Words, after speech, reach
Into silence. Only by the form, the pattern,
Can words or music reach
The stillness, as a Chinese jar still
Moves perpetually in its stillness. (Eliot, p. 19)”

At first, this musical approach made me feel intimidated. I was not used to writing in this way at all. Although I always recite aloud anything I write down right away to have a clear picture of how the words sound in space, I never before imagined that I would be able to write a play using so few words. Yet, Eliot’s poem calmed me down. I decided to dig into the musicality of words even more and started treating each letter as a note, and every word as an interval, a chord, or a musical phrase.
Most of my script consists of brief dialogues made of short sentences, except the SCENE IV. in which I used a distorted version of Hafiz’s poem “Of Course Things Like That Can Happen”:

“Once God made love to a great saint who had a hairy belly. The saint’s cheeks turned into beautiful roses and his eyes shone like two planets making love. Life went on, sweetly humming, disguised in a thousand shapes, colors and forms. Rivers stayed up all night and chanted. Clouds pulled each other’s pants down and pointed and laughed. The stars got clearly drunk and threw themselves across the sky. Light stretched its arms. Angels and flowers were playing hooky in graveyards, laughing and rolling naked on cool stones. The moon knows that God is alway amorous – he will never stop making love (Hafiz, pp. 29-32).”

For the purposes of my play, I found Hafiz’s original poem a bit too long and sometimes unfitting, so I underlined only the phrases that appealed to me the most, and made a little collage out of them. I decided to include the poem in the text in order to bring some vividness, colorfulness and lightness into the script. It is supposed to function a little musical intermezzo that offers the spectators a momentary relief from the dense interactions between Minda and Master.

As I got more and more obsessed with the musical ideas, I decided that not only words should be musical, but all sounds in the play should be innerly connected and have a musical quality to them. Therefore, I decided to have a “percussive trio” in the play: a typewriter – the rhythmical sounds made by hitting the letters on it, the blind man’s cane – the sound of the cane hitting the ground as he walks, and Minda’s tongue – tick-tacking sounds that Minda makes with her tongue, as she counts down to Master’s death.

After a few weeks, or a month, I thought I was finally done. It must had been done, for it was a long and difficult conception. But I was wrong. There was still so much, too much, in the play that needed to be changed, rewritten, solved, and improved.
“In his soul each of us has a tender spot on which somehow no skin and hair has grown; a little naked spot, painfully tremulous, which we should like to conceal from the world (Čapek, p.13).”
First trimester: 
Rewriting the Script

As it turned out, some of the scenes in the first version of my script were too flat, some of them unnecessarily exposed, and the ending felt too abrupt. In one scene, Minda was alone on stage just staring out the imaginary window, watching cars passing by on the road. In another scene, she would pee on stage for no particular reason other than being a dog. One time, she would be alone on stage making tick-tocking sounds with her tongue, yet this time not counting down to master’s death, just out of pure boredom. And finally, in the second to last scene Damin – who at that time he even did not have a name, I called him just “another dog” – showed up out of the brown moon.

Originally, Damin would not speak in the play. He had only two purposes – to make Minda pregnant in front of the spectators, and to switch costumes with Minda and take her place in the house for two months (as that is length of dog pregnancy) without master noticing any change. After two months, that is in the very last scene, Minda would come back to give birth to approximately 50 puppies – decades of puppies that would crawl on stage as if becoming an ocean of puppies in which the master drowns – and to present a monologue about the oppression of dogs in dog language.

While discussing the script with the director of my play, Akiva Hirsch, we came to the conclusion that it would be a good idea to rewrite and expand the script, and to give Damin a more significant role. It turned out to be good not only for the coherency of the script itself, but also for the actors.

I did not consider acting in my play at first, as I wanted to see the rehearsal process from the spectator’s perspective, thus Minda was supposed to be played by Laurent Brodie. However, after my senior project advisor Gideon Lester suggested that I should try acting in the play I
ended up casting myself as Minda and recasting Laurent Brodie as Damin. I rewrote and expanded the script for the sake of the script itself, but my other big motivation was Laurent. I have liked Laurent’s dog acting very much and wanted to give him a bigger part. I also acknowledged that Laurent and I had a good chemistry as two dogs and decided to write several scenes in which the two of us would act together.

