



# IN THE COMPANY OF ACTORS

A Shark Island Productions Film

A Teaching Resource for the Australian Curriculum - Drama

This resource draws on the 45 minute classroom edit of the film available to view free online

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Curriculum Connections	Page 2
<b>Analysis of <i>Hedda Gabler</i> - a new version by Andrew Upton, original play by Henrik Ibsen</b>	
Synopsis	Page 5
Character Analysis	Page 7
Themes and Ideas	Page 11
The Elements of Drama	Page 16
Dramatic Styles	Page 19
<b><u>Learning Experiences</u></b>	
<b>Actor and Character Preparation</b>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Truth</li> <li>• Given Circumstances</li> <li>• Units</li> <li>• Subtext</li> <li>• Objective and Super-Objective</li> <li>• Magic If</li> </ul>	Page 22
<b>Directing and Rehearsals</b>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improvisations from the world of the play</li> <li>• Blocking a scene</li> <li>• Manipulating the Elements of Drama</li> <li>• Building an ensemble</li> </ul>	Page 29
<b>Adaptation, Translations, Versions</b>	Page 38
<b>Production Process</b>	Page 45
<b>Designing for Set, Costumes, Lighting and Sound</b>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating a design vision</li> <li>• Designing for set, costume, lighting and sound</li> </ul>	Page 48
<b>Bibliography</b>	Page 57

### **Suitable for the study of Drama in Years 9-12:**

- Naturalism
- Realism
- Modernism
- Production Elements – set and costume design, lighting and sound
- Directing and Rehearsals
- Characterisation
- The Elements of Drama – in particular Role, Tension and Atmosphere

### **Australian Curriculum**

Please note that as at July 2015 the following content descriptions are available for use and awaiting endorsement.

#### **Years 9 and 10 Band Description**

In Years 9 and 10, learning in Drama builds on the experience of the previous band. It involves students making and responding to drama independently and in small groups, and with their teachers and communities. They explore drama as an art form through improvisation, scripted drama, rehearsal and performance.

#### **Content Descriptions**

- Improvise with the elements of drama and narrative structure to develop ideas, and explore subtext to shape devised and scripted drama (ACADRM047)
- Manipulate combinations of the elements of drama to develop and convey the physical and psychological aspects of roles and characters consistent with intentions in dramatic forms and performance styles (ACADRM048)
- Practise and refine the expressive capacity of voice and movement to communicate ideas and dramatic action in a range of forms, styles and performance spaces, including exploration of those developed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dramatists (ACADRM049)
- Structure drama to engage an audience through manipulation of dramatic action, forms and performance styles and by using design elements(ACADRM050)
- Perform devised and scripted drama making deliberate artistic choices and shaping design elements to unify dramatic meaning for an audience(ACADRM051)
- Evaluate how the elements of drama, forms and performance styles in devised and scripted drama convey meaning and aesthetic effect (ACADRR052)
- Analyse a range of drama from contemporary and past times to explore differing viewpoints and enrich their drama making, starting with drama from Australia and including drama of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and consider drama in international contexts (ACADRR053)

## **Content Descriptions from the BOSTES Drama Syllabus Years 7-10 (2003)**

### **Stage 5**

#### **Making**

Outcome 5.1.1 A student manipulates the elements of drama to create belief, clarity and tension in character, role, situation and action.

Outcome 5.1.3 A student devises, interprets and enacts drama using scripted and unscripted material or text.

Outcome 5.1.4 A student explores, structures and refines ideas using drama forms, performance styles, dramatic techniques, theatrical conventions and technologies.

#### **Performing**

Outcome 5.2.1 A student applies acting and performance techniques expressively and collaboratively to communicate dramatic meaning.

Outcome 5.2.2 A student selects and uses performance spaces, theatre conventions and production elements appropriate to purpose and audience.

Outcome 5.2.3 A student employs a variety of dramatic forms, performance styles, dramatic techniques, theatrical conventions and technologies to create dramatic meaning.

#### **Appreciating**

Outcome 5.3.1 A student responds to, reflects on and evaluates elements of drama, dramatic forms, performance styles and dramatic techniques and theatrical conventions.

Outcome 5.3.2 A student analyses the contemporary and historical contexts of drama.

### **Stage 6**

#### **HSC Preliminary**

P1.1 Develops acting skills in order to adopt and sustain a variety of characters and roles

P1.2 Explores ideas and situations, expressing them imaginatively in dramatic form

P1.3 Demonstrates performance skills appropriate to a variety of styles and media

P1.4 Understands, manages and manipulates theatrical elements and elements of production, using them perceptively and creatively

P1.5 Demonstrates directorial and acting skills to communicate meaning through dramatic action

P2.2 Understands the contributions to a production of the playwright, director, dramaturg, designers, front-of-house staff, technical staff and producers

P2.3 Demonstrates directorial and acting skills to communicate meaning through dramatic action

P2.4 Performs effectively in a variety of styles using a range of appropriate performance techniques, theatrical and design elements and performance spaces

P2.6 Appreciates the variety of styles, structures and techniques that can be used in making and shaping a performance

P3.2 Understands the variety of influences that have impacted upon drama and theatre performance styles, structures and techniques

This is a complimentary resource to the documentary

IN THE COMPANY OF ACTORS, a Shark Island Productions film  
about the staging of *Hedda Gabler* by Sydney Theatre Company.

The schools edit of the film is available free online at:

**[www.inthecompanyofactors.com.au](http://www.inthecompanyofactors.com.au)**

Supported by Shark Island Productions and The Caledonia Foundation

**SHARK ISLAND**  
PRODUCTIONS

*The CALEDONIA*  
*Foundation*

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 Officer for the Sydney Theatre Company. You can contact Hannah on [hbrown@sydneytheatre.com.au](mailto:hbrown@sydneytheatre.com.au)

© 2015 Shark Island Productions Pty Ltd. Copyright protects this Education Resource.

Except for purposes permitted by the Copyright Act, reproduction by whatever means is prohibited.

However, limited photocopying for classroom use is permitted by educational institutions. All images copyright Shark Island Productions and can be viewed online at [www.inthecompanyofactors.com.au](http://www.inthecompanyofactors.com.au)

## SYNOPSIS

Act I gives a full picture of the Tesman household and illuminates all the main problems. Act II introduces the rivals, Lövborg and Brack, and Hedda's first attempt to play with destiny and thwart Mrs. Elvsted. Act III is given up to the story of the manuscript and ends with Hedda's triumph. Act IV springs the trap and undoes the triumph, forcing Hedda to accept her own counsel and use the second pistol.

Act I begins with Aunt Julle and the maid Berte applying the finishing touches to the Tesman's new house, Jorgen and Hedda Tesman have just returned from their honeymoon. Tesman has just been awarded a doctorate and is now known as Dr. Tesman. He is stuffy and scholarly and does not understand the questions his Aunt Julle asks about a baby. He had married on the strength of being awarded a professorship in the university. However, his appointment is in jeopardy because, as Judge Brack informs him, his rival Ejler Lövborg is competing for the post. Hedda is very cold, formal and rude with Aunt Julle, but she behaves in a very warm and cordial manner with Mrs. Thea Elvsted, who arrives uninvited, because she wants to extract information from her. She learns that Thea has taken the bold and daring step of leaving her husband and has followed Lövborg to town. Thea is afraid that with the success of his new book and money in his pockets, Lövborg will revert to his days of drinking. She asks Tesman to invite him to his house so that he will not fall into the wrong company.

In Act II, a series of encounters occur with the men in Hedda's life. Brack, an old friend, attempts to contract a "triangular friendship" with Hedda. It is through her interactions with him that the audience finds out that Hedda married in order to be secure, emotionally, financially, and socially. In this act Hedda's pistols come to the forefront as symbols of protection. She points them at Brack, foreshadowing his later attempt to seduce and extort her. Lövborg is also introduced in this act. He is a reformed character and has left his days of alcoholism behind him. Lövborg shares his excitement about his latest manuscript with Hedda and Tesman, and credits Thea with being a positive influence. He and Hedda had been close friends, but when the friendship threatened to develop into something more serious she broke it off, for she dreaded a scandal and was not ready for a sexual relationship. She sees Lövborg only in an idealised fashion and the newly reformed Lövborg does not conform to her romantic view of him. When Hedda sees that Mrs. Elvsted's influence over Lövborg is considerable, she sets out to destroy it. She betrays the secret Thea had confided in her, in order to break the trust between Lövborg and Thea. This results in Lövborg's defiant action of drinking and attending Brack's bachelor party. Hedda feels that she has liberated Lövborg and that, like Dionysus, he will return with "vine-leaves in his hair".

Although he is supposed to return that evening to accompany Thea home, Lövborg never shows up and the two women end up spending the evening together. By early morning neither Lövborg nor Tesman have returned so Hedda tells Thea to go upstairs and get some rest. After Thea goes upstairs, Tesman returns. He tells Hedda that he is envious of Lövborg because the manuscript he has written is brilliant. He also describes Lövborg's drunken behavior at the party and says that he was so drunk that he did not even notice he had

dropped the manuscript on his way home. Tesman had picked it up and brought it back with him. Tesman says he will return it when Lövborg has recovered from his drinking binge. Hedda takes the manuscript and says that she will give it to Lövborg later. In the meantime, news has arrived from Aunt Julle that Tesman's Aunt Rina is dying, and he leaves to attend her bedside.

Judge Brack enters the scene and gives Hedda the sordid details of Lövborg's excesses, saying that at present he is in the police station for assaulting an officer. After some time, Lövborg arrives at Hedda's house just as Thea is waking up. He tells her to go back to her husband because he is not going to write any more and that he has torn up the manuscript. Mrs. Elvsted accuses him of killing their 'child' and leaves. When left alone with Hedda, he confesses that he lost the manuscript during the previous night's debauchery and feels absolutely awful about it. He confesses that he would like to die. Hedda gives him one of her pistols and tells him to "do it beautifully." When she is left alone she burns the manuscript and declares, "Now I am burning your child, then! Your child and Ejlert Lövborg's."

When Jorgen Tesman returns, shocked by Aunt Rina's death, he asks Hedda for the manuscript. When Hedda tells him that she has destroyed it because Lövborg was his rival, he is distraught yet also thrilled at her loyalty. She also confesses that she is pregnant and his joy knows no bounds. He agrees to keep silent about the manuscript.

Mrs. Elvsted returns to Hedda wanting confirmation of the rumors going around that Lövborg was shot and is dying in the hospital. Brack shows up and confirms what Thea fears: Lövborg is dying from having shot himself in the chest. Hedda is thrilled that he has so courageously gone ahead and killed himself. Tesman regrets that fact that Lövborg died without bequeathing the world "the book that would have immortalised his name." Providentially, Mrs. Elvsted has the notes of the manuscript with her and she sits down with Tesman to reconstruct Lövborg's book. When Brack is left alone with Hedda, he tells her that Lövborg did not die voluntarily. Instead he was shot in the bowels, a humiliating and ignoble way to die, either accidentally or by a nightclub singer. The realisation dawns on Hedda that everything she touches turns "ludicrous and mean." Moreover, the pistol can be traced to her if Brack were to identify the pistol. Finding that she is completely in Brack's power, she commits suicide by shooting herself in the temple.

**NB: All text references from the script in the following resource are taken from the Andrew Upton adaptation unless otherwise stated.**

# CHARACTER ANALYSIS

## **Hedda Tesman *nee* Gabler**

Hedda is the wife of Jorgen Tesman and the wilful and steadfast daughter of the deceased General Gabler. Hedda is trapped in a neurosis caused by her frustration with a life that society has carved for her. Her character is a reminder of the individual's relationship with society and how we let go of our own needs for what is expected of us. This frustration exerts itself in insults and manipulation that aim to destroy others and ultimately destroy her.

Early productions of *Hedda Gabler* labelled Hedda as an evil and desperate woman who finds joy in her boredom by manipulating others. However, her character is much more complex than that and audiences now are more sensitive to her plight of being trapped in a conventional bourgeois world with little outlet for her intelligence or energy. This essentially is the tragedy of *Hedda Gabler*.

