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Rewriting the 'Duchess of Malfi'

Adapting Webster's tragedy for an ESL drama production

Fiona Dalziel/Anna Santucci/Giampaolo Spedo

Abstract

This article addresses issues of text adaptation in full-scale ESL drama production. After choosing to present Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, participants in the English Drama Workshop at Padua University set about the task of adapting the play in order to make it more suitable for a group of non-native speakers of English acting in front of an audience made up predominantly of non-native speakers. Substantial changes were made during the adaptation process: as well as cutting and simplifying the text, certain characters were eliminated while others were doubled (or rather tripled) and one scene was totally rewritten. When implementing these changes, the group had to take account of both the student-actors' linguistic competence and the size and composition of the cast, most of the members of which were female. It is argued that text adaptation in ESL drama is not only a way of creating a more appropriate product, but also greatly enriches the process leading up to the performance. The students gained deeper insights into the text and were also able to achieve a strong sense of ownership of the final production.

1 Introduction

The English Drama Workshop at the University of Padua came into being in 1997 as the result of collaboration between the Department of English and German Language and Literature and a small local professional theatre group, which specializes in providing theatre training for high school students in the area. This collaboration has provided workshop participants with a theatre in which to rehearse and perform as well as the guidance of an experienced theatre director. Participants also receive the support of one or more university language instructors, together with help and advice from literature experts in the Department. The workshop is essentially an extra-curricular activity, although students are now awarded credits for participation, but without any final mark. However, personal interest and motivation are the main reasons why students choose to participate as the workload far exceeds that required for the number of credits. The vast majority of participants are enrolled on a language-degree course, but the workshop is open to all students with an

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adequate knowledge of English. No previous acting experience is required. Over the years, it has attracted students of Law, Political Sciences and Engineering (often good sources of male participants), PhD students and students spending the year in Padua as part of the Erasmus exchange programme. Each year the group contains a few "veterans" taking part in the workshop for the second, third or even fourth time.

Students meet for 2 to 3 hours weekly from October up until the two or three public performances, which generally take place in June. As with all drama workshops, work intensifies as the performance date approaches, often culminating in daily rehearsals. In the first few weeks, the director and language instructors engage the budding actors in a series of activities designed to improve their overall communication skills, voice production and familiarity with the stage. This phase involves wide use of improvisational theatre techniques, with students starting with their native language and then progressing to the target language. The next step is the choice of text: the director and language instructors propose a number of possible texts in line with the overall pedagogical aims of the workshop (see below), but also invite suggestions from the participants. The choices are discussed and a decision is taken, taking account of the interests of the students. In order to facilitate the casting procedure, as well as the reading and discussion of the text, groups of students are invited to perform short improvisations based on the themes and events of the text. At the same time, the job of text adaptation begins, as will be described in detail in the following sections. The final casting decision is made by the director and language instructors on the basis of various considerations such as language competence, previous theatrical experience, and, where possible, the individual wishes of participants to be assigned a certain part. There follows the phase of the rehearsals proper, first with and then without scripts, during which final adjustments to the adapted script are made.

The authors of this article were all involved in the English Drama Workshop in the 2008-2009 academic year, when the group staged *The Duchess of Malfi,* but in different ways: Fiona Dalziel was the general coordinator as well as being one of the language instructors; Anna Santucci was a student participating in the workshop for the second time, who for this performance also took on the role of stage manager; Giampaolo Spedo was a post-doctoral student of English Literature who provided input for the group on the source text.