As I was expanding the script I remembered talking about the *Animal Farm* with my other senior project advisor, Jorge Cortiñas, during the first semester of my senior year. I decided to reread the book and was struck by how similar in spirit to Čapek’s short story Orwell’s novella is. Both stories were published in 1940s – Čapek’s book was first published in 1940 and Orwell’s novella in 1945. Both inhaling and exhaling similar air, both published during World War II.

While I was getting inspired by *Animal Farm*, I came up with three new scenes: SCENE II – a typewriter scene, SCENE V – a mirror scene, and SCENE IX – the final scene in which Minda gives birth to a puppy who then wraps an umbilical cord around Master’s body.

For the typewriter scene and the final scene I drew my inspiration from *Animal Farm’s* seven commandments:

```
“1. Whatever goes upon two legs is an enemy.
2. Whatever goes upon four legs, or has wings, is a friend.
3. No animal shall wear clothes.
4. No animal shall sleep in a bed.
5. No animal shall drink alcohol.
6. No animal shall kill any other animal.
7. All animals are equal (Orwell, p. 28).”
```

Through the seven commandments, Orwell’s animals try to avoid becoming human. Yet, the pigs who wrote the commandments end up walking upon two legs, wearing clothes, living in the farmer’s house, sleeping in his bed, drinking lots of alcohol and killing their fellow animals.
Similarly, in the typewriter scene Minda and Damin come up with a poem of protest in which they accuse the blind human of being the cause of their suffering:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Bruised} \\
\text{Used} \\
\text{Abused} \\
\text{The cold heart prevails} \\
\text{Fooled} \\
\text{By guilt} \\
\text{We bowed} \\
\text{On our four} \\
\text{To fear} \\
\text{Our tales [it’s okay if it’s ambiguous whether he says tails or tales]} \\
\text{Whipping} \\
\text{The Present} \\
\text{Will not} \\
\text{Do it over}
\end{align*}
\]

Although in my play Minda attempts to fight the human by becoming human, the outcome of her actions is not too different from *Animal Farm*. Just like with the pigs, Minda’s initial ideas and intentions are pure. Yet, the difference is that Minda tries to avoid suffering by causing more suffering. Now, that is not anything surprising, not an uncommon way to deal with pain. When feeling emotional pain in the stomach or anger inside the chest, the easiest way (as well as the most inefficient way) is to turn the point of the knife towards someone else instead and stab them with the painful emotion.

Again, it is something that I have experienced in my life many times. Whenever it happens, the bodily sensations of stabbing someone or being stabbed are so strong that I decided to show it in the play explicitly. Therefore, in the very first scene Minda stabs Master’s naked foot with a sharp piece of a broken plate. Minda is enjoying this moment very much, yet it does not satisfy her. She keeps trying to stop her suffering by causing more mental suffering to her master, hoping that one day she will cast the pain out of her body.
Going back to the musical ideas, I thought of Minda’s final monologue/protest poem in the last scene as a variation on the protest poem in the typewriter scene. I made a few changes in the original poem and added a little coda to the end:

    Fooled
    By guilt
    We bowed
    On our four
    To your fears
    The Present
    Once
    Whipping
    Our tales
    Now embraces
    You
    Stay
    With yourself
    In the hug of blind freedom.

In music, coda is a short passage that is added to the very end of a piece in order to bring the piece to its conclusion. I have been playing classical music for many years so I was quite familiar with this idea. However, what I did not know at all was the etymology of the word *coda*. When I looked up the term in the “Online Etymology Dictionary” I had to laugh. I laughed and laughed as I read about one of its possible origins: “coda comes from Latin *cauda* "tail of an animal,” which is of uncertain origin.”\(^1\) I found it wonderful that the pieces of puzzles came together like magnets – tales and tails and codas. Musical tales and musical tails were swinging together.

The third scene that was inspired by *Animal Farm* was SCENE V – the mirror scene. In the very last sentence of his novella, Orwell writes: “The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again; but already it was impossible to say which was which (Orwell, p. 155)”. The image of his description felt powerful to me.

\(^1\) Online Etymology Dictionary, s.v. *coda*. 
Although this idea of overlapping creatures – in Minda’s case a dog and a human – is quite obvious throughout the play, I wanted to create a scene in which Minda sees and appreciates her transformation in a mirror.

