

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, and 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, reshaped or added in. Andrew Upton's *Three Sisters* 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 refreshed 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, former 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

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

RESOURCES

Supplied script excerpt

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

TIME

15 minutes

- 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
THREE SISTERS
PG. 8

Irina: What? What / is this?

Ferapont: Can I come / in?

Anfisa: You've got / clean feet.

Olga: A birthday / cake. Who From?

Irina: Who sent this / What's this?

Ferapont: It's / a cake.

Anfisa: From Protopopov on the district council board
of / directors and managers.

Masha: He's a horrid / little man. What does he want?

Irina: I don't know Protopopov.

Upton, A. (2017). *Three Sisters*. 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 *Three Sisters*, use your imagination to write an extension/text interjection of this moment, where the character's dialogue continues. 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 THREE SISTERS PG. 76

Irina: Is that Ivan?

Olga: He's so drunk.

Irina: What an awful night.

Pause.

Olga? Apparently. Did you hear? The Brigade was being transferred out of here? Far south. Did you hear?

Olga: Rumours.

Irina: What if it's true?

Olga: Rumours are never true.

Irina: We'd be alone.

Olga: No.

Irina: I do. I understand how sweet and loyal and good Nikolai is. And you're right. You are. I will marry him but, all I ask is - he has to come home with us. That's all I would say. Don't you think? We all have to go home. Please Olga, just say. Tell me we will leave here, and go home - I just know. I just know that would fix everything. Olga? Let's go. Shall we? Olga? Go?

Compiled by Lisa Mumford based on work 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 former Education Projects Officers for the Sydney Theatre Company. You can contact Lisa on lmumford@sydneytheatre.com.au

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