2 Pedagogical Aims and Approaches

Much has been written about the value of drama techniques in language acquisition (see for example, Dodson 2002; Marini-Maio & Ryan-Scheutz 2010), ranging from the incorporation of simple role play activities into a communicative classroom to the production and performance of dramatic texts. Ryan-Scheutz & Colangelo (2004: 384) explain that the latter is related to the practical, affective and cultural goals of foreign language curricula: students can engage with language and culture in a positive, collaborative environment,

where peers and instructors provide the support required to stand up and act in front of a real audience in a foreign language. It should be stressed that the aim of the Padua workshop was not merely that of improving the participants' language competence, but it had more far-reaching pedagogical objectives. As mentioned above, most of the students involved were undergraduates majoring in foreign languages. Padua University offers two BA modern language-degree courses, one with a strong literature component and another with a focus on translation and international communication. Both, however, involve the study of literature. The workshop thus aims to give students the opportunity to combine language and literature learning and also to develop the critical skills essential in any academic career. These objectives fit with what Marini-Maio calls a "holistic model", one which fosters L2 communication skills and "exposes learners to literary, historical, and cultural content" (2010: 242). Nevertheless, each individual participant in the workshop clearly has his or her own goals and learning paths. Some are extremely keen to improve their language skills, working hard on their pronunciation and taking advantage of the language instructors to interact in English off as well as on the stage; others may be more interested in aspects of literary analysis, participating actively in the interpretation and adaptation of the source text.

The approach adopted is one which involves both product and process orientations. Although full-scale production has as its aim a final product, the processes that lead to this are of equal if not greater importance (cf. Hegman Shier 2002). As Moody (2002: 135) affirms: "a product-approach, which involves various processes in the interpretation, rehearsal, and public performance of a text, is a valuable form of educational drama". At the Padua workshop, the director and language instructors encourage an active, problem-solving approach, which has been said to lead both to increased foreign-language proficiency (Hegman Shier 2002: 189; Sosulski 2008) and critical thinking skills (Marini-Maio & Ryan-Scheutz 2010: 5). It can also be seen to comply with social constructivist views of learning, as "[e]ach drama creates a problem for students before they have been taught how to respond" (Wagner 2002: 9). These problems are faced not only individually, but also as a group, thus encouraging peer collaboration.

3 The Choice of Source Text

First performed in 1614, John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* is a tragedy inspired by a real story, and set in Italy. The protagonist, a young widow, is a complex and determined character. She is obsessed by the passing of time and resolves to start a new life with her steward, Antonio, whom she is to marry secretly. This act of defiance incites the rage of her two powerful brothers, Ferdinand, Duke of Calabria, and the Cardinal. The former is unbalanced and insanely jealous of his twin sister, while the latter is cold and cynical. The two brothers send Bosola, an ex-convict, to spy on their sister and, when the marriage to Antonio is uncovered, to arrange for her death. Throughout

the play Antonio's faithful friend, Delio, presents events and characters; he introduces characters in the first act, and when the play ends in violence, with the death of almost the entire family, it is he who brings the one surviving son and heir of the Duchess to court.

It may seem inconsistent with the aims of L2 language development to choose a 17th century text, whose language is far remote from what the students themselves are striving to learn. Yet there were several reasons for proposing this work to the group. Firstly, it was one of the plays studied that academic year by third-year students on the literature-based degree course, some of whom were participating in the workshop. Therefore, it was hoped that, as well as benefitting from this direct link with their course of studies, those students would also be able to provide valuable input for other members of the group. Moreover, the performance itself could be greatly appreciated by other students on the course, who would have the opportunity to view and to give an assessment of one possible interpretation of the work.

It was also believed that the choice of text would appeal to the group as a whole and thus increase their motivation. Experience had shown the director and language instructors that 16th and 17th-century English theatre would be a popular choice: whether or not students were familiar with the works of that period, it seemed to arouse great curiosity and enthusiasm, perhaps in part due to associations such as the Globe Theatre or even the film *Shakespeare in Love*. In previous years, several Shakespeare plays had been performed by the group, but no other playwright of the era had been picked. However, some members specifically stated that the appeal of *The Duchess of Malfi* lay in the fact that it was a 17th-century tragedy *not* written by Shakespeare. A possible added attraction of this particular play for our context was the fact that it was set in Italy, adding layers of cross-cultural perspective to the cross-temporal one: a group of Italians in the 21st century perform (for a predominantly Italian audience) a play set in 16th-century Italy seen through the eyes of a 17th-century English dramatist. In fact, those students whose degree course was centred around "language and mediation" would be given a challenging task of intercultural and diachronic mediation. Finally, the play contained a number of universal themes which students might find relevant despite their 17th-century setting. These include power and corruption, sex and incest, and the status of women. With agreement reached on the choice of text, the next issue facing the group was the necessity of adaptation. The criteria for that adaptation along with the process and results will be discussed in the following sections.

