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Two Adaptations for the Stage. The Case of Louis Couperus' Novel *Van oude mensen, de dingen die voorbij gaan* (Of Old People, the Things that Pass).

It has been observed in the critical literature that Louis Couperus (1863-1923) would have belonged to world literature if he had made use of a more accessible language than Dutch. The literary historian G. Knuvelde wrote: "Perhaps one can say: the only one of a European level [among his Dutch contemporaries], the only one whose oeuvre can compete with that of some great authors of international fame." (Knuvelde 106)

Adaptations in the arts are not held in high esteem. In her *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon writes: "... an adaptation is likely to be greeted as minor and subsidiary and never as good as the original." (Hutcheon XII) Charles Timmer, after receiving the M.Nijhoff prize for translations (from Russian into Dutch) in 1963, declared in his acceptance speech: "the translator is in essence an unscrupulous man, someone who is capable of committing a murder without batting an eyelid and with malice prepense" (*Uitreiking* 12) The adaptor is presumably even worse.

Adaptation is, indeed, a tricky business. I must confess that, for instance, I cannot stand the transposition for violin and piano of a Chopin mazurka (originally written for piano). Does the transposer think that this rendition is better? Did the famous conductor Leopold Stokovski think that his orchestral transposition of a prelude and fugue for organ by Johann Sebastian Bach was really better than the original? And with this kind of transposition we remain in the realm of music. With a novel's adaptation for the stage, the genre changes. There is an obvious difference in the manner in which a novel (reading) and a play (watching and listening) is consumed. Reading is an individual activity. When the reading stops, the unfolding of the novel's plot also comes to a halt. When a reader stops reading *War and Peace* at the moment that Napoleon with his *Grande Armée* starts crossing the Niemen river and thus enters Russian territory, and the reader continues reading only after a period of two weeks, Napoleon and his army remain starting to cross the Niemen during that period. When a reader reads Marcellus Emants' *A Posthumous Confession* and at page 37 wants to know what the novel's first sentence was, he/she simply looks up that first sentence. However, when a reader is excited about a sentence or a paragraph in a work of fiction, for instance, when reading in Franz Kafka's "A Report to an Academy," about the man who was formerly an ape, that he has always known that he was in the process of becoming a human being, and the reader wants to share his enthusiasm about the statement with someone, then he/she may be alone in the room. On the other hand, when a spectator falls asleep during the famous soliloquy of Hamlet the show goes on and the text is lost on the spectator. However, when a spectator is deeply moved by a performance he/she can express that enthusiasm together with all the people in the audience by participating in the applause.

When comparing Couperus' novel *Van oude mensen, de dingen die voorbijgaan* (1906) and its recent adaptations for the stage, it is helpful to make use of the terminology of the Russian formalists. *Fabula* is the raw, basic material of the story and *siuzhet* the artistic end product. Applied to Couperus' *Van oude mensen...* the *fabula* is the murder of Mr. Derksz by his wife Oillie and her lover Takma in the Dutch Indies, sixty years ago, and the murderers' attempts to keep the murder secret. Ma Boeten the nanny knows, because she was present, but who else? The *siuzhet* encompasses the revelation of who knew from the start, of who knew later, and of who guessed, resulting in the revelation of the entire truth. Novel and stage adaptation differ significantly in their handling of the *fabula*. In this paper these differences will be discussed in terms of structural, character, and linguistic divergences, in two adaptations of Couperus' novel for the stage, the one by William Jan Otten (2006) and the other by Ger Thijs (2008).

Otten's adaptation

In 2006 Otten's adaptation was published under the simple title *Oude mensen*. The subtitle rather surprisingly reads: "A Tragicomedy in five episodes..." because the reader will ask justifiably what in this deeply tragic plot is comical. The same can be said about Chekhov's *The Seagull*, a tragic play which the author called a comedy. It is possible that both authors had the same admonition in mind: please play this heavy stuff with a light touch. In his introduction, Otten calls the play "not an adaptation of Louis Couperus' great novel. It is what the subtitle promises: a play 'after'." No doubt this statement prepares us for the fact that there will be changes that may surprise us. For example, it is not clear why, in the list of dramatis personae, old Mrs. Dercksz is said to be in her eighties whereas in the novel she is ninety-seven. Her son Harold, who was thirteen when the horrific event happened sixty years ago, is obviously not in his sixties but seventy-three. Otten may have made these characters younger in an attempt to make it more plausible that they are much more talkative in the play than in the novel.

