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Jane Austen

May 8 2019

Rationale for Fanfiction

I was really interested in the crossover between the Broadway fandom and the Jane Austen fandom, because in my own personal experience every theatre kid has watched *Pride and Prejudice* at least 50 times and had a massive crush on Keira Knightley. For this piece, I created a crossover of the two most easily hateable characters in the works I drew from: Anatole Kuragin of “*Natasha, Pierre, And The Great Comet of 1812*” and John Willoughby from *Sense and Sensibility*. Both mediums contain large amount of free indirect discourse, with Austen inventing the darned thing, and Dave Malloy having his characters reference themselves in the third person (ex: having Natasha take the voice of the narrator and sing “Natasha’s whole body shook with noiseless convulsive sobs” and then switching back to singing in the first person). I’m not intending to change anyone’s mind on these men, personally I see both of them as master manipulators and generally awful people, but I did want to examine the psychology of how they could rationalize their actions when faced with a mirror image of themselves, especially coming from two different modes of art. Arguably the 70 page slice of *War and Peace* “The Great Comet” is based on is very much a reflection of *Sense and Sensibility* and vice versa, though Tolstoy and Austen were writing in a different time and place, and Dave Malloy boils that 70 page slice down to even more closely reflect that dynamic, doubtlessly inspired by the many adaptations. Both contain themes of temperance of spirit, as Natasha and Sonya reflect the

Marianne and Elinor dynamic with one side being too much sensibility to the point of self-harm and the other being too much sense in losing the love one may seek to gain from a man from being too self-sacrificing. This “slice of life” fic follows Anatole as he flees Russia (a very large deviation from the book) and meets a kindred spirit.

Chapter 1

It had been a long night for Anatole. He had ridden all the way to Amsterdam from Moscow in two days, the insane driver, Balaga, had asked nothing more than his coat and 20 rubles for payment. Realising it better to be rid of any identifying marks, he agreed, shedding his outer layer and giving him the few bills extra he had stolen from Pierre’s desk on his way out. The Count Bezukhov wouldn’t mind, he was sure, after all what were a few rubles between brothers? And if he did, let him be damned. His angry thoughts turned next to securing passage across the waters to England, there he would wait out Napoleon’s war and the police after him, and hopefully they would destroy the other in the process. He imagined he could see the white sandy beaches that Helene had talked so often of whenever she returned from her excursions to find new fabrics. His heart flinched away from the thought of his sister, surely he would not be seeing her for some time, not since... well the russian guard would have to look very far indeed to find him, farther than they would go for an accused bigamist. Wandering along the docks he found a Danish skipper about to depart, willing to take him this instant if he would only give the captain his waistcoat so his wife could make a spencer from the wedding brocade. And with one coat gone, what was another article of clothing? Anatole slinked his way down into the innards

of the ship with the rest of the passengers, waiting for the three hour journey to be soon over. Just as he had closed his eyes he heard a rough voice ask

“This is your first time to England?”

Anatole panicked for a moment, knowing any English that crossed his tongue would give away his russian origins, and he was too close to freedom to be suspected of spying on Napoleon’s forces now.

“Je suis désolé monsieur. Je parle français, na pas anglais.”

“Oh!” the stranger intoned, switching into a rustic french “I’m sorry, you just seemed like you were English. We don't see many French people around here now seeking passage to England”

“I’m not french, my mother is prussian, my father was french, so I grew up speaking French.”

The stranger nodded thoughtfully, the intricacies of language acquisition never having crossed his brain before, but why shouldn’t a prussian speak french? It seemed natural enough to him.

“Where are you headed?”

Anatole was beginning to grow increasingly annoyed with this mans persistent questioning “I’m not quite sure, somewhere in England where I can get a bit of rest. Maybe somewhere with fashion, I’ll need to have new things made. And somewhere that won’t bore me to death”

The man shrugged, “Well, I’m heading towards London to bring fabrics back to my wife, you are more than welcome to join me. I could always use someone interesting to join us. We have money to spare but somehow that never seems to fill the silence in our rooms. What was it

Shakespeare said? “though her father be very rich, any man is so very a fool to be married to hell?””

Anatole smirked and responded “No profit grows where no pleasure is taken.”