4 Adapting Webster's Tragedy

Textual adaptation is often a necessity in ESL productions for a series of practical reasons: as Bancheri (2010: 96) points out, one may wish to shorten the length of the play as a whole as well as that of the main parts and of individual lines. In the case of *The Duchess of Malfi*, it was decided first of all that the performance

should not last more than an hour and a half. It was felt that there was enough rehearsal time to work on a play of this length and that this would accord with the maximum attention span for an audience watching a play performed in a language not their own and by non-professionals. Moreover, the play needed to be made to fit the members of the cast, whose knowledge of the English language covered a range of different levels. Yet, although some members were given bigger parts than others, in order to make the experience worthwhile for all those involved, the performance could not be dominated by one or two students with others merely having a couple of lines. Finally, some simplification of language might be required to facilitate audience understanding. As with ESL drama as a whole, the need to produce a suitable text for performance implies a process which is compatible with the pedagogical aims of the theatre experience and beneficial to the participants' learning. For this to happen, the students themselves should be actively involved in the adaptation process and take responsibility for the choices which influence the shape of their final product. Adaptation not only implies working closely with a text but also means that participants transform the source text; to quote Moody (2002: 136): "student motivation is greatly enhanced through exercises and projects that allow students to benefit from their freedom to cocreate in enjoyable ways – that is, to *play*." The challenge lies in the fact that text adaptation is not merely a question of trimming long monologues, but has to be carried out according to certain specific criteria, which we will attempt to outline below.

Reflecting on our experience, it is possible to distinguish two main kinds of processes in adaptation: one looking at the text at a global level and one at a micro level; these could be compared to top-down and bottom-up approaches to textual comprehension. Decisions first need to be made as to whether or not entire scenes or parts of scenes may be cut: the criteria for these choices are whether the overall dramatic effect of the text will be maintained despite these cuts and whether the plot can still be followed. In the case of non-contemporary works, it may be deemed desirable to cut those scenes whose themes are period-specific and thus of less interest to modern audiences. As regards the production in question, the top-down text adaptation involved the whole group, with discussions as to which scenes could be cut. For example, the Cardinal's instalment as soldier (Act III, Scene IV) was expunged, since it had already been mentioned, originally by a Pilgrim, and in our production by Cariola: "The Cardinal of Arragon / Is this day to resign his cardinal's hat"; moreover, his being subsequently dressed in full commander's uniform metonymically signalled his new status to the audience. If some information regarding plot development was lost as a result of the cut in scenes, this could be compensated for by the inclusion of narrative sequences. This technique was used by the workshop in a performance of *The Merchant of Venice*, where two gondoliers explained and commented on the unfolding events. In the production of *The Duchess of Malfi*, the group decided that rather than create narrators, importance would be given to the role of Delio as storyteller, and so he (or rather *she* in this case) interacted with the audience to guide them through the action of the play and

summed up parts of the plot that had been cut. Looking at the text as a whole, one can also decide which parts in a play may be duplicated, which is a possible way of equilibrating student participation. Yet, once again, such interventions should satisfy both practical and dramatic requirements. Merely having one actress take over from another mid-performance could appear meaningless and simply cause confusion in spectators. The way in which role-duplication was addressed with regard to the Duchess will be described in the following section.