Dramatically it is effective that the stage is divided into a ground floor and an upper floor where old Mrs. Dercksz has for many years already sat in her chair and looked out the window, and where she is daily visited by her erstwhile lover Takma who has his own chair and his own window from which to look out. On the ground floor we see the continuous coming and going of the younger generation with its own problems, which are nonetheless closely related to the secret of the past and the old people. Young and old are separated by a high staircase, and the divided stage is very functional.

From the start of the play a connection is established with the horrific event of the past: the noise of falling rainwater is heard, getting louder and louder, and a Malayan female voice (Ma Boeten's) yells: "Perjaga jaga di mana-mana dara." Later in the play son Anton provides a translation: "Look there, everywhere, blood." In the original novel, there are no Malayan words. Then a female voice (Mrs. Dercksz's) shouts: "Oh God... no, no... not in the river." This has been taken verbatim from the novel: "O God, o God, neen neen, niét in de rivier" (Couperus 83). The words refer to the scene just after the murder. Takma and Ma Boeten are determined to get rid of Mr. Dercksz's corpse as soon as possible by dumping it in the whirling water of the river. But Mrs. Dercksz is panicky. The noise of the downpour and the Malayan words hover as a threat over the stage and are linked to Mrs. Dercksz's nightmare in which – for many years already – the face of her slain husband stares at her.

The main scene of the first episode contains her conversation with Takma. She has heard that her daughter Otilie's son Lot is going to marry Elly, Takma's granddaughter. Otilie thinks that Mr. Dercksz is her father but it is actually Takma, who is thus the grandfather to both Lot and Elly, and consequently these two are cousins. Mrs. Dercksz is very much afraid that her and Takma's sin will be visited on their grandchildren. However, when Takma asks her whether she is afraid she answers: "Why should I be afraid? I am too old, much too old to be afraid anymore. Even when he [her husband] is standing there" (Wat zal ik bang zijn? Ik ben te oud, veel te oud om meer bang te zijn. Zelfs al staat hij daar). This is taken verbatim from the text of the novel (Otten 246; Couperus 42). Mrs. Dercksz is nonetheless afraid. Takma asks: "Of death? - No, not of death. But of him. - Do you believe that you will see him again? - Yes, I believe in God, in seeing again. In life hereafter. In retaliation" (Voor de dood? - Nee, voor de dood niet. Maar voor hem. - Geloof je dat je hem terug ziet? - Ja. Ik geloof aan God, aan terugzien. aan leven hierna. Aan vergelding) (Otten 247). This is also taken verbatim from the text of the novel (Couperus 43-44).

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In the second episode several themes are combined. Preparations are made for a festive meal on the occasion of Lot and Elly's forthcoming marriage. There is no mention of such a meal in the novel. Then there is the burning question among the family members why brother/uncle Daan and his Indonesian wife Floor came all the way from the Dutch Indies while apparently nothing has changed with regard to their business there. However, the real reason is revealed in a conversation between Daan and his brother Harold. Before her death, Ma Boeten told her son everything. In order to make him keep silent about the event Daan is forced to pay the son. And to his astonishment Daan learns that Harold has known everything that the son told him, has known it all those sixty years, because he had witnessed the terrible drama as a thirteen-year-old boy.

Repetition is an important narrative device in the novel. It says in the title: "... de dingen die voorbij gaan" (the things that pass). This should be understood not as meaning: passing and disappearing, but as passing and returning and passing again and again. So in this adaptation, there is at this point again a loud noise of a river, the female voice with the Malayan words and another female voice shouting; "Nee, nee, niet in de rivier." And again a forceful reaction from Mrs. Derksz who shouts: "Daar is hij! Daar!" (There he is! There!) and she repeats the phrase (Otten 270). Ironically, the only one who really is standing in the corner is her son Harold.