Looking up, he locked eyes with the stranger for the first time in their acquaintance, and noted with pleasure that there seemed to be a hint of the same wry ice in his eyes that Anatole had been so often told he had himself. He drew in a sharp breath and spoke “ I don’t suppose I can go on to call you Hortensio?”

“No that would be a sad fate indeed, best we become acquainted, we still have many miles yet before we reach land.”

“I cannot argue that. Anatole Kuragin, pleased to make your acquaintance.” he said extending his hand across the small expanse of space separating the two

The stranger smiled, and took his hand, and introduced himself as “Willoughby. The pleasure is all mine”

Chapter 2

The boat had landed safely and Anatole had assisted Willoughby in gathering his things into a carriage. Though Anatole had made a great show of calling for another carriage to transport him to an unknown destination, Willoughby had insisted that he ride with him to London to have a period of rest and recuperation after his journey. After all, they seemed to be kindred spirits, and must have many things to discuss. Four miles into the journey, after a period of sufficient waiting in silence, Willoughby looked up from his book to see Anatole lounging across the seat, with one careless foot perched on the rucksack below him. It was as if a great

coil had been realised inside of him, and now completely unbound by worry, he could simply sit and enjoy the countryside. This ease provoked Willoughby to no end, after all, had he not just seen this man in the bowels of a ship, looking like a runaway, and if he had not been so gracious as to save him, would he not surely have run out of money halfway to London on his own? The thought that he might be harboring a fugitive, or a spy excited him to no end and he had to know why this man was here.

Willoughby snapped his book closed, and looked sharply at Anatole,

“So, will you tell me why you are here?”

“In your carriage? Because you asked me to.”

Willoughby lifted one groomed eyebrow and sat in silence.

“Why did you let me in if you were just going to question me?”

“Excellent question. Because I was bored and you seemed interesting and it happens I've had a moderately distressing year for which I have been abroad most of, and home seemed boring after this. Now do I get an answer for being honest?”

Anatole was taken aback by his candor. Slowly he smiled and replied “I was accused of attempted bigamy and told that if I were to ever return to home I would be challenged to a duel. My only other option was to join the army and march for France but dying seemed distasteful.” It was now Willoughby's turn to be taken aback. He cleared his throat and said “It seems we are kindred spirits then, as I've also past the year in and out of love.”

“Ah yes married to a woman you do not love, my brother in law suffers the same fate, though I suspect you are more of my sister's disposition in regard to the bonds of marriage.”

“I can only assume you mean taking a lover. No, I have a much worse tale of woe. The woman I love, who I have always loved, I was unable to marry because of my family and certain... circumstances coming to light.”

“I can sympathise; the woman I loved betrayed my confidence in our elopement, her godmother nearly tore my hair from my scalp when I tried to collect her, and I am sure that her fiance is soon headed back home to challenge me himself. Natasha was such a charming creature, but somehow it was found out that I had a wife in Poland. Now, I wish you to know I am no scoundrel. I am an honorable man. That marriage was invalid, her father forced me to marry her, I hardly even looked at her before he drove me to the church.”

Willoughby nodded with extreme horror and sympathy, how could someone have so brutishly forced this beautiful man into a marriage with a plain creature? Such torture was almost too much for the imagination.

“Anyway,” continued Anatole, “I fled home to avoid a duel or the court. I had to give her letters back before I left, I have not even a scrap of her to carry with me.”

Here Willoughby almost fainted with pains, “The very same happened to me! As soon as I tried to return to my beloved I was shut out by her horrid, plain sister. I gave back all her letters and hold her now in my memory. My heart weeps alongside yours my friend. Was this Natasha your first love?”

Anatole howled with laughter “Christ, no. No I rather fancied myself to have a new love every week, but she.. She was something entirely different.”

“Again, I understand completely. Marianne was not the first, but the strongest in my heart. How I wish I could be with her now, but alas her husband is a Colonel and should I push my wife from a window it would surely look suspect.”

“My friend, if I had it in the power to harm a lady, I would gladly do the deed for you.” Willoughby smiled and touched his hand to his heart “ And were I free to travel to where you are from I would happily slay a thousand fiances and wives to bring you back to your love” The two, now completely gratified in their mutual care of their affections, settled into a comfortable silence, and after a short while, after assuring themselves that it was only to heal their hearts, decided to stop into the closest house of preferment. After which they would bypass their intended destination of the Willoughby House to make another trip into the city, trailing scandal and clothes wherever they went.