

National  
Theatre  
Learning

H E D D A

by Henrik Ibsen  
in a new version  
by Patrick Marber

G A B L E R



Rehearsal Diaries

## Contents

The National's production

3

Rehearsal diary

4

Welcome to the National Theatre's rehearsal diaries for *Hedda Gabler*.

Written by the staff director for the production, these diaries introduce the process of bringing the National Theatre's production of *Hedda Gabler* to life.

Through imaginative and innovative in-school, on-site and online activities, NT Learning opens up the National's repertoire, artistry, skills, and the building itself, enabling participants of all ages to discover new skills and experience the excitement of theatre-making.

If you've enjoyed this background pack or would like to talk to us about getting involved in NT Learning activities, please contact us on [learning@nationaltheatre.org.uk](mailto:learning@nationaltheatre.org.uk) or 020 7452 3388.

**Jane Ball**  
Programme Manager, NT Learning  
March 2017

This background pack is published by and copyright  
The Royal National Theatre Board  
Reg. No. 1247285  
Registered Charity No. 224223  
Views expressed in this background pack are not necessarily those of the National Theatre

**Author**  
Rachel Lincoln

**Editor**  
National Theatre Publishing

**Design**  
Emilie Chen

NT Learning  
National Theatre  
South Bank  
London SE1 9PX  
T 020 7452 3388  
F 020 7452 3380  
E [learning@nationaltheatre.org.uk](mailto:learning@nationaltheatre.org.uk)

The production photographs in this background pack were taken by **Jan Versweyveld**

Additional images by **Rachel Lincoln**



Click on this arrow, when you see it, for more online resources.

Further production details:  
[nationaltheatre.org.uk](http://nationaltheatre.org.uk)



# The National Theatre production of *Hedda Gabler*

by **Henrik Ibsen**

in a new version by **Patrick Marber**

Hedda, *Tesman's new wife*  
Berte, *a maid*  
Juliana, *Tesman's aunt*  
Tesman, *an academic*  
Mrs Elvsted, *a visitor*  
Brack, *a judge*  
Lovborg, *a writer*

Director  
Set and Lighting Designer  
Costume Designer  
Sound Designer  
Associate Director  
Associate Set Designer  
Associate Lighting Designer  
Fight Director  
Company Voice Work  
Staff Director

**Ruth Wilson**  
**Éva Magyar**  
**Kate Duchêne**  
**Kyle Soller**  
**Sinéad Matthews**  
**Rafe Spall**  
**Chukwudi Iwuji**

**Ivo van Hove**  
**Jan Versweyveld**  
**An D'Huys**  
**Tom Gibbons**  
**Jeff James**  
**Paul Atkinson**  
**Nicki Brown**  
**Paul Benzing**  
**Jeannette Nelson**  
**Rachel Lincoln**

## UNDERSTUDIES

**Harry Anton** (Brack), **Annabel Bates** (Mrs Elvsted),  
**Robert Bradley** (Lovborg), **Ebony Buckle** (Hedda Gabler),  
**Miriam Cooper** (Juliana/Berte), **Jason Langley** (Tesman)

## SETTING

The main room of the Tesmans' new home, September.

## OPENING

Lyttelton Theatre, 12 December 2016

The National Theatre wishes to acknowledge its partner  
**National Angels Limited**

Production supported by the **Williams Charitable Trust**



# Rehearsal diaries – week one

## Re-realising the concept of *Hedda Gabler*

Rehearsals for the National Theatre's production began on 9 November 2016. Staff director Rachel Lincoln's rehearsal diary reveals how the process unfolded.

Rehearsals begin on Wednesday afternoon. We start with a 'meet and greet' where everyone involved with the production introduces themselves and describes their roles.

Ivo van Hove (director) sits with the whole company (cast, creative and production teams) and succinctly discusses his key ideas for the production. Ivo directed the play at the New York Theatre Workshop in 2004 and at the Toneelgroep, Amsterdam, in 2011. This is the third time the concept for this play will be brought to life: this production will be completely new. Patrick Marber has written a new version, adapted from a literal translation by Karin and Ann Bamborough, and the play will be performed by a completely new cast.

Jan Versweyveld (set and lighting designer) designed the previous incarnations of the play in New York and Amsterdam, and introduces us to his new design with images of the model box on a big projector screen. Beautiful details are photographed by Jan, including a tiny letterbox and fire pit. Jan describes some of the metaphors in the design: 'Out of the window is nothing, just darkness and occasional light.'