A smaller group of five or six students worked closely on the changes to individual lines. It was more practicable to have a limited number of participants, under the guidance of a language instructor, undertaking their hands-on work on the text and it also fitted with the learners' individual goals, as just a few volunteered for this extra commitment. There was, however, constant dialogue between the smaller "cuts" group and the whole group, with the former reporting back each week on their changes to the text. The criterion adopted was that of reducing monologues to just five or six lines, with care taken not to reduce the play to a mere sequence of actions, thus undermining its psychological depth. In cases where the length of a certain part may have posed memorization problems, whole lines were eliminated if not essential to plot development and/or dramatic effect. The language was slightly modernized, involving changes to pronouns, verb endings and vocabulary. However, the play was not rewritten in modern English, so it retained its Jacobean feel. Substantial changes were made to the scene in which a number of madmen (*madwomen* in our version) are sent by Ferdinand to his sister before her death in an attempt to torture her (as discussed in section 6).

5 Me and my Shadow: The Characterization of the Duchess

In addition to script manipulation, another aspect of the adaptation is worth special attention: the characterization of the Duchess. The Duchess of Malfi is a young widow who still wants to live her life, but her two brothers – Ferdinand, who is her twin, and the Cardinal – do not want her to marry again. She has to conceal her feelings and her intentions from them, but her mind is resolute, notwithstanding her brothers' scheming. Her passionate nature is revealed in the first act, when she secretly woos Antonio, her steward. Throughout the whole scene, it is the Duchess who leads the seduction game, as these lines reveal:

> DUCHESS The misery of us that are born great,
>
> We are forced to woo, because none dare woo us:
>
> (The Duchess of Malfi, I. 1. 433-434)

The students were impressed by the strength and single-mindedness of the Duchess, revealed for example when she announces that Antonio must flee from her palace after Ferdinand has discovered the truth about their relationship:

DUCHESS The place that you must fly to is Ancona:

Hire a house there. I'll send after you

My treasure and my jewels.

(The Duchess of Malfi, III. 2. 172-174)

What instead appears to frighten the Duchess is the prospect of growing old and ugly as times goes by, as she clearly reveals in the following lines:

DUCHESS Does the colour of my hair begin to change?

When I become gray, I shall have all the court

Powder their hair, to be like me.[1]

The maturation of the character of the Duchess throughout the play was highlighted in the performance by dividing the role into three parts. This division was initially decided upon by the group for practical reasons: as mentioned above, one of the constant challenges of student performances is that of giving all participants substantial roles. This particular year, the group consisted of 18 players, only four of whom were male. Since the part of the Duchess was very demanding and there were so many actresses to involve, dividing the role appeared to be an effective solution. The division was discussed by the group, and decisions were taken on the basis of both the chronological structure of the play and the number and length of the lines each actress would play. Thus the "triplication" of the role ended up by providing students with the opportunity for discussion and analysis of this fascinating character.

The existence of three Duchesses led to a decision regarding the staging of the crucial moment in which Ferdinand looks at his sister's dead body. After the Duchess has been killed, Bosola and Ferdinand speak these famous lines before her corpse:

FERDINAND Is she dead?

BOSOLA Fix your eye here.

FERDINAND Cover her face; mine eyes dazzle: she died young.

BOSOLA I think not so; her infelicity

Seemed to have years too many.[2]

[1] This quotation is taken from our own script. For the original text, see *The Duchess of Malfi,* III. 2. 57-59.

[2] This quotation is taken from our own script. For the original text, see *Duchess,* IV. 2. 246-256.

What actually appeared on stage were the bodies of all three actresses who had played the Duchess: Ferdinand glances at the first, youngest Duchess, and utters the lines "she died young", for he still sees his sister as his twisted mind wants to remember her, the young Duchess that their dead father had known. Bosola instead looks at the third and oldest Duchess and contradicts Ferdinand, for he reads on her face the burden of the years and of the sorrow she has suffered, along with his own guilt.