In the beginning of the play, Minda still moves on her four and her movements are purely doglike. Yet, towards the end she walks comfortably on her two legs. I found it both natural and necessary to have a scene in which I would show how this transformation takes place. Therefore, I wrote a scene in which Minda poses in front of a mirror. While posing, Damin watches her and gives her suggestions on how to look and move more humanlike. Minda listens to his suggestions, manages to stand on her two for the first time, and exclaims:

She bowed  
On her four  
To fear  
But now  
Look at me  
She stands straight  
Like a ruler

Again, I wanted to make a reference to the protest poem. I also wanted to keep playing with words and sounds and the ambiguity they create. In the protest poem, the ambiguous word was a word *tale* which can also be heard as *tail*. In this second poem, the ambiguous word is a *ruler*. One can stand straight physically like a math ruler, but one can also stand like a dignified leader, no matter if standing straight or being hunchbacked.

The rewriting process was much easier than the conception. While adding new scenes and adapting old scenes the rehearsing process had already started. I had a great director whose intuition I trusted very much, and I knew the actors (Laurent Brodie and Charlie Wood) who would breathe life into the characters of Minda and Master. It helped me to write for specific people. I knew how they use their body language, how they speak, and was aware of the
energies they naturally bring into space – which was useful especially when working on dialogues. The script was done, yet the work on the spirit of the play had just begun.

“Benjamin was the oldest animal on the farm, and the worst tempered. He seldom talked, and when he did, it was usually to make some cynical remark—for instance, he would say that God had given him a tail to keep the flies off, but that he would sooner have had no tail and no flies (Orwell, pp. 5-6).”
Second Trimester:
The Rehearsal Process

The auditions for the play took place during the second weekend of February. They did not go too well. Only two people showed up. One of them was Laurent Brodie – Akiva’s friend – who came to the audition only because Akiva kindly asked him to. We ended up casting Laurent as a dog, and that turned out to be an excellent choice, but we still needed to find the right person to play the master. Fortunately, Akiva has lots of good connections, and very quickly persuaded his other friend, Charlie Wood, to audition for the master. We ended up casting him too. The only problem with Charlie was that he would make a wonderful master and he would also make a brilliant dog. I considered recasting Laurent as master and casting Charlie as a dog. However, after auditioning both of them for the second time it was clear that Laurent would be the dog and Charlie the master.

We started rehearsing at the end of February in Olin 205. For one month we would meet once a week all together for two to three hours. Akiva would always come prepared to the rehearsals, knowing exactly what he wants to work on. At times, he would make us do some warm up exercises. Other times, we would play a status game. Each of us would be assigned a number from 1 to 10 – 1 being submissive with almost no power, and 10 being dominant and extremely powerful. Not knowing who has which number, we would improvise a play and act according to our assigned numbers. The goal was to feel comfortable in any assigned number and to figure out where each of us stands on the power scale.

In the group rehearsals Akiva would work mostly on the interactions between the actors, and he would also pay close attention to our movements. For instance, he would blindfold the master with a scarf in order to make Charlie used to moving as a truly blind man (in the actual performances Charlie would be wearing dark sunglasses). Akiva would also spend a
lot of time working with me and Laurent on the doglike movements – giving us suggestions and feedback, so we would always know which movements to explore and improve and which movements we should rather discard.

Apart from the group rehearsals, Akiva would meet with Charlie individually to work on the recitation of the poem by Hafiz. It turned out to be a challenge to recite such a vivid poem as a blind man. What is the proper way to move? What is the natural way to recite the words? Which facial expressions would a blind man, as opposed to a sighted man, make while reciting this poem? All this took a while to solve; meanwhile, me and Laurent were at our homes, watching videos of dogs’ movements (walking on four, running on four, walking on two, barking, laying down, crawling,...) on the internet and posing in front of mirrors.

Simply, everything Akiva did was meaningful. He would never lose anyone’s time and would always make sure that everyone is feeling comfortable in his role.

As the script was very easy to memorize, we did not have to spend too much time on learning the words and could rehearse fully without constantly having a pile of papers in our hands.

This was a great advantage that considerably speeded up the rehearsal process.

During the week prior to the shows we would meet every day at the Old Gym – the black box theater in which the performances took place – for three to four hours. Angela Woodack who agreed on being our technical director spent long hours with the lights and spotlights, trying to find the right illumination for every scene. She would be testing out all different kinds of combinations of colours, shades, and light intensity, and would discuss her decisions with us.