The title of the play is *Hedda Gabler* as opposed to Hedda Tesman. This shows that Hedda is her father's daughter and not her husband's wife. Hedda is a free spirit who does not want any responsibilities. This notion is echoed in the comments made by Aunt Juliana about Hedda riding with her father in a long black skirt with a feather in her hat. The shooting of her pistol for fun provides amusement and a small release for Hedda, while also portraying her carefree spirit and lust for excitement.

**(pg.31)**

**Brack:** (*Off stage*) Are you mad?

*Lights up on Hedda, she's in an afternoon gown.*

*The piano is out of the room. She's holding a smoking gun,*

*aimed out into the garden.*

**Hedda:** That's what comes of trying to get in the back way Judge.

*Brack is at the glass door by now. The pistol is still pointing at him.*

**Hedda:** Anyway/ Do come in.

**Brack:** Cut it out. Hedda.

Hedda admires and relishes the idea of adventure and wants to see and do things that women of her time are not permitted to do. She is curious about gaining an insight into the world of a man - "I wish I could slip into your pocket Judge Brack?" [...] I could listen in on you fellows. In your element. Away from all the politeness. (Simultaneous). Having such fun." (pg. 57) Hedda wants to see and do things that a woman of her time can't and is

obsessed with what is forbidden. Hedda has now entered life as an adult that is limited to a domestic setting. This is vastly different to the life she had with her father who permitted her into a man's world through shooting, riding and animated intellectual conversations.

Hedda occasionally finds herself in dark moods that are the result of her frustration and feelings of entrapment. Brack attributes Hedda's moods to unhappiness.

**(pg. 37)**

**Hedda:** I don't know. Something comes over me. I get this urge. And I just. Have to. I can't explain it. I can't, even to myself.

**Brack:** You're unhappy.

In certain ways Hedda perpetuates her own entrapment as she insists on keeping the windows closed and the curtains drawn. Inside her dark cage of captivity Hedda is a bird desperate for freedom.

### **Jorgen Tesman**

Jorgen Tesman is recently married to one of the most admired women in Norwegian society. He is eager to meet the luxurious tastes of his new wife and has bought a stately home that has been beautifully furnished. Jorgen has also taken Hedda on a six month overseas honeymoon in a bid to maintain her aristocratic standard of living. Jorgen's lavish spending was on the expectation of being appointed to a professorship as a university chair, however in the opening scenes of the play this position is made uncertain by Ejlert's published book and reinstatement into academic circles. It is later revealed that Ejlert has no intention of taking the position.

Jorgen is happy to live a quiet, unassuming life that conforms to the expectations of conventional society. This is seen in his excitement about Hedda's pregnancy – another requirement of traditional society. Jorgen loves Hedda and the social standing that comes with her. However, Hedda does not love Jorgen and is perhaps not capable of love at all as it would mean relinquishing a piece of herself to someone else. This is evidenced in the line "Love? Don't bandy that over-rated word around me. Love is how people sweeten obligation. It is a lie..." (pg. 31)

Jorgen has a strong relationship with his aunts, Julle and Rina, who have raised him since he was a boy. He is eager to please Aunt Julle and involve her in his new life with Hedda – much to Hedda's disgust.

Jorgen is a scholarly man who is engaged in research on the history of civilisation. He is expected to do well in academic circles, however he is more concerned with climbing the ladder and earning money than he is concerned about his honour. This is the opposite of what Hedda values as she believes one's honour and principles are of the utmost importance. Jorgen is preoccupied with his 'special subject' about civilisation that makes him quite rigid and unimaginative in the eyes of Hedda. The audience also see this when Jorgen

responds to Ejlert's new book astonished by someone's ability to think of such a topic, which Hedda is not surprised about. Further to this, Tesman writes about other peoples knowledge of civilisation, while Ejlert writes his own thoughts. This is illustrated in the final scene of the play where Jorgen and Thea sit together rewriting Ejlert's manuscript.

### **Judge Brack**

In order for Jorgen and Hedda's new house to be paid for, Judge Brack encouraged Aunt Julle to take out a mortgage on her and her sister's annuity so that she could stand as guarantor for all the furniture and carpets. Aunt Julle describes Judge Brack's help in saying – "Thank heavens for Judge Brack is all I can say. He organised brilliant terms for us on the loan..." (pg. 9) There is a sense that Judge Brack's arrangement was a gesture of his love and admiration of Hedda which becomes apparent across the course of the play. He is a pillar of society with great influence and of the same social class as Hedda. It is these qualities that make Judge Brack Hedda's greatest confidant and her greatest enemy in the end.

Judge Brack is calculating and underhanded which is symbolised through his constant entering through the back door of the Tesman home to sit and speak to Hedda. Knowing her boredom, Brack proposes that Hedda enter a three way friendship with himself and Jorgen - "...But of course the man in the house must not be alienated. It's a triangular relationship that I find works best." (pg. 34) In the end, Brack tries to manipulate Hedda into a relationship with him in return for silence over who owns the pistols that kills Ejlert. This increases Hedda's feelings of entrapment and in the end contributes to her suicide.

### **Thea Elvsted**

Thea began as a governess for the Elvsted children. When their mother passed away Thea married Mr. Elvsted and Ejlert Lövborg was employed as the children's tutor. She has been married for five years, but exclaims that the last three have been incredibly difficult. Thea and her husband are more than 20 years apart and she has reconciled the fact that they have nothing in common. When Ejlert resigned as the tutor and returned to town, Thea followed him. At the beginning of the play she appears at Hedda and Jorgen's house in desperation, needing a confidant in Hedda with whom she had attended school many years before. Hedda tricks Thea into believing they were friends to establish a false sense of trust and obtain information that she later uses against her. Thea has left her husband and step-children in a bid for self-fulfilment, which she finds in assisting Ejlert in writing and researching his manuscripts which she is immensely proud of. This sense of fulfilment and purpose is envied by Hedda, who at the end of the play burns the manuscript saying "Now. I burn your little child, Thea. With your lovely hair." (pg. 73)

### **Ejlert Lövborg**

Ejlert Lövborg has a reputation as a rebel who does not conform to conventional expectations of society. Ejlert previously worked alongside Jorgen but his penchant for alcohol had ruined his career. He has now reformed and re-entered society with the

publishing of his highly acclaimed book. Prior to General Gabler's death, Ejlert would come and sit in the general's office and talk to Hedda while her father worked. Hedda was taken by Ejlert's stories and intelligence and as time passed a flirtation between the two developed. When he tried to kiss her, she threatened to shoot him, as Hedda's fixation with Ejlert was not necessarily a romantic one, but rather a love of his intellectuality.

Hedda continues to find Ejlert captivating and is jealous of Thea's place in Ejlert's life and success. Driven by her jealousy and passion for freedom and beautiful acts, Hedda manipulates Ejlert into drinking and going out with Judge Brack and Jorgen for the evening, which eventually leads to his death.

### **Berte**

Berte is formally the maid to Aunt Julle and her sister Rina. Together with the aunts, Berte has helped raise Jorgen after his parents passed away. Berte is finding life with Hedda as her new mistress difficult as she is not used to the unconventional and high expectations of Hedda.

### **Aunt Juliana Tesman (Aunt Julle)**

Aunt Julle is Jorgen's elderly Aunt who, along with her sister Rina, raised Jorgen. Aunt Julle is excited about aristocratic Hedda being a part of the Tesman family and eager for Hedda to announce news of a pregnancy. When Aunt Julle pays the Tesman household a visit, Hedda insults her new hat in a deliberate act of manipulation to gain status. While Hedda and Tesman were on their honeymoon Aunt Julle and Judge Brack decorated and furnished the new house. This has left Hedda unable to express herself in her home. Jorgen has a strong allegiance to his Aunt and is eager to live up to her expectations and traditional notions of family and society.



*The Cast of Hedda Gabler with Director, Robyn Nevin, and Adaptor Andrew Upton at BAM*

# THEMES AND IDEAS

## Power and Control

Hedda has lost her power and control upon marrying Tesman. She attempts to regain this control through the manipulation of others. A common misunderstanding of this trait of Hedda's is that she is a wicked, meddling bored housewife. However, her manipulation of others goes deeper than that. She wishes to be the master of other people's destinies to counteract her own inability to master her own destiny.

Hedda is jealous that Thea now has control over Ejlert when she previously held the power with him. At the beginning of the play this is seen in Thea's line "I found I could...I had the power to calm him, keep him clear minded." (pg. 23) Hedda regains her control over him by first manipulating Thea and begins by establishing a false sense of trust with her. When Thea mentions how Hedda used to pull her hair at school, Hedda responds by calling it "school-girl silliness". Thea then divulges her deepest secrets and concerns to Hedda who coaxes her by saying:

**Hedda:** You're so worried.

*She gathers Thea to her, stroking her hair,*

*running her fingers from the scalp to the tips.*

**Hedda:** I'll do everything I can.

*Thea can't resist the affection and support, she softens into Hedda.*

**Hedda:** Poor, sweet Thea. There's not a lot for you is there?

At home? (pg. 21)

Hedda continues her manipulation of Thea by destroying the trust between Thea and Lövborg. Hedda does this by wrongly intimating in front of Ejlert that Thea was worried about his drinking. This then allows Hedda to manipulate Ejlert into being the man who would visit her father's study and she previously vicariously lived through – the man with "vine leaves in his hair". Thea's apparent distrust of Ejlert pushes him over the edge and causes him to have a drink. This marks the beginning of his drunken night of debauchery with Brack and Jorgen, which leads to him dropping his manuscript. Hedda's manipulation in Act II and her desire for control is summarised in her line "It's. A hobby I've taken up. Seeing what it's like to have control over someone's life." (pg. 58)

In Act III, Hedda's manipulation continues, but this time through her silence, rather than her words. She hides from both Thea and Ejlert the fact that she is in possession of the

manuscript. This causes Ejlert to lie to Thea saying he ripped it up which leaves her heartbroken and shocked at his carelessness for “killing their child.” When Ejlert admits to Hedda that he lost the manuscript he says that he cannot face rebuilding his life and reputation again, or his betrayal to Thea. Ejlert is Hedda’s victim and instead of giving him his manuscript she gives him the gun that kills him saying “And beautifully. Ejlert. Promise me that. My Hero.” (pg. 72)

Hedda’s guns, among other things represent her desire for control. When her father was still alive, Ejlert would come and visit Hedda in her father’s study. When Ejlert confessed his desire for Hedda she pointed a gun at him and threatened to shoot him. This shows Hedda’s desire to remain free and control her situation. Having previously belonged to her father, the guns are also a reminder of her past life in which she had more freedom. Hedda expresses her frustration about her situation by practicing shooting in the back garden. In the end, the only control Hedda has over her future is to live blackmailed or to take control by killing herself.

Hedda’s control also exerts itself through her idealism. Hedda’s idealism causes her to want to find beauty in everything. When Ejlert takes the gun Hedda tells him “...do it beautifully.” (pg. 72) When Hedda discovers that Ejlert has died under sordid circumstances she says “Oh Christ. Everything is so. Petty and dirty and little. Everything I touch is. Mean.” (pg. 87) Hedda wants the world to be attractive and romantic place and she places Ejlert at the centre of this world as her beautiful hero. When she shoots herself she dies alongside her beautiful hero Ejlert.

Ultimately, the character with the most control is Brack. Brack is a subtle and sly manipulator seen through actions like always entering through the back garden. Despite being on a high from controlling Ejlert’s apparently beautiful death, Hedda quickly falls prey to Brack, who attempts to control her, playing off her fear of scandal should the truth of who owns the gun become known. Hedda can’t bear the thought of being controlled by Brack and says “So. I’m. not free to (choose.) No. I can’t stand that. No. Never. I’d rather die.” (pg. 90)

### **Respectability**

There is an interesting paradox in the character of Hedda. On one hand she is averse to conforming to society’s conventional expectations of a woman in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, yet on the other hand she continues to be concerned about maintaining a certain level of respectability within Norwegian high society. When Hedda’s father died she was expected to marry and Jorgen was the only option in her age group. So, despite his dull nature, Hedda married Jorgen to maintain respectability. This is portrayed in the quote by Hedda - “But I was done with dances and flirtations. My time had come. (passed even...) (pg. 33)

Her eagerness to maintain respectability is portrayed at the beginning of the play when Jorgen tells Hedda that they will need to be more stringent with their money. Hedda replies

to this sarcastically by saying “I suppose the man servant is out of the question.” (pg. 23). This quote shows that Hedda’s status in society is important to her.