In the third episode it is New Year's Eve of 1899 and thus the next day will bring not only a New Year but also a new century. For the occasion Anna the housekeeper has made a mountain of cream puffs and in short order the members of the Derksz family polish off that mountain. Needless to say there is nothing of the sort in the novel. Most of the family members get ready to go to Scheveningen to see an extraordinary ice wall in the sea; that is not in the novel either. Most likely, the adapter wanted to contrast the terrible event of the past in Tegal (in the mountains of the Dutch East Indies) with ordinary happenings in the present. The scenes remain out of place, nonetheless. Otille, Lot's sister - they are both the children of Otille, the mother, by her first marriage to Pauws - is in Holland. She is a professional singer and will give a concert in Scheveningen. She, however, is an outcast from the family because she lives unmarried and therefore in "sin" with an Italian named Aldo, in Nice. When brother and sister meet they greet one another with "Hoi." This is so un-Couperusian that one wonders why the adapter chose this word. Otille, the granddaughter, climbs the stairs and visits Grandma Derksz, who is under the impression that Elly is with her. Mrs. Derksz asks Elly (actually Otille) to help her to go to the bathroom. Mrs. Derksz tries to get up, cries and points: "There he is! (Daar is hij!)" Otille: "Who, Grandma, who?" (Otten 291). Takma, who is on his way upstairs and must have heard Mrs. Derksz's cry, answers: "There is no one! Quiet down, Lietje, there is no one" (Er is niemand! Rustig nu maar, Lietje, er is niemand) (Otten 291). This is again a powerful scene. At the end of the episode, Mr. Takma collapses in the washroom, but his death has to be kept a secret from Mrs. Derksz.

The fourth episode is called "The secret of the jacket." It is a re-staging of a scene from the novel, where Takma dies at home in his study while tearing up letters from the past. When his niece and housekeeper Adèle goes in there to clean up, she sees fragments of a letter, and although she is aware of the fact that she should not read them, she cannot resist the temptation and does. And she learns what happened that terrible night in Tegal. In the play the jacket of the dead Takma is hanging on a chair and is clearly visible to the audience. Here it is the housekeeper Anna who finds two halves of a letter and, like Adèle, reads the contents and thus also learns about the horrible event in the past. She cannot keep the awful secret to herself, she tells Lot. The episode ends violently, in a scene entirely absent in the novel. Harold attacks his brother Daan, the reason not being clear. Perhaps Daan thinks that they have to tell their mother about Takma's death but Harold is afraid that the news will kill the old lady. Later on Harold, now beside himself, also attacks old doctor Roelofsz. He is most likely enraged by the

thought that the doctor was part of the murder plot, the sight of which ruined his entire adult life.

The fifth episode bears the rather enigmatic title: “The guilty goldfinches.” It refers to a remark that Harold’s daughter Ina makes to the housekeeper Anna about her uncle Anton, of whom the family knows that he is unmarried and very much interested in all aspects of sex. Ina tells Anna: “He has always something up his sleeve, Uncle Anton. Now again those goldfinches. They are male, our finches. He knows that perfectly well. All five of them. And do you know what he once said when he was at our place: look, Ina, how they are mistaken. They forget that they are only male. And then, well, then they do what they would do with a female” (Hij bedoelt altijd iets, oom Anton. Nu weer die sijsjes. Het zijn mannetjes, onze sijsjes. Dat weet hij heel goed. Alle vijf. En weet je, wat hij een keer zei toen hij bij ons was: kijk, Ina, hoe ze zich vergissen. Ze vergeten dat ze mannetjes zijn. En dan, ja dan doen ze wat ze met een wijfje zouden doen) (Otten 276).

It was already mentioned that the spectator gets a translation here of the Malayan words “Perjaga jaga di-mana mana dara” (Kijk, kijk daar overal bloed) (Otten 319). And Uncle Anton explains to Ina the strange behaviour of her father Harold. Anton: “That is what he is dreaming about. Your father. Of blood everywhere” (Dat droomt hij dus. Je vader. Van overal bloed) (Otten 319). And then Uncle Anton goes on but says: “Suppose” (Stel). Suppose there was a murder and your father saw it. Strangely enough, Uncle Anton says as a boy of eight. In the novel it is clearly mentioned that Harold is thirteen. And that the murder was committed by her lover, Takma.