It was a great luck to have the chance to rehearse in the performance space for a week prior to the shows and to have Gideon Lester, Chiori Miyagawa, Miriam Felton-Dansky, and Jonathan Rosenberg watch the dress rehearsals and giving us feedback. Towards the end of the week everything started settling in and we felt (almost) ready to perform.
My mind during the rehearsal process.
During the spring break I decided to do nothing but work on the masks for Minda, Damin and Puppy. I was glad to have a full week to figure out how to do it, as prior to the dog masks I had only created one mask in my whole life. I made that mask with a considerable amount of difficulties in Fall 2018 when I took a mask class with Geoff Sobelle and Yuval Boim. It was a full head paper mache mask of Aláska, the messenger of self-love:

Although having this one experience with mask making was somewhat helpful, I still struggled a lot when creating the dog masks. At first, I considered making full head dog masks. However, I soon realized that it would be too impractical for speaking purposes. Making a dog face with a mouth big enough to project sound was beyond my crafting abilities.

I decided to create half-masks instead. I bought a basic paper mache mask and modelled a dog face on top of it with air drying clay. After the clay was dry, I covered the mask with cellophane and taped it securely to the mask. Then, I covered the cellophane with newspaper strips which I dipped in a paper mache glue. I let it dry overnight and then carefully removed
the paper mache mask from the cellophane. I put the masks on to test them. The eye holes were not good enough and the sound would not project well. I took off the mask, properly cut the eye holes, nostrils (only on Minda’s mask) and the lower part of the masks in order to make the sound project better.

Next came the ears. I first tried to make them from a regular cardboard box. It was not too bad, but I wanted the ears to be a little bent and the material was too thick for that. I was looking up advices on the internet and found a wonderful youtube channel *Ultimate Paper Mache* that is run by a mask maker Jonni. She would use various types of cardboard boxes for different parts of her masks, and for the ears she would use a thin cereal box which turned out to workout very well for my masks too. I cut the ears from the box and attached them to the masks with all purpose glue and a huge amount of tape. Again, I covered the ears with the paper mache glue and strips and let them dry.

After the paper mache was done, the masks had to be painted. I used acrylic paints and various sizes of brushes – thicker brushes for the face and thinner brushes for the nose and ears. It was hard to apply the paint evenly, because the surface of the paper mache masks was uneven. I realized that I should have used a sand paper in order to smooth out the surface of the masks. However, it was too late to do that. I already started painting the faces and did not want to risk destroying the masks. After I let the paint dry, I would try the masks on again. Fortunately, the uneven surface of the masks did not bother me too much, and I eventually even talked myself into liking them, thinking that the rough masks will fit the play.

Finally, I needed to attach a band to the masks. I used thin headbands and a hot glue gun. I cut the headbands, made small holes on the sides of the masks, threaded the ends of the head bands through the holes of the masks, and glued the ends to the inside parts of the masks with the hot glue gun.
Although the masks fitted everyone’s heads and served their purpose, they were far from being perfect. I considered asking someone else to make them for me and they might have looked better if I did so. On the other hand, I was glad to have another experience with mask making, learned from my mistakes and know that next time I will do better.

Minda - air drying clay
Minda and earless Damin

Damin  Minda  Puppy
Birth
The Performances

The performances took place on April 5th and 6th at 8 pm at the Old Gym.

Each night at 7:30 pm I would start worrying. I was afraid that no one will come and I was also afraid that too many people will come. It was a relief that neither of those happened. We ended up having just enough people in the audience for both shows.

Even though it was almost impossible to forget anything in the script, all of us were a bit nervous right before the shows. However, as soon as the shows started I had a feeling that we were able to let go of our fears and enjoyed performing together.

During the shows, nothing unwanted had happened, and we all felt quite satisfied afterwards.

I have felt truly grateful to Akiva, Charlie, Laurent, Jiangli, and Angela. They had put so much effort into making my play bloom –

– Thank you!


Online Etymology Dictionary [online]. [Cit.10. 8. 2017]. Available on: 

https://www.etymonline.com/word/coda
Performance Pictures:

Akiva Hirsch (director) and Minda

Master reciting Hafiz and angry Minda
Master and pregnant Minda

Minda and Damin in the mirror scene
Puppy wrapping an umbilical cord around Master’s legs
THE OLD GYM PRESENTS:

IRIS PETIŠKOVÁ’S

SENIOR PROJECT:

The Master And His Master

Friday APRIL 5 TH  8 PM
Saturday APRIL 6 TH  8 PM

Directed by Akiva Hirsch / Written by Iris Petiškova
THE OLD GYM PRESENTS:

IRIS PETERKOVA’S

SENIOR PROJECT:

The Master
And His Master

Directed by Akiva Hirsch / Written by Iris Peterkova

Performance Program:

Cast
(In Alphabetical Order)
Laurent Brodie as Damin
Jiangli Liu as Puppy Prime
Iris Peterkova as Minda
Charlie Wood as Master

Crew
(In Alphabetical Order)
Akiva Hirsch is the Director
Denise Hall is the Filmographer
Iris Peterkova is the Playwright
Angela Woodman is the Technical Director

About the Play:
Initially inspired by Karel Capek’s story “Minda, or the breeding of dogs”, and later by Orwell’s Animal Farm the play you are going to see, are seeing, or just saw is a distorted variation on the ideas discussed in the writing, combined with an even more distorted version of the world have been swallowing and the world I have been swallowed in.

Special Thanks and Hugs to:
Akiva Hirsch for his patient, precise directing and kindness.
Charlie Wood and Laurent Brodie for spending long evenings in rehearsal and breathing life into the characters.
Jiangli Liu for stepping in at the last second to save the end of my play.
My wonderfully sharp senior project advisor Gideon Lester.
Chio Miya for her wonderful encouragement.
Jonathan Rosenberg and Miriam Felton-Dansky for their feedback.
Williams Lumber Co. for having 45 foot long umbilical cords (rope).
Inspiration who comes and goes.
The Master and His Master

by

Kristýna (Iris) Petišková

Contact:

Kristýna Iris Petišková
Plavecká 2
Praha 2, 12800
Czech Republic
tel. 00420 775350218
kp3286@bard.edu

Spring 2018-2019
Characters:

- **MINDA** – MASTER’s dog, wearing a black costume and a dog’s mask

- **MASTER** – blind, barefoot man, dressed in white, accompanied by a white cane

- **DAMIN** – MINDA’s dog friend, wearing a black costume and a mask too, although different - belongs to a different breed than Minda

- **PUPPY** – Minda’s offspring, non-speaking character, appears only in the last scene
[MINDA is alone on stage. The stage is semidark, lights dim. MINDA is on her four, crawling around. She is observing her surrounding with enormous curiosity. After a while she climbs up a chair and a table. While on the table, she crawls around, plays with a typewriter and eats unfinished lunch of her master. After being done with food she becomes thirsty and decides to drink water from her master’s glass. However, she accidentally pushes the glass over the edge of the table. The glass falls and breaks into pieces. MINDA jumps from the table and crawls around the broken glass, breathing (can be loud and amplified, with echos, so that the sound of her breath fills in the whole space) and moving nervously. Lights go off completely. Only MINDA’s nervous breathing, gradually decrescendoing, is heard. After a long while - at least one minute - steady quiet sounds of a white cane appear. Blind barefoot MASTER is returning home. With the help of his white cane he walks to the center of the stage, towards the table. As the sounds of the white cane become more and more prominent, MINDA’s breath starts crescendoing again. Lights go on, very slowly. The stage is still partly dim. While approaching the table, MASTER steps on a piece of broken glass. He cries out in pain. He drops his white cane and falls to the ground. Lights brighten. 
Master is touching his foot. It is bleeding.]

MASTER

Minda!

MINDA

Hmm-mm-mmm-

MASTER

Minda, why did you do this again?

MINDA

-mmmmmmmmm

MASTER

Didn’t I tell you you ought to be careful with gravity?
MASTER
[continues touching-examining his foot]
F**k!
[M*ASTE*R screams out loud while touching the bleeding spot.
The whole foot is covered in blood by now. And so are his hands.]
Minda, come here.

Come here!

MINDA
Mmm-mmm. No.

I said COME HERE!

[whispers]
N-o.

MASTER
[furious; tries to reach for his white cane with no success]
Huh? Did I hear you correctly/(right)? Did you say ‘no’ to your master?

MINDA
I...no…

MASTER
Okay. Good. Then come to me.

MINDA
You’ll beat me.

MASTER
No, I won’t beat you...

MINDA
Yes, I think you will.
MASTER
[ignores MINDA’s remark]
...just...don’t leave me, please.

[Silence. MASTER sighs.]
Where is my cane? Can you bring it to me?

[Silence.]
Please?

[No answer.]
So you want me to beat you, after all?