Respectability is fuelled by status and with status comes power. For controlling Hedda, power is everything, which is why the thought of scandalous gossip about her role in Ejlert’s missing manuscript is unbearable. Such gossip would leave Hedda powerless. Hedda’s slightly unconventional ways that are in public view make her endearing to others and in many ways provide her with a small thrill in an otherwise mundane existence. These things include riding on a horse with her father, greeting guests bare foot wearing a dressing gown, shooting pistols and even marrying a man who no-one expected her to. Hedda knows that she can have the freedom to do what she likes if it is small, controlled and within respectable boundaries.

The final line of the play is delivered by Brack: “but. People don’t...” (pg. 91). This line highlights the role that respectability not only had in Hedda’s suicide but also how it governs Norwegian high society.

### **Entrapment**

In the documentary, Andrew Upton talks about the emphasis of the original play being that Hedda is petrified by scandal which he believes “...just doesn’t hold that much water anymore.” Andrew goes on to say that he had to shift the weight from scandal, which he did still keep in there, to be a play much more about entrapment.

There are several aspects of Hedda’s life that contribute to her feelings of entrapment. Hedda herself knows she is trapped saying “there’s nowhere more isolating than the middle of someone else’s life” (pg. 31) The home in which *Hedda Gabler* is set highlights Hedda’s feelings of being trapped and evokes an atmosphere of claustrophobia. This is discussed more in the set design section of this resource.

### **Purpose and principles**

Hedda is stifled by her life as Mrs Tesman. At 29, Hedda chose to marry Jorgen for her stability and respectability in society. She is indifferent to her husband and finds his work mundane and unimaginative and his devotion to his aunt irritating. Despite having everything she seemingly asked for – a grand terrace house that is beautifully furnished and a six month luxurious honeymoon, two days after returning from her honeymoon she feels trapped and begins to destroy both herself and those around her.

Hedda’s feelings of being trapped are fuelled by her resistance to conform to society’s expectations of a woman in 19<sup>th</sup> century society. She is averse to the idea of being a wife, a mistress (as proposed by Brack) and mother, despite being pregnant. Defiant Hedda struggles to find purpose in her life. Hedda is resentful of Thea’s courage in leaving her husband to pursue her affair with Ejlert and the fulfilment she has found in writing his manuscript with him.

Brack senses Hedda's frustration with her lack of purpose in life and tells her "Purpose, Hedda. Or life soon becomes a chore." (pg. 38) He repeats this sentiment later in the play by saying, "Eventually one stops railing against the inevitable, and embraces it." (pg. 90) Hedda's reply indicates that she is a woman of principle and in the end she would rather die and maintain her principles than succumb to a life outside of what she wants and what she believes in. When Hedda first hears of Ejlert Lövborg's death she thinks that he has used the pistol to take his own life and says "No. Ejlert Lövborg has settled up and left. On his own terms. And courageously. Defiantly." [...] Lövborg had the courage to live life his own way. And to die as he chose. When he was ready." (pg. 85)

## **Scandal**

The fear of scandal is the final motivation Hedda needs to take her own life. Hedda is protective of her reputation, which is presented to the outside world through her morals and virtues. Towards the end of the play Hedda becomes cornered in a situation where either of her options will create a scandal. Both options are manipulated by Judge Brack who by this point, seemingly has complete power over Hedda and her future. On one hand Brack could expose Hedda as the owner of the gun, resulting in Hedda attending court and her involvement in Lövborg's death becoming public knowledge. On the other hand, Brack has offered to keep Hedda's secret in exchange for the triangular relationship between husband, wife and close friend as proposed by him at the beginning in the play. However, the idea of a forced affair with Brack would not only evoke a scandal for Hedda but also repulses her.

Hedda craves a greater purpose in life and a life less ordinary. Despite her low opinion of Thea Elvsted, Hedda admires her courage in leaving her husband for Lövborg. However, she is unable to leave her own husband because of the scandal it would provoke.

## **Feminism**

It is often said in articles about Ibsen and his work that he was a feminist writer. However Ibsen rejected this idea instead saying that he was interested in universal issues of human liberty and the pressures of living in an orthodox society. Ibsen believed that freedom was essential to self-fulfilment and was a pioneer of naturalist drama that examined social issues.

Hedda is used by Ibsen as an example of how women living in 19<sup>th</sup> century Norwegian society before a female revolution may feel. Hedda's feeling of entrapment is caused by the lack of freedom she has in being anything other than a wife and mother and doing anything other than what society deemed respectable.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, motherhood was the epitome of a woman's existence. However, Hedda is haunted by her pregnancy and is disgusted by the idea of motherhood as it further inhibits her chance of freedom and magnifies her feeling of entrapment. When Hedda takes her own life, she also takes that of her child. Through Hedda and her actions, Ibsen questions the

society in which the play is set. At the time of *Hedda Gabler*'s premiere, Hedda was one of the first characters on stage to voice an objection to motherhood. Further to this, there are no mothers featured in the play. Thea was a step-mother, however abandoned her family to follow Ejlert. Aunt Julie, Aunt Rina and Berte are all childless.

Ibsen was often criticised for the character of Thea as audiences believed that she sacrificed herself for men. However, Ibsen believed that Thea was an exemplary woman who carved her own path to self-fulfilment by helping Ejlert and then Jorgen with their manuscripts. In helping the men with their writing she found freedom and purpose – the very things that Hedda craved.

Although *Hedda Gabler* has feminist undertones, the play ultimately makes a statement about society of the time and the individual's relationship to this society.

**At the end of the play Hedda's resistance to her role as wife and mother in society, her absence of purpose, fear of scandal and Brack's control over her create the perfect crucible for her suicide – her freedom.**



Cate Blanchett (Hedda) and Hugo Weaving (Judge Brack) in *Hedda Gabler*

# THE ELEMENTS OF DRAMA

## CHARACTER

*Role and Character are two different elements. Role is one-dimensional and involves representing a point of view and identifying with a particular set of values and beliefs. Character is the complex personality and background of a character. A Character's complexity is portrayed through interaction and relationship with others and through voice and movement choices.*

### Think about:

- From watching snippets of scenes from the play, describe how Cate Blanchett's choices in voice and movement portray Hedda Gabler as a woman desperate for freedom.
- How is Hedda's high status over Aunt Julle portrayed?
- How would you describe the character of Jorgen Tesman by comparison to Ejlert Lövborg? How is this reflected in Anthony Weigh and Aden Young's voice, movement and costume?
- What is Judge Brack's super-objective in the play? Justify your opinion.

## TENSION

*Tension is the force that drives all drama and moves the Dramatic Action forward. Tension strengthens audience engagement as it motivates the audience to continue watching while influencing them to continue to question the ideas in the play.*

### Think about:

- Choose a pair of characters. E.g. Hedda and Tesman, Hedda and Thea, Hedda and Brack, Hedda and Ejlert or Hedda and Aunt Juliana. Describe the Tension of the relationship between the pair. How does this relationship tension contribute to Hedda's suicide?
- Hedda is battling a tension inside herself. What is this tension and why can't she resolve it?
- Pinpoint a moment in the play where the tension reaches a climax. Justify your answer.

## PLACE AND TIME

*All Dramatic Action occurs at a time and place. Different settings dictate other characters that might be introduced, certain settings will intensify the action, multiple locations can enable us to explore many aspects of the situation, while the use of contrasting settings can help to build the dramatic tension.*

**Think about:**

- The dramatic action of the play is all set in the drawing room and lounge room of the Tesman home. How does this highlight what Hedda is feeling?
- Outline how Hedda is limited by 19<sup>th</sup> century society.
- How does the set create the style of Naturalism?
- Hedda describes the house as having an 'odour of death.' How is this reflected in the set and lighting?

**SYMBOL**

*Symbols can help you understand and focus the drama and they can sum up the meaning of the performance, sometimes on a subconscious level. They can be expressed through the visual imagery of language, movement, gesture, objects, design and staging, helping to reinforce the meaning of the whole experience.*

**Think about:**

- Hedda cannot stand having light in the house and in the opening scene closes the curtains that have just been opened. What does this represent about Hedda's character?
- Research the significance of vine leaves worn by a mythological Greek character. How does this character relate to Hedda? Why?
- What is the pistol a symbol of? Why is it significant that the pistols once belonged to General Gabler?

**ATMOSPHERE**

*Atmosphere is the feeling or mood that is created by, and emerges through, Dramatic Action. Atmosphere and Mood are closely linked to Tension. As the tension builds so does the Atmosphere. The creation of an effective atmosphere fosters audience engagement.*

**Think about:**

- What atmosphere do you think the director would have been striving for in the final moments of the play? How has Robyn Nevin created this through her directorial choices?
- Across the course of the play, the lighting gradually grows darker. What atmosphere is created through lighting at the beginning of the play compared to the end of the play?
- What atmosphere is created by composer Alan John at the end of the play?
- Before her suicide, Hedda plays the piano. How does this assist in the creation of mood?

## STRUCTURE

*The structure is the framework through which the content of the drama is presented. Structural elements such as narrative and plot can shape or order the nature of how the dramatic message is communicated. Narrative: Drama is comprised of a narrative structure. The events in a narrative are not random, but linked by cause and effect. Plot lines: The plot line carries the dramatic action forward. Plot lines can be simple, complex or cyclic. They can be linear or non-linear. The plot line creates a dramatic framework for the narrative.*

### Think about:

- How does the linear plot line assist in the creation of tension?
- What causes Hedda to throw Ejlert's manuscript into the fire? What is the effect of this? What causes Ejlert to drink two glasses of punch? What is the effect of this?
- Name two events in the narrative that lead to Hedda giving Ejlert the gun.
- *Hedda Gabler* follows the traditional five act play structure of exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, denouement. Write down the moments in *Hedda Gabler* that align with this structure.

## LANGUAGE

*In drama, ideas, feelings and needs are expressed through verbal and non-verbal language. Dramatic action is enriched when vocal and physical dynamics are carefully used to reinforce and strengthen the language.*

### Think about:

- Find a line in the play that best portrays the characters of Hedda, Jorgen, Ejlert, Thea and Brack.
- What elements can be found in Upton's adaptation that makes the text more accessible to 21<sup>st</sup> century audiences?

## DRAMATIC MEANING

*Dramatic Meaning is created through the Elements of Drama that are interrelated and interdependent. Dramatic Meaning is what is communicated between the performers, the world of the play and the audience. Dramatic Meaning is always open to interpretation and there is never one set meaning in a production.*

### Think about:

- What Dramatic Meaning was Andrew Upton aiming for in his version of *Hedda Gabler*? How does this differ from Ibsen's original Dramatic Meaning?

- Look at each of the themes and ideas in the play. Write a sentence that best encapsulates each of the themes as a Dramatic Meaning.
- Think about the Dramatic Meaning that Hedda is waging a war inside her head. How do other Elements of Drama work towards making this Dramatic Meaning clear to the audience?

## DRAMATIC STYLE

### Naturalism

Realism was a modernist movement, initiated by Emile Zola with his novel, *Therese Raquin*. The aim of the realists was to reproduce events in the style of a historical/scientific document. The realists were influenced by scientific scholarship at the time e.g. Darwin.