Yet what is perhaps even more interesting is how the three actresses came to be six: this was done by introducing a split in the Duchess's consciousness.[3] To achieve this, an "Alter ego" or "Shadow" was created[4] and played by three other actresses, one for each "real" Duchess. The Shadow embodies and speaks the Duchess's deepest thoughts and fears. She follows her everywhere, trying to attract her attention, while the Duchess incessantly tries to ignore her. The Shadow appears in the Duchess's mirror, but she also haunts her when she is with other people. For example, when the Duchess comments on her gray hair, the Shadow repeats these words in a mocking fashion, bringing to the fore the character's very human fear of losing her beauty even when her life is in great danger. Then, in Act IV, Scene II, the presence of the two figures highlights the Duchess's attempts to affirm her control and position despite Bosola's efforts to drive her mad. The Shadow repeats the word "mad", which appears in two lines, but the real Duchess tries to pay no heed, and stresses calmly that she is, "Duchess of Malfi still".

Performing this character on stage posed various problems, including the risk of mystifying the spectators and making it hard for them to follow the plot. To avoid possible confusion, the actresses who played the Shadow wore red costumes, while the Duchesses wore white dresses; these were contrasted with the costumes of all the other characters, who wore sombre colours. This both enabled the audience to recognize the Shadow as being different, and provided an alienating contrast between what is real and what is unreal. The Shadow moves freely on stage, but only the Duchess perceives her presence. Moreover, the Shadow speaks to the Duchess, sometimes anticipating her lines, sometimes voicing her thoughts, which other characters never hear. Thus, the six Duchesses provided more equal acting opportunities, compensating for the possible loss of insight into the character caused by reducing the length of her monologues throughout the play. Moreover, they brought innovation and originality to the performance, increasing the students' sense of ownership of their production.

[3] The group would like to thank Professor Mario Melchionda, who was teaching the play in his Literature course, for first suggesting that the Duchess should have a "double".

[4] The term "Shadow" was coined by a member of the group and came to be used by all to refer to this "Alter ego".

6 Comic Relief through the Ages: The Madwomen Scene

> QUINCE Bless thee, Bottom, bless thee! Thou art translated. (*MSN*, III. 1. 114)

> Contemporary events or dominant images condition our perception as well as interpretation, as they do those of the adapter. There is a kind of dialogue between the society in which the works, both the adapted text and adaptation, are produced and that in which they are received, and both are in dialogue with the works themselves. (Hutcheon 2006: 149)

First coined in the field of anthropological studies but subsequently adopted to describe the adaptation of a text to the local culture, the term *indigenization* (Hutcheon 2006: 150) adequately describes the adaptation undergone by the Madmen scene (*The Duchess of Malfi*, IV. 2. 37-114) in our production. It was the most extensive alteration that this production brought to the original text – indeed, the scene was totally rewritten, well beyond the overall cutting, paraphrasing, and lexical simplification undergone.

The cooperative effort of adaptation of the source text in order to bring it closer to the experience of both audience and performers yielded an altogether different set of mentally disturbed – and, by definition, deviant – characters. These were better suited to the altered socio-cultural context and to the makeup of the cast: a gender switch brought the dramatic situation even closer to the experience of the young (female) performers; besides being involved in the process, they could more easily identify with the result than with the text before alteration. Student casts may be awed almost to inaction by a canonical text, especially if not in their mother tongue: appropriating it through a process of adaptation that goes beyond mere reduction of the verbal bulk to be performed helps to dispel the aura that surrounds such texts, thus facilitating a more relaxed and intimate approach.

In the original scene (*The Duchess of Malfi*, IV. 2. 37-114), several Madmen are introduced by a Servant, but only four of them have been assigned speech: an Astrologer, a Lawyer, a Priest, and a Doctor. In the final text for the production, there are four Madwomen, not all of them with a clearly recognizable antecedent: whereas the Fashion Designer and the ruined Broker may find their antecedents, respectively, in the "English tailor, craz'd i'th' brain / With the study of new fashion" (50-51) and the "broker that's mad" (57) mentioned by the Servant, the Primary-school "Unique" Teacher (desperate at the prospect of having to teach, due to budget cuts, "History, Geography, Maths, Science [...] and IIIIIInglish" all by herself) and the Desperate Housewife (frantically dusting all over the place and singing the Queen hit 'I Want to Break Free') are contemporary characters with whom both students and the audience could easily identify.