Doctor Roelofsz goes home with Elly after the unexpected attack by Harold, but just as he enters his house he collapses and later on dies. And upstairs, old Mrs. Derksz finally understands that both Takma and Roelofsz have died. And then again there is the noise of tropical rain, a noise that gets louder and louder, and Mrs. Derksz rises and points: “There! There!” (Daar! Daar!) The audience hears the Malayan sentence and the female voice that shouts: “O, God, niet in de rivier” (Otten 326). And shortly afterwards Mrs. Derksz dies as well. Although in the play the past event in Tegal is ingeniously evoked by way of the tropical rain, the Malayan words, and Mrs. Derksz shouting “O God, niet in de rivier,” no complete account of it is given. In the second part, chapter V of the novel, on the contrary, all is revealed when son Daan, who has learned the entire truth from his brother Harold, has a conversation with the 88-year-old doctor Roelofsz, of whom Daan knows that he witnessed everything and from whom he wants a confirmation. Ma Boeten’s son, he says, had told him “ ‘That my father wanted to attack Takma with a kris... That Takma wrested the kris from him, while... - While what... well, while what...? [Roelofsz interrupts] - While mama, my mother... - Well...? - ... had put her arms around my father to keep him... - Oh, God, indeed!... - In order to keep him from defending himself... and that nanny had heard behind the door... -Indeed... indeed... oh, God... - Had heard her say: “I hate you... I hate you; I have always hated you...” - Indeed, oh, God! - “I have always hated you and I love... I love Emile!” - Indeed... and then...? - And then she called out to Takma, almost loudly: “Emile... stab him: better he than you!” - Oh, God!!!’ The doctor’s heavy body sank down in a chair” (“Dat mijn vader Takma te lijf wilde gaan, met een kris... Dat Takma hem de kris ontwong, terwijl... - Terwijl wat...ja, ja terwijl wat...? - Terwijl mama, mijn moeder... - Ja,ja...? - Om mijn vader de armen geslagen had, om hem tegen te houden... - O God, ja,ja... - Om hem tegen te houden zich te verdedigen... en dat baboe achter de deur had horen zeggen... - Ja,ja... ja,ja o God!... - Haar had horen zeggen: ‘Ik haat je...ik haat je; ik heb je altijd gehaat...’ -Ja,ja...o God! - ‘Ik heb je altijd gehaat, en ik hou ... ik hou van Emile!’ - Ja,ja... en toen...? - En toen heeft ze tegen Takma geroepen, bijna luid: ‘Emile... geef hem een por; liever hij dan jij!’ - O God!!!” De dokter zakte, zware massa, neer op een stoel) (Couperus 230).

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The play concludes with an epilogue, "A Letter from St. Petersburg." Lot's and Elly's marriage is not meant to last. Lot has received a letter from Elly from St. Petersburg, Russia where she has joined the Red Cross and will work in Mukden, Manchuria, in a war zone (this is the time of the Russo-Japanese war), because she feels that that is her calling. This is in agreement with the novel but that Lot gets a fried egg with bacon from Anna and that Harold again plays the piano – a skill not mentioned in the novel - and that while doing so his hair is cut and that he asks Anna also for a fried egg and wants to eat from Lot's plate, those are details totally absent in the novel and they form a strange ending to the play. One suspects that the adapter wanted again to pull the heavily loaded events of the past down to everyday occurrences in normal life.

Thijs' adaptation

Ger Thijs' 2008 adaptation of the novel differs in some major ways from Otten's. For one thing there is no division of the stage into a ground- and upper floor and, most significantly, old Mrs. Derksz is not among the dramatis personae – we never see her. In a postscript Ger Thijs writes: "A novel is, in principle, in the past tense. 'At one time' is the traditional narrative structure. A play is always present tense. Things happen now, here, in front of us. The adaptation of a novel for the stage can thus be summarized: to transfer the acts to the present time. In the adaptation of *Van oude mensen* this was done abundantly... What appealed to me especially in the book? The richness of characters in Couperus, here and there (in the play) diminished by combining characters into one. Couperus' dramatic writing style - in scenes and dialogue - and the fact that families are in the foreground in his psychological novels – there is no more rewarding subject for the stage than the family" (Thijs 121-122). Thus the fact that it is a family novel and that there is a mysterious secret that has to be solved made the adaptation for the stage a feasible project.

The play starts with the arrival in The Hague from Paris of the newlyweds Lot and Elly. In the novel this episode is told in chapter VIII of the second volume; the reason for this visit is Grandpa Takma's passing away and the fact that as his granddaughter Elly will naturally inherit from him. However, they arrive a day after the funeral, and Lot is displeased because there was now actually no reason for their return.

In the play, however, it is old Mrs. Derksz who is dying. Lot is again in a bad mood because he does not like the depressing atmosphere in the old lady's house. He wants to leave and suggests to Elly that they can explain their absence by saying: "Alas, dear family. In the Alps our train was hit by an avalanche. For weeks we were cut off from the outside world. We survived. By polishing off a succumbed conductor..." (Helaas, lieve familie. Onze trein is in de Alpen door een lawine getroffen. Drie weken waren we van de buitenwereld afgesneden. We hebben het overleefd. Door het verorberen van een omgekomen conducteur) (Thijs 11). Needless to say, nothing of this tasteless and vulgar language can be found in the refined style of Couperus' original.