Shakespeare sets the scene for Naturalism in *Hamlet* when he tells the First Player, “Suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature. For anything so o'erdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end both at the first, and now, was and is, to hold as ‘twere the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure.” (Act III, scene ii Lines 16-25)

There are nonetheless many features of realism evident in *Hedda Gabler*:

- Careful attention to detail in motivation of characters, costuming
- Setting and dialogue
- Individual and complex characterisations
- Exploration of rivalries between characters producing complications within the action
- Performance in period realism – even using as part of the stage design an enclosed stove instead of open fire, a labelled book for Lövborg’s treatise and authentic duelling pistols.
- Use of the fourth wall where the character’s speech is addressed to each other and the audience are flies on the wall

*This analysis of style is taken from the STC Hedda Gabler Teacher’s Resource Kit written by Jeffrey Dawson in 2004.*

*Dawson, J. (2004). Teachers’ Resource Kit – Hedda Gabler. Retrieved from:  
[http://inthecompanyoffactors.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/STC\\_Study\\_Guide.pdf](http://inthecompanyoffactors.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/STC_Study_Guide.pdf)*

### Modernism

Henrik Ibsen can be considered the founding father of Modernism. The Modernist style of theatre signalled a “radical break with the past and looked forward to a future discontinuous

with it." (Barranger, 2006, pg. 368) Modernist theatre depicted reality in which humans mirrored themselves, their relationships and the society and issues in which they lived. Many of the problems and ideas portrayed on stage were issues happening behind closed doors in society, issues that were otherwise ignored. Ibsen put these issues on the stage, forcing audiences to confront the real society in which they lived.

Through his plays Ibsen portrayed 'modern' ideas with 'modern' characters (like Hedda) who were opposed to what society expected of them. Ibsen successfully explored "society's mores and outgrown convictions." (Barranger, 2006, pg. 414)

### **Hedda Gabler – A tragedy?**

Can *Hedda Gabler* be considered a tragedy? Greek Tragedy contains certain conventions of the style which culminate in a tragic end for the hero or heroine of the story. These conventions were first classified by Aristotle who identified them as:

- A reversal of fortune
- The hero has a flaw in character which contributes to their downfall
- The hero has a revelation about their life and destiny
- Tragedies cause the audience to fear for and pity the downfall of the character

Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* does contain some of these characteristics. Hedda is a tragic heroine because she will only be free through death. Her change in fortune is gradual and the result of several events and circumstances. Firstly, her change in fortune occurs when she marries Tesman. Hedda was originally a member of the bourgeoisie, a high society General's daughter. However Tesman's research and reliance on an appointment as a professor means her high society lifestyle has been placed on hold, which leaves her in a situation where she is powerless. However, her downfall is her own doing through her mistakes. She marries Tesman because she thought she should and then she proceeds to manipulate people to benefit her own situation. When this manipulation does not go as planned her only escape is death. She sees the freedom and relief of suicide as beautiful. Her death is tragic but it is an act of self-renunciation. A rejection of her current situation as she is a free spirit who cannot be tamed or conform to what society wants her to be.

However, Hedda is a difficult character to sympathise with as her manipulation of others is selfish and portrays her as having bad character. Can Hedda be considered a villain or a victim? She is a villain because she is a manipulator who knowingly meddles with other people's lives by her own doing without considering the consequences of the person. Yet, Hedda is also a victim of the time as she is a woman born into a society where her capabilities are restricted to the roles of wife or mother.

Hedda's death is not a noble or heroic act as is the death of the hero in conventional tragedies. Her death is futile and small and of little consequence to the world outside the Tesman home. Her death only brings relief to herself and the psychological warfare playing out in her head. However, women and indeed audiences will pity Hedda because of her entrapment and desperation in a patriarchal society.

*This analysis of Tragedy was taken from the Theatre Hedda Gabler Teacher's Resource kit written by A. Truppi for the Hartford Stage.*

*Truppi, A. (2012) Study Guide – Hedda Gabler. Retrieved from:  
<http://issuu.com/hartfordstage/docs/studyguideheddagabler/1?e=5767488/6067018>*

# LEARNING EXPERIENCES

## ACTOR AND CHARACTER PREPARATION

### TRUTH

One element that *all* actors speak of finding is truth.

**Question One:** What is your definition of truth for a character? What things do you think an actor could do in order to find their truth for a character?

In order to think more deeply about truth creation on stage discuss as a class or in small groups the following quotes from the actors in *Hedda Gabler*.

*“David Mamet said there’s no such thing as character and I actually agree with him. [...] I’m different in each moment depending on what’s going on. Simply play each moment as honestly as you can and the audience then creates character in their mind.”* Anthony Weigh

**Question Two:** Read the above quote and discuss in groups. Do you agree with David Mamet and Anthony Weigh’s opinion? Is a character a subjective creation of our minds that is made by us watching and analysing? Does this mean that everyone’s idea of a certain character can be different? Go around the group and have each person discuss their idea of Hedda.

*“It’s not literature. It’s theatre. It’s a living, breathing thing that doesn’t have a static notion of the truth. [...] It’s what this ensemble, put on in this moment.”* Cate Blanchett.

**Question Three:** Read Cate Blanchett’s quote. She believes that the ensemble working together creates truth and that each production will therefore have a different truth based on what the ensemble brings to life along with the director and designers. Do you agree with Cate Blanchett? Justify your opinion with examples.

*“Often thought gets in the way of a particular truth with a character. [...] The doing of something [...] can help you to feel what that truth is in that particular moment.”* Hugo Weaving

**Question Four:** What is it about being up on your feet rather than reading through the script that helps in the creation of truth?

## CHARACTERISATION

There are many and varied approaches to character creation used by actors. Some actors use renowned methods taught in acting schools such as that of Stanislavski, Meyerhold or LeCoq. Other actors may not have a set method to character creation and simply find what works for them for that particular moment and play. Indeed, as Cate Blanchett points out, some actors are unaware of what exactly their method is and somehow there is power in that mystery.

Andrew Upton: You have a process and it's working.

Cate Blanchett: Can you tell me what it is?

Andrew Upton: No, you don't need to know. But you have it.

In response to this Cate says that "You feel the need to keep something hidden from yourself. 'Cause there is a magical quality, an ephemeral quality to what it is we do. If it is locked down and defined it can kill it."

**In the following activities Stanislavski's actor preparation will be explored. This is a more psychological and analytical approach to characterisation that is drawn from mining the text.**

Let's do an experiment – an experiment in truth. Our hypothesis is that "Stanislavski's approach to characterisation leads to the creation of truth on stage." While the following activities can be pulled out and used at will, they also exist as a thorough whole that are explored over a one or two week intense period of actor preparation with your students.

### Resources:

- *Hedda Gabler* script excerpt or any script excerpt from a play students are exploring in class.
- Notebook dedicated to this activity – similar to a log book
- Pen

### Activity One:

Read the scene through cold once and then get up and act it out in front of the class.

### Questions:

- What was the atmosphere of the scene? How did it feel?
- How would you describe the character's personalities?
- Was the voice and movement true to these personalities?
- Did you have a clear idea of what the characters wanted in the scene?

**Now we are going to explore Stanislavski's method of characterisation. Stanislavski devised and taught a comprehensive method or system of actor training that underpins most western approaches to actor training.**

### **Activity Two: Given Circumstances and the Six Fundamental Questions**

The Given Circumstances and the Six Fundamental Questions are a good place to start in gathering basic information about the character and world of the play to assist in more complex tasks later in the characterisation process.

Ask students to write down the Given Circumstances for your character in your chosen play.

#### **The Given Circumstances**

- The story of the play, this includes the narrative structure (linear, episodic etc.) and the plot lines.
- The facts, events, time and place of the dramatic action.
- The condition of life for the character
- The actors' interpretation – what draws you to the character? Use your imagination to write down your initial thoughts about the character
- The mise-en-scene
- Production details (if you have them) This includes costumes, set, lighting, props, effects

Now ask students to write down the answers to the Six Fundamental Questions. It is a good idea to answer these in the first person, as if the students were the character.

1. Who is my character?
2. When is the play set and when does the action of this scene take place?
3. Where is the play set and where does the action of this scene take place?
4. Why is this scene important in the play? Why is this scene important in my character's journey? Think about the plot – how does this scene move the action forward?
5. For what reason is your character doing what they are doing in this scene? (What do they want?)
6. How are they going about getting what they want?

### **Activity Three: Bits or Units**

A bit is the same as a unit. A unit is just a nicer way of saying it! Units are created when the script is broken down 'bit by bit' and divided into sections of text where the characters are dealing with the same idea, topic or discussion. These units will help unlock your character's objectives and eventually your movement and voice on stage.

- Ask students with their scene partner to decide on the units in their scene and mark where they begin and end with a line.

- Now ask students to name each unit of action according to your character – so the unit names will be different to their partner's. The name should give the essence of what the unit is about for the character and give the student a jump off point for acting in the unit. E.g. "Playing it safe" or "desperation" or "I've got you now"
- Ask students to share their unit names with their scene partner/s
- Now ask students to act out their scene, paying close attention to where their units start and end. Encourage students to use the names of their units as inspiration when acting.
- Reflect - Ask students the following questions: What difference do the named units make to your acting? How does acting out the scene now feel by comparison to the cold read? Why is this?

#### **Activity Four: Subtext**

Subtext is what the character means behind their lines –essentially, subtext is what the character is thinking inside their mind with every line they say; it is the inner-monologue of the character. For the purpose of this activity, we are going to focus on how vocal dynamics can portray subtext on stage. Pay careful attention to punctuation, which can give insight into the subtext.

#### **Voices in the head**

- Have students double the amount of people in their scene group. If they have two, they will now have four etc.
- For each character in the scene there is a person that stands next to them and after each line they will say out loud what the character is thinking – their subtext. The person who voices the subtext is almost like the voice in the head of the character.
- Have students draw up the following table in their notebook. Ask students to do the following: Write their character's line in one column, the meaning behind the line (the subtext) in the other column. Their subtext can be influenced by what was said in the above activity or something new. In the final column write the vocal dynamics they plan to use to portray this subtext. These include pitch, pace, pause, volume and tone.

<b>Line of dialogue</b>	<b>Subtext</b>	<b>Vocal Dynamics</b>

- Now have students act out their scenes.
- Reflect: How does subtext influence the creation of a scene on stage? What insight does it give to your character?

## **Activity Five: Objective and Super-objective**

The above activities have allowed students to gather a lot more information about their character in the world of the play.

- Ask students to go back and look at the names they gave to their units. Now decide what their character's objective is in the scene. The objective is what their character wants to achieve in the scene. Have students name this objective for their character in their scene. Make sure their objective is a verb. A verb being a doing word immediately gives the students inspiration to create movement in the space on stage – as Stanislavski says: “every objective must carry in itself the germ of action” because in order to achieve their objective they must carry out a series of actions.
- With each objective comes a counter-objective. The counter-objective is the obstacle that is preventing a character from achieving what they want in a scene. Ask students to write down their character's counter objective.
- A super-objective is what a character wants to achieve in the play as a whole. Ask students to write down their character's super-objective.

## **Activity Six: Please/No**

- Divide students into pairs, one person is person A and the other person B. Person A is a teenager who wants to go to a party. Person B is a parent who will not let them go. Person A can only say “please”, person B can only say “no”. Students act out this scenario, each trying to achieve their objectives.
- Perform a few pairs for the class.
- Reflect: How did the actors use voice to achieve what they wanted? How did the actors use movement or actions in the space to achieve what they want?
- Now complete the same activity using two characters from *Hedda Gabler* or your chosen play, in a moment that occurs in the play. Give each character an objective and one word to say. Act these out for the class and analyse how each character went about achieving their objective. E.g. Hedda and Ejlert when Hedda wants Ejlert to have an alcoholic drink. Hedda's objective is to push (verb) Ejlert into drinking in a rebellious and beautiful act that is true to himself. Ejlert's objective is to refuse Hedda. All Hedda can say is “drink” and all Ejlert can say is “never.”
- Act out scenes to the class.
- Reflect: How did the actors use voice to achieve what they wanted? How did the actors use movement or actions in the space to achieve what they want?
- Now have students perform their scenes thinking about their character's objective by concentrating on the actions and movement in the space that are created to try and achieve this objective.

- Reflect: How does your scene now feel by comparison to your cold run? What is different? How would you describe your character now?