The roles were taken up by students who, either because of their limited acting experience or lack of the time and energy that a major role would have required, had been assigned other minor characters in the play; but here they had the scene all to themselves, except for the relatively passive

presence of the Duchess and Cariola, her maid. Far from being crushed by the responsibility, they utterly enjoyed the experience and, encouraged by the director and language instructors to express the deranged condition of their characters, they exploited the liberating potential of the dramatic situation by interacting with one another and the audience as they deemed fit, improvising upon an established routine and the crescendo of their distress.

As noted by author and celebrated scriptwriter Vincenzo Cerami (1996: 160-161), faithfulness to the original text is not a necessary requisite for a good comic performance, provided that even its poorly remembered version maintains the informative content of the original and what Cerami terms its *metonymies*, i.e., the anticipation, in various forms, of future developments in the story. In fact, the modernized version of the scene preserves adequately the grotesque absurdity of the overall situation, underscoring the isolation of the Duchess and foreshadowing her tragic demise, but at the same time providing comic relief through the helpless antics of the madmen sent by Duke Ferdinand to torment his disgraced sister.

To provide the scene with an explanatory introduction of both characters and situation, as did the original speech by the Servant, a Prologue was written by G. Spedo:

> Madwomen all, they came, number of four
>
> Their stories to the Duchess for to tell.
>
> The first Madwoman's coming to the fore:
>
> She blew the subprime bubble very well,
>
> But when it burst this Broker had no time
>
> To save her savings; thus she had to sell
>
> Her penthouse for a penny and a dime
>
> And now she pays for her crime doing time.
>
> A lonely Teacher is outraged to see
>
> Denied her role, her learning underrated
>
> And asks: what good has ever come to me
>
> From working hard to be so educated?
>
> Fashion Designer one of them is called
>
> For pets and not for men, as was of old.
>
> Last but not least, a Desperate Housewife,

Dissatisfied completely with her life.

And if their tales have power you to move

You Gents and Ladies will this scene approve.

Read out by one of the actors, the stanzas of various lengths in iambic pentameter are each devoted to one of the Madwomen and begin *in medias res*. The incipit, inspired by that of the ballad 'John Barleycorn Must Die',[5] makes the audience immediately alert to the unusual scene about to unroll before their eyes. The *captatio benevolentiae* in the final couplet and the rhymed verse form are reminiscent of actual prologues familiar to audiences in the age of Webster, such as the introductory sonnet in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*; likewise, the contemporary usage acquires an antiquated patina by the adoption of forms that were colloquial at the time of traditional ballads, but are awkward – if perfectly intelligible – today, such as "number of four" and "for to tell".

Thus, as is often the case with texts that have acquired canonical status, the original already contained the elements needed for its explanation, even to modern audiences, which is another aspect of which students ought to be made aware. Their awe of canonical texts can and should extend beyond mere passive reverence; instead, they should ask themselves what the text is actually *saying* at any particular point, before trying to *translate* it, to say "almost the same thing" (Eco 2003), either to modern audiences or themselves.

The Madwomen scene acknowledges and reinforces the canonical status of the adapted text rather than denying it. Granted, it is a breach in the spectators' frame of reference (Bal 1997: 119) brought about not so much by the discrepancies between the adaptation and the original scene (which many among the audience might not be familiar with in the first place) as by the presence of contemporary characters in a 17th century play, which constitutes a defamiliarization (in Structuralist terms). At the same time, however, this act of appropriation is "a more decisive journey away from the informing source [than is adaptation] into a wholly new cultural product and domain" (Sanders 2006: 26). It indigenizes and *proximates*[6] the text to the target culture, which was one of the main goals of the entire process of rewriting the *Duchess*.