MINDA
[slowly starts crawling towards MASTER, scared]

[MINDA pushes the white cane towards MASTER with her head and then slowly crawls back]

MASTER
[looks around with his ears, trying to identify where MINDA’s voice came from]
That’s right. That’s my Minda.
Now, come, let’s cuddle.

[searching for MINDA]
Where did you go again? I said I want to cuddle you.

MINDA
[a few meters away from MASTER]
I’m right here.

MASTER
[stands up and limps around the space, searching for MINDA]
Here? Where here?

[MASTER walks and MINDA follows him silently.
At one moment, MASTER turns around and perhaps accidentally hits MINDA with his white cane.]
Here? Is it you?

[he hits her again and again to make sure it is MINDA]

MINDA
[lets MASTER beat her; after a while]
Here.

MASTER
Sit down, Minda.
[MASTER and MINDA sit down. MINDA places her head on MASTER’s shoulder.]

MASTER

Good, good girl.

[touches MINDA’s head]

Could be a very good girl. Could be rewarded. Maybe. We’ll see.

But first clean up the glass.

[Without saying anything, MINDA crawls towards the broken glass and then pushes the broken pieces towards the audience. MASTER is listening.

MINDA keeps pushing the broken pieces. She does it with her head, slowly, patiently, one by one. Preferably, she pushes the pieces under one of the audience members’ chair. She pushes the last piece of the glass to the MASTER, crawls back to him and places her head on his shoulder.]

MASTER

[Silence. MASTER puts his white cane aside and touches the floor before and around him. He does it carefully so he would not get hurt again. It should almost seem like he is reading Braille.]

Is it all gone?

MINDA

[starts caressing MASTER in a sensual way]

MASTER

Oh, Minda.

[They cuddle for a while.

Suddenly, MINDA pushes the last piece of the glass into MASTER’s sole. MASTER moans very loudly and touches his leg; MINDA runs away, MASTER continues moaning, almost screaming, stands up and starts chasing MINDA across the stage in pain, tripping and falling and getting up, tripping and falling and getting up, tripping, falling and getting up, tripping falling and...staying on floor, giving up, crying.]

Minda, come back. Please. Come back. I don’t want this. Not again. I’ll be good to you.

MINDA

No.

MASTER

You little bastard! COME-

[- he starts screaming out in pain again, touching his leg. The scream stops after a while. MASTER lays down, sweating, exhausted by the pain.]
Please, come back to me. I’ll be good to you. I promise.

[Lights off.]
SCENE II.

[The stage is semidark.
MINDA and DAMIN on stage.
MINDA is sitting on the floor with a typewriter in between her legs. She is hitting
letters on it, writing down what DAMIN says. While speaking DAMIN, on his four, is
walking across the stage.]

DAMIN

Bruised
Used
Abused

The cold heart prevails

Fooled
By guilt
I

MINDA

We

DAMIN

We bow

MINDA

Bowed

DAMIN

We bowed
On our four
To fear

MINDA

Good. Wait.
[finishes writing what DAMIN said]
Go on.

DAMIN

The tales
Of our tails
MINDA

[laughs a bit scornfully]
No.

DAMIN

Our tales [it’s okay if it’s ambiguous whether he says tails or tales]
Whipping
The Present
Will not
Do it over

MINDA

[writing it down while saying it aloud]
– Present
Will not
Do it over

Got it.

[Lights off.]
SCENE III.

[Lights dim. It’s around 1 a.m. MINDA is sweeping the floor. MASTER walks behind him, barefoot, checking if MINDA does her job properly. After MINDA is done sweeping, MASTER goes on his four, touches and licks the floor.]

MASTER

I still taste some dirt. Do it over.

MINDA

[passive aggressive, bottling up her anger, whispers like a venomous snake:]

Liar.

[She starts sweeping the floor again.]

MASTER

[walks downstage center, stops, holds his ears, trying to listen to the sounds of highway but cannot hear anything (no one does)]

Why is it so silent out there?

MINDA

It’s not.

MASTER

What’s the time?

MINDA

Time to be good to me.

MASTER

No. Not yet.

MINDA

[casually:]

You might die soon. I feel you might die quite soon.

MASTER

[surprised, but answers casually:]

Are you thinking of killing me?

MINDA

What a self-centered idea. No.
MASTER

How do you think I will die then?

MINDA

[shrugs her shoulders]
I have my feelings…

[Minda starts ticking with her tongue. LOUD]

MASTER

Can you please stop?

[Lights dim, even more, ticking stops. Lights off.]
SCENE IV.