### **Activity Seven: Magic If**

The ‘Magic If’ is one of Stanislavski’s most famous acting tools. ‘Magic If’ is created on the premise of “what would I do if....” I were in the situation my character is in? ‘Magic If’ is designed to help the actor connect with their character by relating the character’s situation with a situation in their own life. E.g. If you were playing Hedda the question might be “What would I do if I was married and I didn’t want to be?” or “What would I do if I was living a life that was far from my ideal life?” or “What would I do if I was having a baby and I didn’t want to?” It is most likely that no-one would have been in these exact situations. But they might have been in a situation where the same feelings were felt and this can be used to connect with the character and bring a sense of truth to the character.

For example, I have never been married and felt like I didn’t want to be, but I have experienced a time when I felt trapped and unable to escape. I would use this as inspiration for Hedda in my scene.

- Have students examine the scene and character that they are playing. Think about what their ‘Magic If’ would be. Ask students to write down a connection that they could draw from this ‘Magic If’.

### **Activity Eight: Performance**

In the past activities students have undergone a deep exploration of character and the psychology of their character. This has included the Given Circumstances, The Six Fundamental Questions, Units, Subtext, Object and Super-Objective and Magic If. By now students should have a strong understanding of their character, the world they inhabit and their inner-life. This type of psychological analysis can perhaps give way to a more truthful portrayal of character in the scene.

- Now ask students to perform their scenes in front of the class paying careful attention to everything they have learnt.
- Reflect: Ask the audience to think back to the cold reading right at the beginning of the task. How did the scene differ? What type of feeling does it have now by comparison to before? Describe the characters in the scene and justify your answer. Is there a sense of truth? How?

## More on Stanislavski

There is much more to the work of Stanislavski and his characterisation method. In the later part of his career, Stanislavski changed from a psychological approach to a more physical approach. The above exercises have not explored the physical or dramatic action on stage. For more Stanislavski exercises check out the following two texts that explain his acting tools and provide activities.

Benedetti, J. (2008). *Stanislavski and the Actor*. London: Methuen Drama.

Merlin, B. (2007). *The Complete Stanislavsky Toolkit*. Revised Edition. London: Nick Hern Books.



*Hugo Weaving in rehearsal for Hedda Gabler*

# DIRECTING AND REHEARSALS

A director has many responsibilities when directing a play and during the rehearsal period. The director during the rehearsal period has two main functions. Firstly, to guide the actors on their journey of exploring the world of the play. Secondly, to physically bring the play to life on stage with the actors for an eventual audience.



*Cate Blanchett, Aden Young, Andrew Upton, Robyn Nevin in rehearsal *Hedda Gabler**

Katie Mitchell, a prominent UK director, in her book *The Director's Craft* (2009) says “Rehearsals should allow the actors to build things step by step over time, gradually and slowly. The main skills required from the director are patience and long-term thinking. Even if you are rehearsing for only two weeks, the process should be one that evolves carefully and gently. It is like building a house in which different materials are laid down layer by layer from the foundations to the roof”(pg. 115).

## **Focus: Exploring the world of the play through improvisations in rehearsals**

### **Resources:**

- Notepad and pen
- A copy of *Hedda Gabler* or the play students are working on
- A scene from *Hedda Gabler* or the play students are working on

### **Activity One: Trigger Event**

**The trigger event of a play is the event that happens immediately before the action of the play begins that sets the proceeding action in motion.**

As a class, think about what the trigger event for the action of the play could have been. This is an event that is not directly mentioned in the play, but something that can be inferred. Brainstorm possible events on the board as a class. Divide students into groups and choose different trigger events to rehearse. Present these and then decide as a class the one trigger event that best suits the world of the play.

If using *Hedda Gabler* think about the following questions:

- What mood is Hedda in at the start of the play? How does it change across the course of the play?
- What mood is Tesman in?
- What pieces of information does Hedda give about where they have been and what they have been doing before Scene One begins?
- What other characters and places are mentioned?
- Knowing how the play ends, and the personalities of the different characters what is an event that could ‘tip’ Hedda over the edge and lead to the unfolding action of the play?

### **Activity Two: Events of the past**

Events of the past are events that happen according to the script. These events are alluded to but not shown. For example, in *Hedda Gabler*, we know that Ejlert Lövborg used to come and sit in Hedda’s father’s study and one day she threatened to shoot him. We also know that Jorgen and Ejlert used to work together. These are both examples of ‘events of the past’ scenes – scenes that are spoken about but the audience do not see.

Divide students into pairs. Ask students to think about a scene that is alluded to in the play but not seen. Have students create this scene and act it out in front of the class.

### **Activity Three: Immediate Circumstances**

The immediate circumstances are the events that happen in the 24 hours leading up to a scene. The events could be five minutes before the scene starts or 20 hours before the scene starts. They are essentially ‘filling in the gaps’ between the scenes.

Divide students up into groups and give each group a scene or a section of a scene from the play. Ask students to read through the chosen dialogue and discuss what the immediate circumstances could be. Give students time to rehearse the immediate circumstances scene.

Present to the class. Before students present, they must tell the class what happens in the scene they were given, what their immediate circumstances scene is about and why they think this scene happens.

#### **Activity Four: Everyday activities**

Everyday activities are activities that a character might do every day. They relate to the world of the play and the character. For example, Jorgen conducting research or Hedda cleaning her guns.

- Ask half the class to sit as an audience and the other half of the class to find their own space in the room and face the audience.
- Allocate the entire group a character from the play and an everyday activity.
- Ask the students to all perform this activity simultaneously. Paying particular attention to detail and small movements and gestures, encourage students to take their time.
- Ask the students who are watching to ensure they watch carefully.
- After four minutes stop the activity and ask the audience who performed the everyday activity particularly well and why? Who were they drawn to watch? Who performed the activity most like the character? What was it that they did exactly?
- Swap the audience and performers and have the performers act out a different everyday activity by a different character.

#### **Activity Five: An ensemble activity from the world of the play**

As a class it is a great idea to learn an activity or a game as a class in order to deepen the engagement with the world of the play, while building ensemble skills. This activity could be something that is literally done or referred to in the play. For example, in the world of the play the characters might play cards together. Or, the activity could be something that is symbolic of the world of the play, the tension and the atmosphere. For example, the designer of *Hedda Gabler* talks about the action being like a sweaty dance. Perhaps the actors could learn the tango or the waltz!

As a class, ask students to think of a game or activity that can be played? How does it relate to the world of the play?



*Hugo Weaving, Anthony Weigh in rehearsal Hedda Gabler*

### **Focus: Creating movement and action in the stage space - blocking in rehearsals**

#### **Resources:**

- A scene from the play

#### **Activity One: Tempo Rhythm**

Tempo rhythm of the character is created in conjunction with the units (see Characterisation section above) and is closely linked to a character's mood. This means that with every new unit, there is a new tempo rhythm. A tempo rhythm allows the inner life of the character to be externalised by the quality and pulse of their presentation. (Merlin, 2014) The tempo is how fast or slow the movement is performed and the rhythm is the pattern of the movement.

Ask students to focus on two units from a scene. If they have completed the Characterisation activities above, they will have already marked out two units.

- Ask students to decide what the tempo rhythms of their character's movements are in the chosen units. The tempo rhythms can be applied to a character's walk, gesture and when using props.
- Perform the chosen units for the class. What does concentrating on tempo rhythms do for a scene? What does it do in terms of characterisation?
- If there are scenes performed between the different *Hedda Gabler* characters, how does Hedda's tempo rhythm with her husband Jorgen Tesman differ from her tempo rhythm with Eljert Lövborg? What does this say about her inner life?

## **Activity Two: Bringing scenes to life physically**

“It is essential that actors are arranged on the stage so that the action, events and key story points are visible and well focused for the audience. This is a major part of your work as a director.” (Mitchell, 2009, pg. 178)

For the following activities allocate students into their scene groups. With each group there should be another student who will take on the role of the director. The director, together with the actors, will work to bring the scene to life on stage.

### **Key story points**

In the above quote, Mitchell talks about story points. These are the main turning points in a scene – the units, as discussed above in the characterisation section. For each unit in a scene ask the director to create a frozen image with the actors that depicts what that particular unit is about. Ask the director to find one line from a character within each unit that encapsulates what that unit is about. When the freeze frames are performed one character is to say the line out loud.

Perform these freeze frames for the class. These freeze frames should act as inspiration for creating action on stage in the next activities and clearly encompass the crux of each moment.

### **TACH**

With their same scene partners and director students are now going to block their movement in the stage space. The director is to take charge of the decisions and tell the actors where to move based on the TACH acronym.

**TACH** T-Towards A-Away C-Circling H-Holding.

All movement must be purposeful and have a reason behind it rather than movement for movement’s sake.

Practice a scene incorporating TACH and perform for the class.

### **Discuss:**

- What decisions were made by the director using TACH that were particularly effective in using the space?
- What choices were made using TACH that were true to the character’s objective in the scene?

### **MAGI**

With the same scenes, the director is now going to block the stage action. In previous activities students have explored their character’s objective and super-objective and this

should influence the movement on stage. Ask the students to share their objective in this scene with the director.

For the purpose of this activity the following acronym will govern how the action is created.

#### **MAGI** M-Movement A- Action G-Gesture I-Image

Movement refers to the use of the stage space, action refers to movement between characters or movement between characters and objects. Gesture is a non-verbal form of communication using hands or legs and image is the pose or stance of a character when they are standing still.

The director is to direct the scene according to the MAGI acronym. Rehearse the scene and perform for the class.

#### **Discuss:**

- What decisions using MAGI were made by the director that effectively portrayed the relationships between the characters in this scene?
- What decisions using MAGI were made by the director that portrayed the character's different personalities?
- What decisions using MAGI were made by the director that physically portrayed character subtext?

#### **Activity Three: Stop Think – Action is Reaction**

This exercise is taken from Augusto Boal's *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (Boal, 2006). All action on stage is reaction. This means that all movement on stage has a reason for why it occurs. This reason is linked to the character's objective in the scene, the subtext and their personality.

Ask each scene group to perform their scene. At any point during the scene an audience member can call out "Stop Think!" followed by the actor's name. This actor must then tell the audience why they have performed the movement they just did.

#### **Activity Four: Manipulating the Elements of Drama on stage**

It is also part of the director's role to ensure each moment is fulfilled to its dramatic potential, as each moment in a plot is an important part of the narrative structure. This entails manipulating the Elements of Drama, in particular Tension and Mood/Atmosphere.

## **Building Tension in a scene**

Tension in a scene drives Dramatic Action forward to the next plot point. Tension can be built, made more complex and resolved in different moments, scenes and overall across the course of the play. Tension can also be made explicit to the audience through voice and movement choices and with the assistance of production elements such as lighting and sound.

### **The Revelation of St. Theresa**

This game is another game from Boal's *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (Boal, 2006). This game is to be played simultaneously as a class. Students find a partner. Allocate Person A and Person B. Together the pair decide on the relationship of Person A and B e.g. boss and employee. Students are to start a conversation in their respective roles. After a few moments the teacher calls out "revelation one" and Person A must reveal something to Person B that compromises their relationship e.g. I have been stealing petty cash from the cash register. Students are to continue their conversations in reaction to this revelation. After a while, the teacher is to call out "revelation two" and Person B must reveal something that furthers the tension. e.g. I have maxed out the company credit card. The conversation is to continue until it is resolved.

Some of the scenes can be performed for the class.

#### **Discuss:**

- How was the tension established, made more complex and then resolved?
- What performance skills did the actors use that made the tension clear to the audience?

## **Manipulating tension through voice and movement**

Allocate students into groups of three. Using Figure One allocate each group a scenario from the world of the play – two students will be actors and the third student is the director. It is the role of the director to make voice and movement choices with the actors to establish the tension, make the tension more complex and resolve the tension. Think about voice modulation in terms of pitch, pace, pause, volume, tone and emphasis. Also consider proximity in the stage space.