The sequence of events has been reversed, with Takma still alive when Lot and Elly arrive whereas old Mrs. Derksz is confined to her room upstairs. This is very likely because Takma moves in the company of the younger generation. And his reaction of panic or shock, when he thinks of the horrific happening in the past, is naturally effective on stage. When he is alone with Otilie the younger in the hallway of the main floor he asks her to light the gas lamp and when Otilie is somewhat unwilling. Takma in panic commands: "Do it now. Something ... moved" (Doe het. Nu. Iets... bewoog) and a moment later: "Light the lamp" (Ontsteek de lamp) (Thijs 23). Just before Otilie enters, Takma had seen something in a dark corner and mumbles: "He is in the house... Is waiting

for her to die, as we all are, but from the other side” (Hij is in huis... Wacht op haar dood, zoals wij allen, maar van de andere kant...) (Thijs 22).

Although it is unavoidable that the novel’s contents are curtailed in the stage adaptation, the fact that Otilie’s third husband also functions as the family doctor in the play is surprising. In the novel Steyn is described as a big fellow who, being fifty years of age and thus ten years younger than Otilie, still has the looks of a young man, whereas Otilie at sixty looks her age. He loves the outdoors, loves hunting and having a drink with old friends from when he was a cavalry officer. Steyn, the medical doctor, strikes one as a different character from the novel.

As in the novel, in the play it is important, and even more so, that the impetus pushes forward regarding the secret of the horrific event of sixty years ago. This takes place in a lengthy dialogue between the religious Therèse and her brother Harold, whose life was doomed since the moment he witnessed, as a thirteen-year-old boy, the terrifying outcome of the crime. This dialogue does not take place in the novel, but other dialogues and descriptive passages have been skilfully combined by the adapter. The remark that Lot and Elly should not have gotten married, because as grandchildren of Takma they are cousins, is made in the novel by old Mrs. Derksz in a conversation with Takma, as it is also in Otten’s adaptation.

A narrative passage in the novel says of Therèse: “she had learned what she had known since that time from the lips of her mother, who had a high fever. She had seen her mother *see* - although she herself had not seen - the ghost rising in the corner of the room... She had heard her mother begging for mercy and for an end to her punishment” (zij had van haar moeders eigene lippen, in hevige koorts, dat vernomen wat zij sedert geweten had. Zij had haar moeder zien zien - hoewel zijzelf niet gezien had - zij had haar moeder zien zien de oprijzende schim in de hoek van de kamer... Zij had haar moeder horen smeken genade en eindiging van haar straf) (Couperus 148). In the play Therèse says: “ I learned from mother’s own lips what I have known since that time...She was seriously ill, I was sitting at her bedside. I saw mother *see* the ghost rising... I heard mother begging for mercy and for an end of her punishment” (Ik heb van moeders eigen lippen, dat vernomen, wat ik sedert geweten heb... Ze was zwaar ziek, ik zat aan haar bed. Ik heb moeder zien zien de oprijzende schim... Ik heb moeder horen smeken genade, eindiging van haar straf) (Thijs 40).

Therèse says that by intuition she knows that Harold, who was after all with his parents in the mountains of Tegal, must have seen. Upon Harold’s question what then he did see, Therèse simply says: “Father.” Harold persists in denying that he knows. He acknowledges, though, that he saw his father’s swollen corpse after the drowning. In the touching dialogue between brother and sister Harold comes to the fore, by the firm way in which he replies to his sister’s questions, as a different character from the novel. There he is someone who continuously suffers physically and emotionally, is always silent, and speaks only when it is absolutely necessary.

It is effective that after this emotional dialogue there is one between Therèse and Takma who, while looking through the window, says that he (meaning the old Derksz) is again outside. Therèse naturally wants to know what or who it is. Takma does not know, something, someone. It is someone whom he knows and he (the vision) has always been there. Therèse tells him that there is nothing there. Takma, who feels that he is dying like old Mrs. Derksz, talks about the last winter and says: “Otilie... Already more than sixty years” (Otilie... Al meer dan zestig jaar) (Thijs 48). Therèse does not understand what he is talking about, and the 94-year old Takma corrects himself cleverly by saying that Otilie (the daughter) is already sixty. The scene is important because the theme of the vision with which the old people have been struggling for sixty years is reiterated here.