[Stage is semidark. MINDA is lying on the floor, defeated by her boredom, staring at the ceiling, and making sounds of the clock with her tongue – each odd second sounding in a high pitch, each even second sounding in a low pitch. After five to ten seconds, after MINDA’s tongue sounds five to ten times, MASTER comes home. MASTER’s white cane joins the sounds of MINDA’s tongue, hitting the floor every second second. MINDA walks upstage right, continuing to make the ticking clock sound.]

MASTER

[recites with passion]
Once God made love to a great saint who had a hairy belly. The saint’s cheeks turned into beautiful roses and his eyes shone like two planets making love. Life went on, sweetly humming, disguised in a thousand shapes, colors and forms. Rivers stayed up all night and chanted. Clouds pulled each other’s pants down and pointed and laughed. The stars got clearly drunk and threw themselves across the sky. Light stretched its arms. Angels and flowers were playing hooky in graveyards, laughing and rolling naked on cool stones. The moon knows that God is alway amorous – he will never stop making love.
I wrote it for you. Do you like it?

[Silence. MINDA stops ticking. MINDA walks towards MASTER and whispers into MASTER’s ear in a loud, cold and dry way.]

MINDA

Liar.

MASTER

No, it’s true. I did write it for you.

MINDA

[more intensely, in a snaky voice:]
Liar.

MASTER

To show you I am capable of being good to you.

[Lights off.]
SCENE V.

[Lights on.
MINDA is alone on the stage.
DAMIN comes and brings a mirror. He drags it on the floor with a string that is attached to the mirror. The reflective side is up.
He stops upstage center and holds the mirror before MINDA while she starts observing herself in it. DAMIN is watching her while holding the mirror still.
Sometimes he gives MINDA a suggestion which she listens to.
Bit by bit, MINDA tries out different postures, angles, more and more resembling a human who is examining himself in the mirror, positioning himself into different angles, wanting to look as good as possible.

DAMIN
Move slower and be more dignified.
[MINDA tries.]
Use your hands.
[MINDA does what he says.
After a while, she takes off her mask. She continues observing herself. She experiments with different facial expressions.]

DAMIN
Chin a little higher.
Open your eyes. More. Wider.

[After another while, MINDA tries to stand on her two. At first she fails, but –

DAMIN
Open your chest.
Breathe slower and deeper.

– gradually she is able to stand and even make a few steps without falling down.]

DAMIN
Good. Now try to speak.

MINDA
She bowed
On her four
To fear
But now
Look at me
She stands straight
Like a ruler

DAMIN
[claps his hands]
Yes.

[MINDA watches herself a little longer.
Then she puts her mask back and goes back on her four.]

MINDA
Now you.

DAMIN
Minda –
– we might be better off like this.

MINDA
Shut up, Damin.

DAMIN
I might be right.

MINDA
I know you are trying to be good.
Everyone does.
But now you said enough.

[MINDA walks away from him to stage left. She lays on the floor and closes her eyes.
DAMIN watches her go.]

DAMIN
[whispers]
I’ll see you tomorrow.

[He walks off stage, still on his four, with the mirror.
Lights off.]
SCENE VI.

[Stage is completely dark and empty. Both MASTER and MINDA are on stage, MASTER sitting on the floor downstage center, MINDA upstage center.]

MASTER
Stop hiding. [MINDA echoes what MASTER says]
I will be good to you, I promise. [MINDA echoes what MASTER says]
I know I am no one.

MINDA
You know you are no one.

MASTER
I will be good to you, I promise.
[MINDA echoes what MASTER says]
Go fuck yourself.
[MINDA echoes what MASTER says]

MASTER
I want to be good to you.
[MINDA echoes what MASTER says]

MASTER
Can’t you hear me? I want to be good to you.
[MINDA echoes what MASTER says]

Minda...

[MINDA starts making ticking clock sounds - ]
Oh, COME ON…
[I - while the lights go gradually off, MINDA slows down the frequency of the ticking
-
[MASTER sighs]
- till nothing is left, neither light nor sound.]]
SCENE VIII.

[MASTER and DAMIN perform a pantomime scene with a giant pregnancy test. It turns out positive. They get excited about it. MASTER comes home.]

MASTER

Minda?

[MINDA and DAMIN become silent. They barely breathe. MASTER listens carefully.]

Why are you crying?

[Silence. MINDA and DAMIN are still as if they were statues.]