### **Figure One**

Jorgen Tesman tells Hedda he has bought the stately home she told him she admired, however Hedda isn't particularly interested.	A moment alone between Hedda and Eljert Lövborg . Hedda tries to coax out of Eljert any exciting or unsavoury activities he may have been involved in prior to his new, clear life. However, Eljert is apprehensive to speak about the past.	Aunt Juliana approaches Hedda about the possibility of moving in after Aunt Rina's passing.
---	--	---

## **Building Mood/Atmosphere in a scene**

### **Soundscape**

Divide the class in half. Allocate one half of the class the mood of 'impending doom' and the other half of the class the mood of 'frustration'. As a group they must decide how they are going to communicate this mood using only sound – voice, music, sound-effects, body percussion and using objects in the space. Students can also use single words or phrases. When they perform these moods the audience are to sit on the floor with their eyes closed while the atmosphere is played out.

### **Discuss:**

- What sounds created the mood?
- Were there any words or phrases that were said that helped build the mood?

## **Manipulating Mood/Atmosphere through voice and movement**

Allocate students into groups of three. Using Figure Two allocate each group a scenario from the world of the play – two students will be actors and the third student is the director. It is the role of the director to make voice and movement choices with the actors to establish the

mood/atmosphere. Think about voice modulation in terms of pitch, pace, pause, volume, tone and emphasis.

### Figure Two

Mood/ Atmosphere: Awkward Tesman proposing to Hedda.	Mood/ Atmosphere: Agitated The first time Hedda met Aunt Juliana.	Mood/Atmosphere: Menacing Brack trying to convince Hedda that she should visit him in his chambers and help him work.
--	--	--

### More on directing and rehearsals:

Mitchell, K. (2009). *The Director's Craft – A Handbook for the Theatre*. London: Routledge.



*Cast of Hedda Gabler in Brooklyn*

# ADAPTATION

## TILT - THOUGHTS ON THE ADAPTATION OF *HEDDA GABLER* BY ANDREW UPTON

Unexpected, even these days. Modern still. This way Ibsen has of tilting the story and unbalancing the dynamics between the characters. The challenge of adapting the play lies in getting this... tiltedness. In this failed heroism. This failure of Heroism. The unsettling dissatisfaction we feel as audience at the cross purposes of the character's negotiations. At the cross purposes of the character's reality and their skewed ideal of themselves. Because in fiction, as in memory, the tendency is to smooth over or idealise. The tendency is to make sense. Sense in a vacuum, where everything fits into place. It's being there means it must have a place in the overall sense. The ideal sense. In my application to the adaptation I came to realise Ibsen's mastery of the separateness of people. That in an exchange Hedda may think something apparently similar to Judge Brack or Ejlert Lövborg - they may even seem to agree - and yet, what each has understood is profoundly different and consequently sets them on very different paths. It is from this conflict, the conflict of understanding, that the drama is born. The dogma for writers these days is 'tell the one story', but Ibsen can tell seven and thus create this enormous, constantly shifting work. The perception of what it is possible to create within the confines of theatrical Naturalism is often limited, something more akin to chamber music. A sonata of grievances, but this is not so for *Hedda Gabler*. In *Hedda Gabler*, Ibsen has composed a symphony of misunderstanding.

When writing a new version, adaptation or re-contextualisation of a classic text, it is the playwright's role to carefully arrange, trim, change and add language, rather like a composer creating a new arrangement of a song. Translations, adaptations and versions aren't simply about converting words, they are about conveying meaning. When a playwright sets out to do a version of a play they have a particular interpretation or vision of the play they wish to communicate. *Hedda Gabler* is often perceived as a play about a bored, menacing, aristocratic woman, however as discussed in the play analysis section, Hedda is an intricate and layered character.

For Andrew and *Hedda Gabler*, this interpretation is beautifully encapsulated in the quote by Plato at the beginning of the play that reads, "Only the dead have seen the end of war." Andrew has also included a new line said by Hedda that encapsulates the dramatic meaning of the play beautifully – "There's nowhere more isolating than the middle of someone else's life." (pg. 31)

### Discuss:

- What does the quote by Plato mean?
- How does it relate to Hedda and her motivation for her actions?
- How does Hedda's quote about being trapped relate to her situation?

## **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. Norwegian to English. This person generally 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. Some lines are removed, reshaped or added in.

Andrew Upton's *Hedda Gabler* is a new version of the Ibsen from the literal translation.

**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.

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?

### **Andrew Upton versions of classic plays**

Andrew Upton's career as a playwright has produced many versions and adaptations of classic plays such as *Uncle Vanya* by Anton Chekhov, *Children of the Sun* by Maxim Gorky, *Cyrano de Bergerac* by Edmond Rostand and most recently *The Present* after *Platanov* by Anton Chekhov to name a few.

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

- “Simultaneous” use of dialogue [...] to modernise the impact of the text, providing a freshness and a presence
- Missed phrases and sentences, lost words and sentences which provide unending intrigue
- A series of interchanges, with changes in mood states. For instance, Hedda is mischievous and wicked, dark and sombre. Yet the play is genuinely funny at times too.

*“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. STC has a policy of commissioning its own translations of the classics. Our adaptors start from a literal translation of the play that we supply them with.” Robyn Nevin*

**Activity One:**

In small groups read the following scene from the Methuen Drama edition of *Hedda Gabler* translated by Michael Meyer and the same scene from Andrew Upton's version of *Hedda Gabler*.

On a piece of butcher's paper, compare and contrast the two scenes using the following questions:

- Why is this scene important in the play?
- What is the overall mood of the Methuen version by comparison to Andrew Upton's version?
- Is one version more affective than another in terms of mood? Why?
- What words have been added/deleted? What effect does this have?
- What effect does the addition of Upton trademarks have on this particular moment in the play?
- Do any changes made by Andrew Upton give greater insight into the characters or world of the play?

---

**Pg. 55-56 of Andrew Upton's version of *Hedda Gabler***

**Hedda:** I worry about it. The look of contempt on a friend – Judge Brack's face. When you didn't dare to join them for a toast.

**Ejlert:** I had more important (Simultaneous) things to (talk about)...

**Hedda:** (Simultaneous) And then the look of. Pity. I would say. Pity, when you shoved your tail between your legs at the idea of joining his soiree. Like a little doggy.

**Ejlert:** Is that what you think?

**Hedda:** It's what I think Judge Brack thinks. And he's a friend. God knows what other people think.

But I suppose it doesn't matter what people think.

**Ejlert:** It can't.

**Hedda:** So steadfast. See Thea? You had no reason to be all in a tizzy this morning. It seems to me your all-new (simultaneous) Ejlert Lovborg has passed the test.

**Thea:** (Simultaneous) Hedda. Hedda, Hedda.

**Ejlert:** Your what? What's this?

**Hedda:** We hadn't seen each other for years and she comes rushing in all a-twitter with anxiety that you'd. Well. But you hadn't. and I knew you were better than that. I tried to say, Thea. But she insisted I see you.

*Thea is mortified and verging on tears.*

Anyway. It's an ill wind, blows no good. We're all three of us together –

**Ejlert:** What did you think?

**Thea:** I didn't Ejlert, I (Simultaneous 1) never did.

**Hedda:** Simultaneous 1) Careful Thea. Judge Brack (Simultaneous 2) is watching you.

**Ejlert:** (Simultaneous 3) No Ejlert I didn't. Please. (Simultaneous 4) Hedda, Ejlert Please. Hedda.

**Hedda:** (Simultaneous 4) What are you doing? He's watching you can't you see (Simultaneous 5) He's watching you.

**Thea.** Please. What are you? Thea. Now. Really.

(Simultaneous 5) What did you think?

**Thea:** (Simultaneous 5) Oh. Ejlert. No. Please don't. No Hedda please stop him. Ejlert No, anything, anything, anything.

**Ejlert:** This? *He grabs the punch and downs it in one.* This? You stupid. *Thea is wracked. He takes up the other.*

**Hedda:** That was (mine) - *He drinks it.* Never mind. Cheers.

---

**Pg. 59-60 Michael Meyer's translation of *Hedda Gabler* edited by David Thomas. Published by Methuen Drama (2002).**

**Hedda:** Or perhaps I should say for other people's sake.

**Loeborg:** What do you mean?

**Hedda:** People might think you didn't feel absolutely unashamedly sure of yourself. In your heart of hearts.

**Mrs Elvsted:** (*quietly*) Oh, Hedda no!

**Loeborg:** People can think what they like. For the present.

**Mrs Elvsted:** (*happily*) Yes, that's true.

**Hedda:** I saw it so clearly in Judge Brack a few minutes ago.

**Loeborg:** Oh. What did you see?

**Hedda:** He smiled so scornfully when he saw you were afraid to go in there and drink with them.

**Loeborg:** Afraid! I wanted to stay here and talk to you.

**Mrs Elvsted:** That was only natural, Hedda.

**Hedda:** But the Judge wasn't to know that. I saw him wink at Tesman when you showed you didn't dare to join their wretched little party.

**Loeborg:** Didn't dare! Are you saying I didn't dare?

**Hedda:** I'm not saying so. But that was what Judge Brack thought.

**Loeborg:** Well, let him.

**Hedda:** You're not going, then?

**Loeborg:** I'm staying here with you and Thea.

**Mrs Elvsted:** Yes, Hedda, of course he is.

**Hedda:** (*smiles, and nods approvingly to Loeborg*) Firm as a rock! A man of principle! That's how a man should be! (*Turns to Mrs Elvsted and strokes her cheek.*) Didn't I tell you so this morning when you came here in such a panic - ?

**Loeborg:** (*starts*) Panic?

**Mrs Elvsted:** (*frightened*) Hedda! But – Hedda!

**Hedda:** Well, now you can see you yourself. There's no earthly need for you to get scared to death just because – (*Stops.*) Well! Let's all three cheer up and enjoy ourselves.

**Loeborg:** Mrs Tesman, would you mind explaining to me what this is all about?

**Mrs Elvsted:** Oh, my God, my God, Hedda, what are you saying? What are you doing?

**Hedda:** Keep calm. That horrid Judge has his eye on you.

**Loeborg:** Scared to death, were you? For my sake?

**Mrs Elvsted:** (*quietly, trembling*) Oh, Hedda! You've make me so unhappy!

**Loeborg:** (*looks coldly at her for a moment. His face is distorted*) So that was how much you trusted me.

**Mrs Elvsted:** Eilert dear, please listen to me –

**Loeborg:** (takes one of the glasses of punch, raises it and says quietly, hoarsely) Skoal, Thea!

*He empties the glass, put it down and picks up one of the others.*

**Mrs Elvsted:** (quietly) Hedda, Hedda! Why did you want this to happen?

**Hedda:** I – Want it? Are you mad?

**Loeborg:** Skoal to you, too, Mrs Tesman. Thanks for telling me the truth. Here's to the truth!

*He empties his glass and refills it.*

---

### **Activity Two:**

Written above are the 'trademarks' of an Andrew Upton translation. Allocate students into pairs and ask them to write a new version of the below piece of script from the Michael Meyer translation using language like Andrew Upton. In this moment of the play, the characters find out about what they believe to be Loeborg's attempted suicide.

In writing their new version have students 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.

**Pg. 94 of Michael Meyer's translation of *Hedda Gabler* edited by David Thomas.**

**Published by Methuen Drama (2002).**

**Mrs Elvsted:** (ignoring her) I must see him! I must see him before he dies!

**Brack:** It's no use, Mrs Elvsted. No one's allowed to see him now.

**Mrs Elvsted:** But what's happened to him? You must tell me!

**Tesman:** He hasn't tried to do anything to himself? What?

**Hedda:** Yes, he has. I'm sure of it.

**Tesman:** Hedda, how can you - ?

**Brack:** (who has not taken his eye from her) I'm afraid you've guessed correctly Mrs Tesman.

**Mrs Elvsted:** How dreadful!

**Tesman:** Attempted suicide! Fancy that!

**Hedda:** Shot himself!

**Brack:** Right again, Mrs Tesman.

**Mrs Elvsted:** (*tries to compose herself*) When did this happen, Judge Brack?

**Brack:** This afternoon. Between three and four.

**Tesman:** But, good heavens – where? what?

**Brack:** (*a little hesitantly*) Where? Why, my dear chap, in his rooms, of course.

**Mrs Elvsted:** No, that's impossible. I was there soon after six.

**Brack:** Well, it must have been somewhere else, then. I don't know exactly. I only know that they found him. He's shot himself – through the breast.