7 Setting the *Duchess* to Music

During the rehearsals of *The Duchess of Malfi* various suggestions were made as to possible musical accompaniment to the play, but no definite decision was taken. Then quite by chance, the name of a Beatles' song arose, leading to discussion among students as to how many titles of works by this group were in some way related to the plot of Webster's play. The list that the participants

[5] "There were three men come out of the west / Their fortunes for to try" (Lloyd 1975: 73)

[6] Genette (1997: 304) describes "proximation" as a movement through which "the hypertext transposes the diegesis of its hypotext to bring it up to date and closer to its own audience (in temporal, geographic, or social terms)".

came up with was long and included the following: *You've Got to Hide your Love Away* (the Duchess cannot tell her brothers of her attachment to her steward); *Happiness is a Warm Gun* (a song for Bosola, the hired killer); *A Hard Day's Night* (the Duchess's night-time cries during childbirth must be kept secret from Bosola); *You Never Give me your Money* (Ferdinand refuses to pay Bosola for his services); *Julia* (the name of the Cardinal's lover, who he kills by making her kiss a poisoned Bible). The use of Beatles' songs to illustrate moments from a Jacobean tragedy was unusual, and surprised spectators at first. However, the combined harmony and dissonance of the choice proved to be yet one more way in which the performance was personalized; together with changes such as character duplication and invention, it contributed to the birth of what one student-actress affectionately referred to as "our Duchess".

8 Discussion

What we hope has emerged from this exploration is that adaptation can foster a process orientation in ESL theatre: in fact it may be that a text is picked precisely because it *will* need to be altered. Simply providing students with a ready-made text for performance can still be of value: text understanding is required; pronunciation and intonation skills may be enhanced and the final performance can be rewarding. However, by choosing a text in need of adaptation, more L2 language use, increased intimacy with the text and more critical thinking will be required. Moreover, adaptation can be framed in such a way as to foster peer collaboration, from discussion about to the rewriting of texts. Feedback from the student-actors in the Duchess revealed that they believed that the reworking of the text, including the splitting of the protagonist, helped them to gain valuable insights into the play. By considering the cuts to be made on a global level, they had to focus on how events developed: as one student commented: "I could enter synergetically into the story together with my peers". As for the Duchess, students noted that the character division helped them not only to understand the complexities of her persona and her emotional state, but also the different stages and situation of the plot as a whole.

There are some shortcomings in our project, which we can learn from in order to seek future improvements. Firstly, it might have been possible to do more work on a global rather than a micro level: the shortening of many scenes led to frequent scene changes, which at times interrupted the flow of performance. In addition, it could have been beneficial to encourage the students to do some written work on character analysis, as described by Ryan-Scheutz (2010: 307). Finally, there was a lack of systematic investigation of student learning, especially language learning, which could be addressed by the use of detailed pre and post-course questionnaires.

As regards general adaptation issues, it would be useful at this point to consider the following quote:

> Canonicity [...] is almost a required feature of the raw material for ad-

> aptation and appropriation. [...] The implied pleasure involved in the action of assessing the similarities and differences between texts [...], which [is] fundamental to the reading and spectating experience of adaptation, [...] requires prior knowledge of the text(s) being assimilated, absorbed, reworked, and refashioned by the adaptive process. (Sanders 2006: 120)

In other words, one cannot desecrate what was not a shrine in the first place. Yet the thrill of treading on "holy ground" should not be the main motive behind adapting a canonical text. In fact, not all the audience could be expected to have such a prior knowledge of the play as to appreciate the differences in our production from the original; but those involved in the adaptation/appropriation process did. Therefore a significant part of the experience was for the student-adaptors to learn how to approach such a text respectfully but critically, preserving what is still comprehensible and useful and adapting, even radically, what they perceived as irredeemably out of date.

