

ADAPTATIONS OF CLASSIC PLAYS

ANDREW UPTON IS A PLAYWRIGHT KNOWN FOR HIS ADAPTATIONS OF CLASSIC PLAYS. THE FOLLOWING LESSON PLANS FOCUS ON CONVENTIONS USED BY UPTON AND ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO ADAPT THEIR OWN SCENES.

VERSIONS, ADAPTATIONS AND TRANSLATIONS

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A VERSION, AN ADAPTATION AND A TRANSLATION OF A PLAY?

Translation: A translation is when the original language is a language other than that which the play will be performed in and so the translator translates it into the new language e.g. Russian to English. A translator is concerned with communicating what the words say, rather than poetics.

Version: A new version is not necessarily a complete translation, but some aspects of the text may have been changed. Lines are removed, re-shaped or added in. Andrew Upton's *The Present* is a new version of Chekhov's manuscript.

Adaptation: Adapting a literary work, means keeping it in the same genre, but changing it for a different purpose such as working with a smaller cast, performance conventions such as chorus, additional styles such as puppetry, physical theatre. In some cases the adaptation may adapt the text into a new medium such as from a book to a play.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF ADAPTING, TRANSLATING OR WRITING A NEW VERSION OF A PLAY?

Plays are adapted, translated or have new versions as the change allows the play to become current and more accessible for the era and the audience of the time. This could mean the play has a social political context, characters, themes or ideas that are relevant to the world at the time. Changes also allow a particular meaning of a play to be sharpened and re-freshed which may change the reception of the story, themes or character – “the second life of the text coincides with the second life of the reception.” (Casetti in Balodis, 2012, pg. 34)

DISCUSS:

- If you could adapt a play that you have studied what would it be and why?
- The “wright” part of playwright is derived from the word “wrought” meaning hammered, beaten into shape. How does this relate to translating, adapting or creating new versions?

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ANDREW UPTON HAS FURTHER REFINED THE TEXT TO BE LEAN AND ESSENTIAL, FINE AND SPARE, WITH ROOM FOR SUBTEXT. THIS IS ACHIEVED THROUGH FRACTURED ENDS OF SENTENCES” Robyn Nevin, past Artistic Director of STC

Andrew Upton’s career as a playwright has produced many versions and adaptations of classic plays such as *Hedda Gabler* by Henrik Ibsen, *Uncle Vanya* by Anton Chekhov, *Children of the Sun* by Maxim Gorky and *Cyrano de Bergerac* by Edmond Rostand.

Adaptations and versions of classic texts by Andrew Upton are characterised by the following elements:

- “Simultaneous” use of dialogue to modernize the impact of the text. These are signified using a / in the text. The overlapping dialogue shows the way that people don’t listen or hear each other and the way we jostle for our place within a conversation and sometimes even shut others down.
- Missed phrases and sentences, lost words and sentences which provide unending intrigue
- Short sharp sentences.

ACTIVITY ONE

Analyse

RESOURCES

Supplied script excerpt

TIME

15 minutes

In small groups read the scene on the next page from Andrew Upton’s *The Present*.

On a piece of butcher’s paper answer the following:

- Identify the different conventions of Upton’s writing by circling or highlighting.
- What effect does the addition of Upton trademarks have on this particular moment in the play?
- Why is this scene important in the play?
- What is the overall mood of this scene?
- What insight into the characters or world of the play is created through Upton’s style of writing?

SCRIPT EXCERPT FOR ACTIVITY ONE

ANDREW UPTON'S *THE PRESENT* PG. 107
AFTER PLATONOV HAS BEEN SHOT

Mikhail: I love Anna Petrovna. I came back here to tell her - I knew it was the right thing to do.

Mikhail collapses. Anna gathers him up in her arms. Yegor and Dimitri have gone.

Anna: No, stay here with me. Don't go.

Mikhail: I'm here. Don't worry. I'm here. At last.

Anna: What can I do, Nikolai? Nikolai?

Nikolai comes over. mikhail is bleeding badly.

Nikolai: I don't think.

Anna: Nikolai? You're a doctor. Call/a doctor. Somebody. Nikolai? Please.

Quiet. Nothing.

Mikhail: Don't worry, Anna, my sweet.

Anna: No, Mikhail...stay here with me. Don't go.

Mikhail: I'm not going, I promise. I'm here. I'm right here. Now.

He dies.

End of play.

Upton, A. (2014). *The Present*. Currently unpublished.

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ACTIVITY TWO

Creating your own version

RESOURCES

Supplied script excerpt

TIME

30 minutes

Written above are the 'trademarks' of an Andrew Upton translation. Looking at the script excerpt provided to the right, from Andrew Upton's *The Present* write an extension/ text interjection of this moment, where the character's dialogue continues. This scene is a moment shared between Mikhail Platonov and Anna Petrovna.

In writing your extension think about:

- Character objectives
- Use of punctuation and how it can be altered to strengthen meaning
- Words that can be considered 'old fashioned' and how these might be contemporised
- Addition of words or lines to create a more contemporary feel and strengthen dramatic meaning
- Sentence structure. Short, sharp sentences.

ANDREW UPTON'S *THE PRESENT* PG. 62

Anna: Have you got my detonator?

Somewhere in his pockets. He hands it to her, batteries. The back cover. The front.

I am forty in two hours...three hours.

What are you going to give me?

Mikhail: Well, i had a thought - just showing up was hard enough.

Anna: You live down the road. You didn't even organise a baby-sitter.

Mikhail: Well Sasha's...She prefers...

Anna: I think we have something we need to finish.

Mikhail: I don't...I don't, I don't think...

Anna: Am i imagining things?

Mikhail: No.

Anna: Are you saying the past is gone? What was between us is dead and buried?

Mikhail: No.

Anna: Are you saying you are satisfied wtih our friendship?

Mikhail: No.

Anna: What then is finished between us...?

Upton, A. (2014). *The Present*. Currently unpublished.

Compiled by Hannah Brown.

The activities and resources contained in this document are designed for educators as the starting point for developing more comprehensive lessons for this production. Hannah Brown is the Education Projects Officers for the Sydney Theatre Company. You can contact Hannah on hbrown@sydneytheatre.com.au

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