**Mrs Elvsted:** Oh, how horrible! That he should end like that!

**Hedda:** (*to Brack*) Through the breast, you said?

**Brack:** That is what **I** said.

**Hedda:** Not through the head?

**Brack:** Through the breast, Mrs Tesman.

**Hedda:** The breast. Yes; yes. That's good, too.

**Brack:** Why, Mrs Tesman?

**Hedda:** Oh – no, I didn't mean anything.

**Tesman:** And the wound's dangerous, you say? What?

**Brack:** Mortal. He's probably already dead.

**Mrs Elvsted:** Yes, yes – I feel it! It's all over. All over. Oh Hedda - !

**Tesman:** But, tell me, how did you manage to learn all this?

**Brack:** (*curtly*) From the police. I spoke to one of them.

**Hedda:** (*loudly, clearly*) Thank God! At last!

**Tesman:** (*appalled*) For God's sake, Hedda, what are you saying?

**Hedda:** I'm saying there's beauty in what he has done.

# PRODUCTION PROCESS

## **The Process**

At Sydney Theatre Company a play is programmed over a year before it's opening night. In the year prior a carefully time lined process unfolds that allows the play and the Dramatic Meaning to be crafted in detail with a team of STC staff and creatives.

### **1. Programming, assigning a creative team**

Before a play is programmed in a Sydney Theatre Company season many elements are considered. The program as a whole needs to be diverse and include Australian work, classics, new plays, translations/adaptations and international plays. The potential cast size and a variance in styles also needs to be considered. A season must include comedies, tragedies, dramas and family shows.

In the decision process big questions are asked of this play such as: Why is this play important for today's audiences? What is exciting about this play? What theatre should the play perform in? And what director, designers and cast can be involved?

### **2. Director and Designer Collaboration**

Approximately six to eight months prior to opening night, the director and designers begin collaborating on the set and costume ideas. The director, having researched their directorial vision and dramatic meaning for the play, shares their vision with the designer whose job it is to visually bring the world of the play to life.

### **3. White Card Presentation**

Six months prior to opening night the initial set and costume ideas from the designers and director are shared with the Artistic Director of STC and other executives and creatives. The White Card presentation is literally a basic model of the set made out of white cardboard. The purpose of the white card presentation is for the designer and director to firstly reveal their design vision, and secondly share all the pieces of set, costumes, props, special effects and mechanics they desire to use. Suggestions are made by others in the room.

Following the white card presentation the vision is discussed and the production manager assesses the budget requirements and the skills, time and staff required in bringing the design to fruition. Occasionally, changes are made to the design to meet the budget or skills/capacity of the production team.

### **4. Design Presentation**

At the design presentation a large group of STC creatives, production crew and staff gather to view the set model box and the costume sketches. During this meeting the designer talks

through their vision and their choices for the production. The design presentation usually happens three months prior to opening night.

## **5. Set build, prop creation and costume sewing**

Generally the production process, including the set build, prop creation and costume sewing, begins six weeks prior to opening night. Most STC productions have a four to six week lead time as the entire season program consists of on average 14 plays that run back to back all year long. A six week timeline allows for the production teams to complete the entire creation of sets, props and costumes before moving on to the next play. Generally one play is worked on by all teams simultaneously under the one roof at The Wharf allowing a true feeling of collaboration in the company. When the play finally opens it is a proud moment for the company as a whole.

## **6. Rehearsals**

While the sets, props and costumes are being made rehearsals are also taking place. Generally plays rehearse for four to six weeks prior to opening night. Actors are expected to rehearse Monday to Friday from 10am – 6pm.

## **7. Bump In**

When the set is completed it is ‘bumped in’ to the theatre. This process involves dismantling the set into pieces and re-constructing it inside the theatre. A set is rather like Lego that can be pulled apart and put back together. When drawing the draft for the set, careful consideration is given to the doorways and tunnels the set must fit through in order to bump in to the theatre.

## **8. Production Week - Technical rehearsals, dress rehearsals**

Two weeks prior to opening night a technical rehearsal with lighting, costumes, props and sound occurs. Once technical rehearsals are complete, dress rehearsals commence.

## **9. Previews**

One week prior to opening night preview performances are held. Generally a show has four preview performances. These are ticketed performances for the general public, just like other shows. The week is used to allow the actors and director to continuing fine-tuning the show and gauge the audience’s reactions to the production. Previews are open to journalists and media who come to review the show.

## **10. Opening Night and Season**

Opening Night happens one week after the first preview. It is a special evening not open to the public. Special guests are invited and the play, cast and creatives celebrate their achievements. Opening night is usually followed by a six week run of a show. Each week consists of eight performances a week including two on Wednesdays and two on Saturdays.

No performances occur on Sundays. Sometimes smaller shows run for a shorter season of two to three weeks.

## **11. Bump Out**

The day after closing night the set is dismantled from inside the theatre in what is called 'bump out.' Due to storage space restrictions sets are unable to be kept. STC's commitment to sustainability through the 'Greening the Wharf' initiative means that the wood from sets is recycled or reused in the creation of new sets or samples. Props and costumes are often given a second life and used during rehearsal periods. Theatre is an impermanent art form, so the reuse of production elements is a small way for a play to live on and have another life.

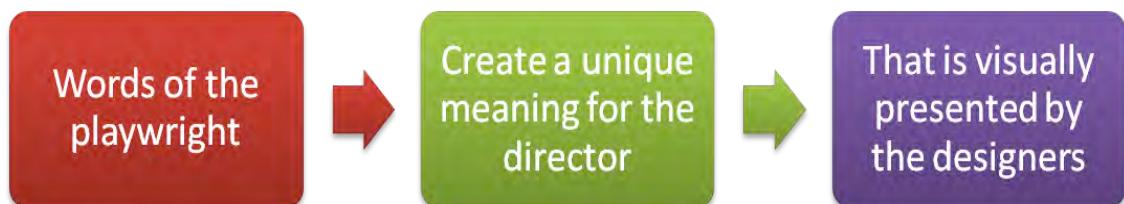


*Rehearsal, Construction, Performance*

# DESIGNING

## SET, COSTUMES, LIGHTING AND SOUND

A design vision is dependent upon the Dramatic Meaning the director wishes to communicate to the audience and this meaning is derived from the text written by the playwright. Designer Stephen Curtis in his book *Staging Ideas* (2013) says that designing "is based on *interpretation* (translating the words and ideas of the production to the stage), *collaboration* (working closely together) and *experimentation* (systematic trial and error)" (Curtis, 2013, pg. 2).



The design of a show must do the following things:

- Communicate basic information like who, what, when, where and why?
- Help tell the story
- Help motivate and shape action on stage
- Give the production a tangible style
- Direct audience focus
- Communicate themes and ideas
- Keep the audience engaged
- Build an atmosphere/mood
- Create the world of the play
- Reveal information about the characters

(Curtis, 2013)

The following activities can be used in helping students create their own designs for *Hedda Gabler* or a play of their choice. This step-by-step process begins with formulating an overall design vision. If students are studying *Hedda Gabler*, encourage them to read the play analysis section before proceeding.

It should be noted that this is a short approach to a design vision. For a more detailed and lengthier approach read *Staging Ideas* by Stephen Curtis (2013). Note also that many of these steps happen concurrently, they are not linear.

### **STEP ONE: Design Vision based on the play**

**Activity One:** Read the play script or script excerpt that is being designed. Brainstorm on a piece of paper the following things:

- When and where is the play set?
- What knowledge do you have of this time and place in terms of social and political climate?
- What detail is given by the playwright about what the set looks like? Place, entries, exits, furniture etc.
- What actions do characters have that might dictate set elements?
- What do the characters say about the set in the play?
- What mood/atmosphere does the script evoke?
- What themes and ideas are present in the script?
- What symbols layer the dramatic meaning of the play?
- Are there any specific lines that can act as inspiration?
- Are you going to maintain the context (place and time) of the play or re-contextualise the play into a new time and place? E.g. 1920's outback Australia

**Activity Two:** Now ask students to write one to two sentences of what their vision aims to communicate to the audience. Fiona Crombie talks about her set vision being derived from Hedda's line "There's nowhere more isolating than the middle of someone else's life." (pg. 31) This was a line that Andrew Upton wrote in to his new version of the play. This inspired Fiona to create her set like a bird cage, where Hedda was a bird trapped inside the cage.

### **STEP TWO: Set**

**The following is an interview with Fiona Crombie about the creation of her set design for *Hedda Gabler*.**

#### **CAGING THE EAGLE**

**Outline the set design for *Hedda Gabler*.**

The play is set in Hedda's house, just after she and her husband have returned from their honeymoon. So I was very conscious of creating a setting but not a home. It is an unclaimed space because they have just arrived. Henrik Ibsen is very specific about the set so that needs to be addressed. With this design the exterior has become really important. That is a

large part of the look of the space, all these windows and a world that you can't quite see outside. Making rooms private and then opening them up allows the space to be quite versatile. It can go from an intimate space to a vast space.

### **What has influenced your design?**

My initial impulse had a lot to do with creating a beautiful cage. There is this entrapment that Hedda feels through society and her choices and all manner of things. Andrew Upton (the adaptor) said there is a beautiful formality to *Hedda Gabler*. That was important to me, to find an elegant formality in the look of the room. This room is so heavily described, not only in the layout of the space but also in the writing. Hedda says she hates the house and everyone else is in love with it. You have to find a way to address all those things so the audience can see it can be both of these contradictory responses.

### **How much did the original text inform your design?**

I read various different adaptations and then connected each. More poetic things affected me as well. The concept mainly came through talking to Robyn Nevin (director) and my instincts. We haven't really been too concerned about exactly what architecture was like in Norway in 1890 – I have looked at only a little of that. We would not be able to achieve what we are going for if we got caught up in that kind of realism.

### **What is it like designing the set and not the costumes?**

This is the first time I have been the set designer and not the costume designer. Kristian Fredrikson, the costume designer, doesn't colour his costumes until he has started the process, until they start buying. So he sits back and waits for the set designer to resolve the colour issue, which means that he is really sympathetic to the set and the palette of the set. The thing with being a set designer is that you are involved with the whole conceptual world of the play. In my work as a costume designer I have been involved towards the end of a process where the set designer and the director have gone through this entire journey together and then I tag on and have my little abbreviated journey. So it's been great to be in it from the beginning.

### **What elements of the play is the design highlighting?**

It highlights the societal limitations of the times. Hedda never actually goes anywhere during the play. For someone who has so much drive and spirit she is really aware of what can and can't be done. She is very socially aware and of appearing to be the right kind of person. What's happening outside is this intangible thing, this other side of the glass that she never gets to. There is also a real austerity to this space. It's not a lived in space – it should never feel like they have made themselves at home because they haven't. It is a cold room.

### **What are the attractions of designing a classic play like *Hedda Gabler*?**

The attraction is that it's such a proven great work. It is so involved and rich and has already been honed and refined. Some people might say, "Well the set has to be a room and it is already defined" but the way I like to work is to find the intricacies and the details. You can find so much that can exist within those constraints. That is one of the most fascinating

things about designing. It's also about working out the psychology of the space and what you can say by having windows, curtains, chairs and doors and how you can underscore things in the play without overstating it and giving the game away. It's about supporting the text.

### **When the audience walks into the space what do you hope will happen?**

I would rather they not notice the set because it works so well than walk in and go "Wow that is the most beautiful set and it completely stole the show", but I am not in much danger of that happening! The set has to function and I don't want the audience to think, "What are they doing? Why is that there?" I would rather it just feel absolutely natural because the thing is, it is not completely natural. We have constructed it in a way that serves our needs in terms of space and in terms of an aesthetic. I want them to go, "Yep that makes perfect sense and now lets get on with the show".