The cast then do a read-through with the whole company present. I'm struck by how well the lines come off the page when the actors read. I ask Patrick about his experience of writing a new version and learn that Ivo and Patrick discussed the play in depth whilst drafting the new script. There were new insights into the plot that Patrick was able to decipher through reading the literal translation, and he has attempted to make these clear in his version. Patrick is present in the first days of rehearsal and makes the occasional, very slight change to the text.





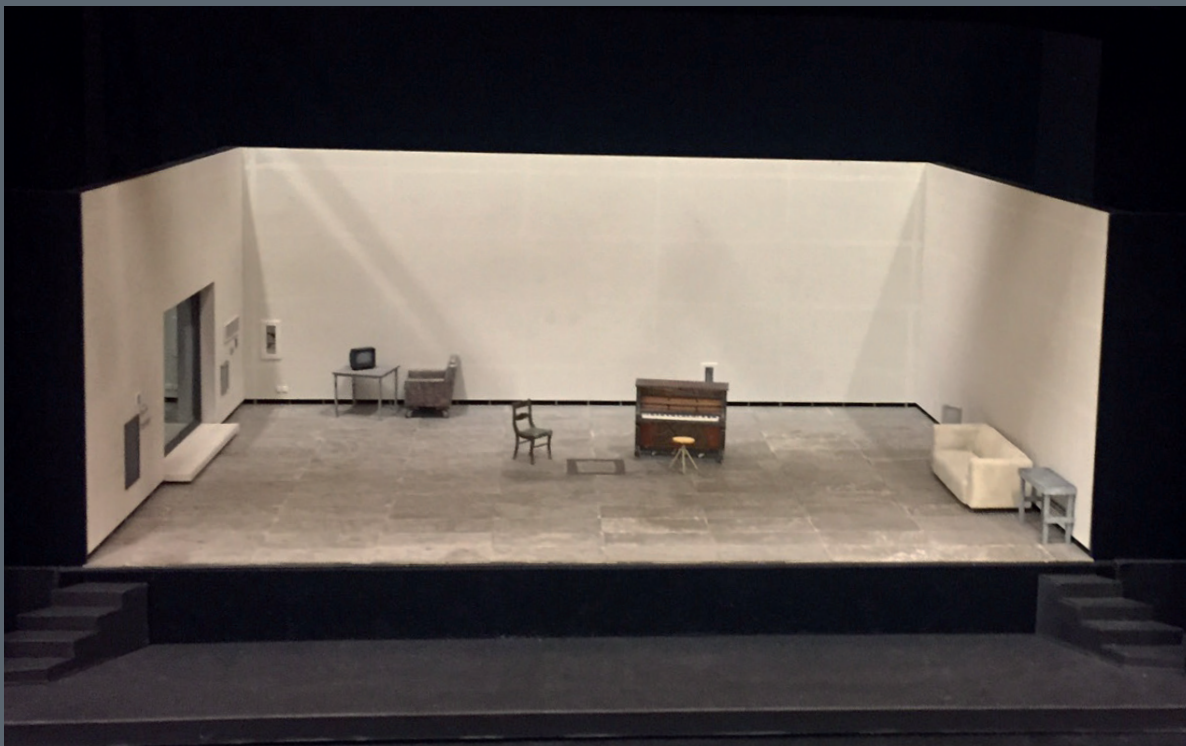
# Rehearsal diaries – week one, *continued*

Thursday's rehearsal begins with all of the cast members in full costume, with An D'Huys (costume designer) present. She will be tweaking costumes throughout the first few days, playing with new colours, coats and fabrics. For example, we rehearse a scene in which Tesman (Kyle Soller) enters wearing shoes; later a decision is made that they should be taken off, and we run the scene again. This gives Kyle the freedom to move in a whole new way, playfully exploring the furniture around him in a way that shoes would have restricted him (eg feet on walls) and shows the power of costume (particularly shoes) to effect change in behaviour and performance.

By Friday I can see there is a strong and quiet collaboration between Ivo and Jan. Jan was works on the space, moving objects and taking photographs. Lots of thought is going into every detail.

From day one, Ivo works chronologically through the play with the actors off-book (ie the actors have already learnt their lines). There is a rehearsal set which will be very similar to the final set. This enables the actors to work organically, allowing them to explore blocking and movement around the furniture and space. I overhear a remark that 'It feels like week three of rehearsals already!' with set, costume and lines all taking shape.

## NOTES FROM THE DESIGN PRESENTATION IN WEEK ONE:



- The design idea is based on seeing the apartment from Hedda's point of view.
- The room is how Hedda sees it, whereas in 'reality' it is probably fully furnished.
- The furniture comes from the idea that it is something that the builders probably found down in the basement and used when they were doing up the home.
- Nothing is nice, as Hedda sees it.
- The walls covered in plasterboard, the floor made of stone.
- Out of the window is nothing, apart from darkness and occasionally light.