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Hereafter there is a scene in which Otilie quarrels with her husband Steyn. She openly declares that she hates him but at the same time she is jealous because she suspects that he has affairs, something he strongly denies. When it becomes apparent that Otilie has taken a lot of money out of the bank in order to send money to England to her beloved son from her second marriage, Hugh Trevelley, Steyn complains because they themselves have hardly enough to live on and because Hugh only contacts his mother when he needs money and he knows that he can fleece her. Otilie is infuriated and shouts: "Yes, I hate you every day more and more. I will cheer looking at your corpse. I see you, dead, run over, maimed, with a knife in your chest, or a shot in your temple... And, do you know? I will cheer" (Ja, ik haat je meer en meer elke dag. Ik zal juichen bij je lijk. Ik stel me je voor, dood, overreden, verminkt, met een mes in je borst, of een schot in je slaap...En weet, dan zal ik juichen) (Thijs 86).

This passage in the first person is practically identical to a narrated one in the novel. But hereafter play and novel diverge. In the play it comes to blows between the spouses and Otilie yells: "Kill him! Kill him!" (Maak hem dood! Maak hem dood!) (Thijs 86). Takma enters and looks as if he has seen a ghost. He orders Steyn to immediately let his wife go. It has to be acknowledged that in this scene, with its heightened tension, the adapter ingeniously combined the hatred of the Steyn de Weerts for one another and the startling moment for Takma, who must have been reminded of how sixty years ago the elder Otilie admonished him to kill her husband.

In a lengthy scene that follows, Daan and Therèse urge their brother Harold to reveal to them what exactly happened that night sixty years ago in the mountains of Tegal. He must know because he was there. Harold, however, is very reluctant to carry on the conversation, claiming that it is all gossip. The retardation in revealing the entire truth is an effective device to increase suspense on the stage. But Daan confronts his brother with what the *mantri* (in the Dutch Indies an official of a lower rank), Ma Boeten's son, had told him. And here Daan uses exactly the same words as he does in the novel when talking to old doctor Roelofs: " 'Ik haat je, ik heb je altijd gehaat... en ik hou van Emile!' En toen heeft ze tegen Takma geroepen: 'Emile... geef hem een por, liever hij, dan jij' " (Thijs 100). Harold continues to deny the story. Daan is adamant that he has to know the truth because, if it is true, he still wants to cut Takma's throat even after so many years. There is no such threat in the novel. Nor does Therèse say there that they have to know the truth for the family to survive. Daan claims that he had to come to Holland after he knew all those details, he had to see mama and Takma.

Towards the end of the play, in a detailed confession Harold finally reveals what happened that dreadful night in the Tegal mountains. Thijs aptly transposes the narrative on pp. 81-87 of the novel to Harold's monologue. The text had obviously to be curtailed but with a change from third to first person, several lines in the play are taken verbatim from the novel. The necessary replacement of the novel's third person by the first person is especially effective when Harold addresses his mother: "Then I hear... your voice, mama" (Dan hoor ik...jouw stem, mama) (Thijs 114). Old Mrs. Derksz is not present but her son addresses her personally. In the novel it says: "He heard his mother's voice" (Hij heeft zijn moeders stem gehoord) (Couperus 82). It is unfortunate that Harold's moving speech is preceded by a lighthearted argument by Daan that on the family's plantation in the Indies the cultivation of sugar should be replaced by that of rubber, being much more profitable. The speech is entirely out of tune and does not correspond to anything in the novel.

Repetition is so important in the novel because of continuous references to the Thing that reappears to those who have seen it. In the play Takma reappears and in a dialogue with Harold, similar to the one he had before with Otilie and Therèse, he again looks out of the window and thinks that he sees something moving

outside. Harold tells him that there is nothing there. Hereafter the maid Anna appears, calmly announcing that it is over. Slowly the family members go up the stairs to the old lady's room, and when Harold wants to do the same he realizes that Takma is still in the room. Harold calls him but the old man does not move. And this is the end of the play.

Ger Thijs has put together a powerful play. The text of the novel had naturally to be curtailed but some colourful characters, especially Daan's wife Floor with her Dutch so characteristic of people from the East Indies, should have been included.

To my mind, both adaptations provide satisfactory stage productions. In Otten's, the repetitious rainfall, the utterance of Malayan words and Mrs. Derksz's shouting, by means of which the horrific event of the past hovers over the stage during the entire play, is very effective, as is the division of a ground- and upper level. On the other hand, the insertion of scenes that are absent in the novel and in which often an un-Couperusian language is used, must be considered distracting. In the Thijs adaptation, the slow but steady revelation with increasing suspense of what happened sixty years ago in Tegal, culminating in son Harold's relating the entire truth, is very effective, but again, events that are not in the novel, and in the telling of which sometimes vulgar language is used, are unfortunate.

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