*Reference: Laura Scrivano, "Caging the Eagle: Interview with STC's Resident Designer Fiona Crombie about her inspiration for her elegant design - transforming Wharf 1 into the world of **Hedda Gabler** - from STC'S subscriber publication, **Currents**, Vol. 22 No. 2 May 2004*



*The Hedda Gabler set in place at the Harvey Theatre, BAM*

### **Activity Three:**

Ask students to think about the set of the play as a living, breathing character and answer the following questions.

- If the place where the play is set could talk, what would it say about the situation of the play and the dramatic action?
- What has the set seen and heard?
- How would you describe the personality of the set based on the stage directions?
- What type of design choices would reflect the personality of the house?

#### **Activity Four:**

- Conduct research using books, magazines and the internet to create a stockpile of images of what the set could incorporate.
- Cut out or print these images and glue them on a large piece of paper to create an inspiration board. Words can also be written on the inspiration board that allude to the mood/atmosphere created by your vision.
- Ask students in their pairs to create a poster for the production. This can be hand drawn or created on the computer using images from the internet. The purpose of this task is to encapsulate their design in one poignant image.
- Now ask students to hand draw one set sketch for their production on a piece of A3 paper.
- Once the sketch is complete, ask students to annotate the sketch by labelling different aspects of their design. The annotation of each aspect of the design must be accompanied by two to three sentences of justification of how the design aspect relates to the design vision.

#### **STEP THREE: Costume**

Ask students to choose one character from the play or scene and design two costumes using the following activities:

#### **Activity Five:**

- Describe the personality of the chosen character.
- What is the social status of the character and their status in the world of the play?
- What animal would best describe the character and why?
- What symbols are associated with this character according to the play text?
- What colours, textures and lines symbolise the personality of the character?
- How does the character change over the course of the play and why?

#### **Activity Six:**

- Thinking about the answers to the above questions, ask students to draw two costumes for their chosen character. One for the beginning of the play and one for the end of the play.
- Label the different aspects of the design with details about colour, texture and detail.
- Justify each decision with one to two sentences about how the choice relates to the character.

#### **STEP FOUR: Lighting**

Read the following information about the lighting of *Hedda Gabler* by Nick Schlieper.

The action of the play is contained within a 36 hour time span. The time is early September, 1890. The play opens with “*watery morning light filling the drawing room*,” after Aunt

Juliana draws open the heavy curtains on the garden doors. Act Three opens with Tesman *scrupulously* closing the curtains that give onto the garden. A *quick shaft of soft morning light behind him*. There is also *a lamp smoking on a table by the couch. Soon grey daylight pours in* when Hedda throws the curtains open again.

Reference: Jeni Porter, *Sauce column in The Sydney Morning Herald Weekend Edition, 31 July-August 1 2004*

Given *Hedda Gabler*'s theme of darkness and light, it's fitting that the production, with the headline Hedda – our Cate Blanchett – is so dark. Literally. Shand said they did something similar for a Barrie Kosky production of *Oedipus* four years ago. The darkness creates the opportunity for some David Copperfield-like magic. After Blanchett's Hedda demands that a piano be moved from the drawing room to her study, the upright piano which was sitting at the right hand back of a stage cluttered with several chaise longues, miraculously appears stage left in the next scene where Blanchett appears to play it.

Reference: Kristen Anderson and Imogen Ross, *Performance Design in Australia, Craftsman House Sydney 2001* p.70

Schlieper describes the "dramaturgical function" of lighting in performance, using light and shadow to "underscore" an apparently solid world: "I think you (as a lighting designer) have an enormous influence on the emotional climate on stage. The word 'atmosphere' is always bandied around a lot when talking about lighting. It goes way beyond those obvious things of dark and bright, gloomy or not gloomy. You can underscore so much and sometimes you do the very reverse – you juxtapose – an emotional climate, an emotional atmosphere. And it needn't be one that's obvious at all on the surface to an audience. Indeed, it is better when it is not."

### **Activity Seven:**

"Because light is the final visual component to be added to the production it might be tempting to think of light as 'just the final brush-strokes that complete the stage picture.' Think again!" (Curtis, 2013, pg. 179) Light, like the set and costumes is an important part of the design concept as pointed out by Curtis. Below is a list of the different functions of a lighting design:

1. Aid in the creation of place
2. Portray time and the passing of time
3. Emphasise the Dramatic Meaning of the play
4. Create mood/atmosphere
5. Help build the tension
6. Direct the audience's attention through focus

- Ask students to think about their chosen scene and describe the atmosphere/mood of this scene.

- How can lighting be used to communicate this? Think about colour, intensity and sharp or soft edges.
- When the lighting changes how will the fade occur? Will it be a snap or a slow fade? How does the change communicate meaning or the atmosphere/mood of the unfolding action?

### **Activity Eight:**

- Allocate students into groups of six. Ask students to choose three pivotal moments from one person's chosen scene or play and create freeze frames of these moments in groups of five. Students who are not playing characters are to play inanimate objects in these scenes. The person whose scene it is will act as the lighting designer.
- Each group must think of a way to morph or transition from one freeze frame to the next.
- The student playing the lighting designer is to look at the freeze frame and decide how it will be lit based on the moment in the play. What will the purpose of the lighting be? To portray place, time? Or atmosphere/mood? Encourage the student lighting designer to think about how colour, texture, intensity, sharp or soft edges will communicate their meaning.
- The student lighting designer is also to think about how the fades will occur.
- When the freeze frames are performed to the class, the image is to remain frozen while the designer tells the audience about their decisions. When the freeze frame morphs into the next they are to describe the type of lighting transition.

### **STEP FIVE: Sound**

**Read the following information about Alan John's music composition for the production of *Hedda Gabler*.**

"The music is connected to Hedda's secret (and suppressed) state of mind and to the world of her father (a 'warrior' but ironically of the armchair variety - another repressed and insufferable hothead one presumes). It's wild, scary and on an epic scale that's impossibly (pathetically?) at odds with the mean little world of the play. The orchestral palate and musical imagery is that of the battlefield or the duelling field - in the opening cue measured heavy timpani rhythms - shades of the soundtrack for Kubrick's film *Barry Lyndon* - underpin a noble trumpet tune (possibly representing or foreshadowing Hedda's belief in the possibility of a 'beautiful death' - the captured General's honourable suicide).

Brooding dark strings gradually weave around it. It's unashamedly Capital 'T' Tragic in tone - the comedy of the ensuing scene seems all the more effective in its wake.

The scene changes are frenetic and I hope terrifying at times - trumpets tumble over each other or scream in pain (c.f. Ligeti's *Requiem*) while timpani, snare drum and multiple harps play relentless galloping rhythms- is this the soundtrack to the young Hedda's mad rides in her black cape?

A timpani motif holds the whole thing together. I just realised today the model is *Katya Kabanova*! It is taken from the left hand of the piano piece that she plays - a mad and obsessive piece based closely on Schubert's *Moment Musicaux No.5*. In order to play it at speed she would need to attack the piano (the gnome- her bitter soul? her father? everything outside of her amoral *Wuthering Heights* ideal that she must battle with?) rather like a lioness bringing down a zebra. Fortunately in the new version we get to see her wrestling with the piece prior to Act 4. As her swansong, unseen by us- it's performed without a mistake and is only cut off by the po-faced shooshers on stage."

### **Activity Nine:**

Sound Design can be the designing of soundscapes and music as well as sound effects. Like lighting, sound design can have several different purposes:

1. Communicate place and time
2. Communicate the passing of time
3. Create atmosphere/mood
4. Help build the tension
5. Symbolise the mood or personality of the character

As a movement, Realism/Modernism tried to move away from orchestral underscoring prevalent in the theatre at the time. The texts for plays from this era often have little room for music to be added, and where music was required, authors wrote it into the action. In re-interpreting the play, designers will design and compose sound and music around the text, underscores may be light and then swell into scene changes for example.

In designing the sound for *Hedda Gabler*, emphasis was placed in supporting the music of Hedda's mind and in making the sounds of the house be realistic for Hedda's world - the approaching footsteps of Judge Brack or Tesman, but without the soundscapes of a world outside her 'cage'.

- Think about the mood/atmosphere of the scene. Ask students to find a piece of music that complements this mood/atmosphere. Ask students to find a piece of music that contrasts with this mood/atmosphere. Share these pieces of music with the class and justify their decisions.
- Does the place where the scene or play is set have any particular sound effects that would help to bring the sense of place alive for the audience?

### **Activity Ten:**

Read the excerpt from the scene below from *Hedda Gabler* where Hedda is burning the manuscript. The tension builds in this scene as the war inside Hedda's head rages. Find a piece of music that assists in building the tension and portraying Hedda's mindset at this point in the play, having just given Ejlert the gun and telling him to kill himself beautifully.

#### **Hedda Gabler Pg. 72-73**

*They nod farewell to each other, clipped and respectful. Then he is gone. Hedda watches the door. Without thinking she crosses to the drawer again and takes up the manuscript. She makes her way across the room. Stops. Looks at some of it. The rounded handwriting. The care and meticulousness. She moves over to the potbelly stove and pulls up a seat beside it. She sits. And holds the manuscript in her lap.*

*She opens the door to the stove. She throws a leaf in. Just one page.*

**Hedda:** Now. I burn your little child, Thea. With your lovely hair.

*She throws another sheet in. Then another.*

Yours and Ejlert Lovborg's little child. Burn.

*She throws in more. And more.*

Now burn. Previous little child. Burn away.

*She keeps piling in the papers. Shoving them in till it is all consumed. Blackout.*

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

Balodis, J. (2012). *The practice of adaptation: Turning Fact and Fiction into Theatre*. (Doctoral Dissertation.) Retrieved from [http://eprints.qut.edu.au/60917/1/Janis\\_Balodis\\_Thesis.pdf](http://eprints.qut.edu.au/60917/1/Janis_Balodis_Thesis.pdf)

Barranger, M. (2004) *Understanding Plays* (3rd ed.). USA: Pearson Education.

Benedetti, J. (2008). *Stanislavski and the Actor*. London: Methuen Drama.

Boal, A. (2002). *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*. New York: Routledge.

Conlon, K. (2012). *Hedda Gabler Teachers' Resource Pack*. Retrieved from: <http://oldvictheatre-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/assets/File/1554.pdf>

Crawford, J.L., Hurst, C., Lugering, M., Wimmer, C. (2005) *Acting in Person and in Style*. Sydney: McGraw Hill.

Curtin, S. (2014). *Staging Ideas – Set and Costume Design for Theatre*. Sydney: Currency Press.

Dawson, J. (2004). *Teachers' Resource Kit – Hedda Gabler*. Retrieved from: [http://www.inthecompanyoffactors.com.au/pdfs/STC\\_Study\\_Guide.pdf](http://www.inthecompanyoffactors.com.au/pdfs/STC_Study_Guide.pdf)

Haseman, B., & O'Toole, J. (1986) *Dramawise*. Melbourne: Heinemann.

Ibsen, H., Meyer, M.L., & Thomas, D. (2002) *Hedda Gabler*. London: Methuen Drama.

Ibsen, H. (2004). *Hedda Gabler*. (A. Upton, Adpt.). Currently Unpublished. (Original work published 1891)

Manson-Jones, R., Dickenson, S., Ingham, J. (2005). *Hedda Gabler Resource Pack*. Retrieved from: No longer available.

McFarlane, J. (1994). *The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen*. London: Cambridge University Press.

Merlin, B. (2007). *The Complete Stanislavsky Toolkit*. Revised Edition. London: Nick Hern Books.

Mitchell, K. (2009). *The Director's Craft – A Handbook for the Theatre*. London: Routledge.

Rowlands, P. (2001). *Hedda Gabler – A resource for teachers and students*. Retrieved from: <http://www.royalexchange.co.uk/91-hedda-gabler/file>

Truppi, A. (2012) *Study Guide – Hedda Gabler*. Retrieved from: <http://issuu.com/hartfordstage/docs/studyguideheddagabler/1?e=5767488/6067018>