I am sorry. I didn’t mean to hurt you.

[MINDA puts on DAMIN’s mask and DAMIN puts on MINDA’s mask. DAMIN walks to MASTER. He sits before him. He touches him.]

Oh, Minda…

[MINDA leaves the stage, half on her four, half on her two – still struggling to walk comfortably on her two.]

Minda… My darling… You know we are meant for each other… You know it…

[MASTER touches MINDA’s back and slowly realizes it’s not Minda.]

Minda?

[Lights off.]
SCENE IX.

[Lights are on. MASTER is standing downstage center. DAMIN is squatting on MASTER’s left side, observing him. DAMIN is holding MASTER’s cane. He is playing with it. MASTER is dressed up – black suit, white shirt, shiny black shoes. His hair is gelled up. He is facing the audience and pretends to be checking himself in the mirror. MASTER and DAMIN are surrounded by at least ten white neckties which are laid out around them in a perfect circle.]

MASTER

So? How do I look?

DAMIN

Not too bad. But the evil comes through.

MASTER

No, I don’t believe you. I can’t. I am GOOD. You can’t keep telling me that I am not. Because I am. I am good good good good good good good good good good! I AM very very GOOD!

DAMIN

I know you are. But it doesn’t come through. So it doesn’t count.

MASTER

[Silence.]
I wonder if I would recognize myself...

DAMIN

[Silence.]
You look quite good.

[MASTER starts crying and sobbing, not too dramatic.]

DAMIN

Hurry up.

MASTER

Pick me a tie please.

DAMIN

There is no time for that.
MASTER

Please pick me a tie. Now when I am good to you.

DAMIN

You are late already.

MASTER

But I can’t show up there without a tie.

DAMIN

I don’t think so. You just want to misuse me.

MASTER

Look at me, Min...Damin. Look into my eyes. I am a desperate man. Have some empathy with me. Please.

DAMIN

[silent, trying to stay stubborn]

MASTER

Please.

DAMIN

[silent, looking at him]

MASTER

Pleeeeeease.

DAMIN

I don’t like this.

MASTER

Yes, I know. I’ll leave you alone. I promise. Just pick me the tie, will you?

DAMIN

I don’t like this at all.

[DAMIN takes of his shirt, places it on the ground, grabs the cane again (so it would resemble a sweeping broom) and then sweeps away the ties in a circle at once. While sweeping:]
MASTER

[screaming, desperate]
You know it, you know that I can’t leave without the tie!

[Silence. DAMIN is almost done sweeping.
MASTER starts looking for his cane.]
Where is it?

Silence.
Where is my cane?

DAMIN

[finished sweeping, drops the ‘sweeping broom’ and takes the pile of ties, he holds it in his arms while facing MASTER:]
I don’t know. I haven’t seen your cane. And it doesn’t matter. If you are staying home you don’t need it.

[MINDA comes back on stage. Pregnant. She walks on her two. DAMIN sees her and leaves the stage with the ties.]

MASTER

Find it.

[MINDA echoes MASTER]
Minda?

[MINDA echoes MASTER]
I don’t like this game.

MINDA

Who says it’s a game?

MASTER

I...I do!

MINDA

So what?

[MASTER echoes MINDA]

MASTER

I am your master.

[MINDA starts ticking with her tongue and leaves the stage.
Silence.]

[Lights off.]
SCENE IX.

[MASTER standing on stage alone. MINDA comes on stage and lies on her back in the traditional position for birth-giving, upstage center. She is breathing heavily. DAMIN comes to her, holding a huge white sheet. He covers her lower body with the sheet. MINDA is giving birth to a puppy. They are connected to MINDA with the umbilical cord. The puppy walks in a spiral motion around MASTER, the umbilical cord ties around his body.]

MASTER

[saying and repeating in random order:]
Minda?/Did you come back?/ Minda where are you?/ Damin?/ Minda is it you?/ I want to be good to you. Damin?

MINDA

Fooled
By guilt
We bowed
On our four
To your fears
The Present
Once
Whipping
Our tales
Now embraces
You
Stay
With yourself
In the hug of blind freedom
I wrote it for you. Do you like it?/I hope you like it.

MASTER

[With the umbilical cord wrapped around his body, MASTER falls to the ground.]
Minda, it’s time to be good to you.

[DAMIN looks at MINDA. She nods. DAMIN comes to MASTER and offers him his hand, so MASTER could get up again.

[Lights off.

The End.]