9 Conclusion

These reflections on the adaptation of a 17th-century play confirm the hypotheses of those who affirm that full-scale theatre production can bring together product and process approaches to educational drama (cf. for example Marini-Maio & Ryan-Scheutz 2010). The Padua experience was similar to that described by Moody (2002: 154) where "the text of the play was the starting point for steps in an interpretation that involved theater games, improvisation, and ultimately, a version of the play that students themselves had co-written". The final product that the audience sees is merely the culmination of a series of collaborative activities and thus "[t]he performance, in this regard, although important, continues to be just part of the overall learning process for its participants" (Hegman Shier 2002: 190). In our case, the adaptations of the text, including the synchronic and diachronic character-splittings, involved the students in an in-depth analysis of a complex and tragic character. Spectators and student-actors alike were provided with a break from the dark events of the play by means of the Madwomen Scene, the writing of which greatly fostered the participants' creativity. As always, the learning experience was extended to the instructors, who every year pour over the successes and shortcomings of each workshop. In the words of Bräuer (2002: xi): "Reflective practitioners examine their experiences with drama as a mode of instruction, through which they themselves also continue to learn about the educational use of drama." Despite the fact that many of the decisions made and procedures followed were driven by a specific institutional context, it is hoped that practitioners in the field of ESL theatre pedagogy may be able to make use of our reflections in order to facilitate similar projects.

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Primary literature

Secondary literature

Appendix – The Madwomen Scene

Fashion Designer: **FD**
Desperate Housewife: **DH**
Broker: **B**
Primary-school teacher: **T**

FD: Years and years of hard work and sacrifice. . . . And look at me now!**DH**: *[singing and dusting]* I want to break free..**B**: I started work as a receptionist. . . **T**: *[speaking very bad English]* Be quiet. . . listen to me. . . don't do that. . . **FD**: With my creative genius I should have been making dresses for kings and queens[show picture]**B**: And then I became a personal secretary. . . **DH**: What am I doing here. . . where are my dreams. . . where did everything go. . . **T**: 2 times 2 is. . . the longest river in. . . in 1945 Italy. . . **B**: I rose to fame and fortune.. a self-.made woman. . . **FD**: and not for. . . pets!**T**: Hello children, I am your "unique teacher". . . today we will be doing history, geography, maths, science. . . I fell so lonely!!**DH**: all my studies. . . Shakespeare, Webster, Wilde. . . for nothing!!**B**: I started as a broker and the shares went up and up. . . **FD**: and as for the colours. . . this season my whole collection is purple, but everyone now wants orange!**T**: and IIIIIInglish!**DH**: Just look at me now, changing nappies, cooking, washing, cleaning. . . **B**: . . . no lover, no family, work, work, work. . . **FD**: They don't understand me. . . I don't understand me. . . *[to the other madwomen]* Do you understand me?**T**: I did a course last week. . . so read and repeat. . . *[gets out board with word CAT]* . . . cat. . . repeat. . . *[starts questioning the public]***DH**: And my husband. . . never at home. . . always away on business... who knows who with. . . With you? Or with you? *[to the public]***B**: . . . but I did it. . . I got to the top! Success, money, recognition..**FD**: *[to audience]* What do you think you are wearing. . . that's not in fashion this summer *[to Duchess]* . . . can I measure up for a new gown?**T**: *[shows CAT IN GARDEN]* Repeat after me. . . "The cat is in the garden". . . **DH**: my children don't listen to me. . . *[to audience]* Do your children listen to you? .. I could have done so much with my life. . . my hopes, my dreams. . . I could have been an actress. . . "Tomorrow is another day". . . **B**: I planned everything to get where I did.. I had everything under control!**FD**: *[writes down measurements of Duchess]* I've got just the thing for you madam. . . **T**: And now children, something a bit more difficult *[holds up a board with speech from* Hamlet*]* . . . **DH**: I'm trapped. . . *[singing]* I want to break free. . . **FD**: No. . . I can't. . . don't use me like this.. the world isn't ready for my creations. . . **B**: [soothingly]. . . and then the crash. . . I lost it all [breaks down into desperate howls]