# Rehearsal diary – week two

## Discoveries and collaborations

The core production team are a near constant presence in the first two weeks of rehearsal; collaborating with Ivo to enrich the work.

Jeff James (the associate director) has worked with Ivo on his English-language productions since *A View from the Bridge* at the Young Vic. Ivo and Jeff discuss the work in rehearsals and Jeff contributes ideas. He is also in all conversations with the actors. Jeff makes suggestions for blocking and clarifying movement, and gives occasional notes to the actors. He notes down ideas and thinks behind the text and makes detailed notes about blocking. Clearly there is a trust between the two and this makes for an exciting and fun working atmosphere.

Patrick Marber watches the actors work chronologically through the scenes and listens to the way the text sounds. Patrick makes suggestions to Ivo; it's very exciting to hear new suggestions from such a talented writer, they seem to flow so easily. Ivo occasionally asks Patrick about the meaning of the lines and checks in with decisions about immediate circumstances and background of the play. Patrick explains his thinking and sometimes references the translation by Karin and Ann Bamborough.



An actor's-eye view of the production desks in the rehearsal room  
PHOTO: RACHEL LINCOLN

Here are some changes that were made:

### EXAMPLE 1

#### Original

Lovborg: She's too *naive* to understand it.  
Hedda: Is she?  
Lovborg: You've met her.

#### Rewrite

Lovborg: She *wouldn't* understand it.  
Hedda: Why not?  
Lovborg: You've met her.

Ivo feels the word 'naive' is too cruel to be said by Lovborg about Mrs Elvsted. Ivo thinks Lovborg sees Mrs Elvsted like a sister, he cares for her. Ivo thinks that 'he is not in love with Thea', certainly not in the way that he loves Hedda. Patrick says that it was a clear decision to make Lovborg criticise Mrs Elvsted in this way and suggests the alternative version: the same sentiment, but less cruel.

### EXAMPLE 2

Tesman: But your current *tome* goes up to the present day, what else is there?

Patrick changes 'tome' to 'one'. He feels 'tome' is too old fashioned.

### EXAMPLE 3

Tesman: Handwritten.  
Lovborg: Always.  
Tesman: I remember. But this isn't yours?  
Or rather, the handwriting varies.

During a rehearsal of a scene in which the above lines are said, Hedda was facing upstage, away from the action. Patrick gives a note that Hedda should instead be observing the conversation between Lovborg and Tesman. If Hedda overhears this moment, it proves that Mrs Elvsted has been involved with the creation of Lovborg's manuscript. This will then give Hedda a reason to be jealous of Mrs Elvsted and Lovborg, fuelling her desire to destroy the manuscript.

In the middle of rehearsing a scene, Ivo has an idea and turns to Tom Gibbons (the sound designer) and requests some sound for the scene. Tom quickly responds with a menacing piece of music. The actors remark on how much it helps them and it certainly adds a dark atmosphere. Ivo says the sound is good, but is too repetitive like 'a grandfather clock'. Tom experiments with different moments to begin the music in the scene and continues exploring alternative music choices.

# Rehearsal diary – week three

## Act four

The biggest discoveries this week come from rehearsing act four. I now understand why Ivo rehearses chronologically; it allows us to clearly see the development and emotional journeys of the characters.

Jan choreographs the transition from the end of act three into four. He tasks the actors with boarding-up the only window/door, and blockading it with furniture. It is fairly unusual to see a designer choreographing actors like this. He is very good at it and shows the actors how to place the furniture precisely and in what order to move them. Jan describes to me how the characters are building Hedda's tomb, the room in which she will die.

Ivo directs the actors by communicating his ideas about what the characters are thinking and feeling. He then gives notes to the actors after they have rehearsed the scene.

Ivo identifies the important moments in act four where Hedda's emotional state changes and where she makes decisions, and talks about them with Ruth Wilson. At the end of act three, Hedda encourages Eilert Lovborg to commit suicide: 'Make it beautiful', Hedda says, and then burns Lovborg and Elvsted's manuscript. Ivo describes how this is a release for Hedda, she experiences joy, and this state continues into act four. As the others blockade the window, she relaxes into a joyful state in her own 'bubble'.

The next important moment is where Brack reveals to Hedda that Lovborg's death was not suicide but was an accident. Hedda's 'beautiful' illusion is destroyed. This breaks her bubble:

Hedda: Oh it's so vulgar! And disgusting!  
Everything I touch is cursed!

### TESTING TOMATO JUICE ON FABRIC





# Rehearsal diary – week three, *continued*

Ivo also identifies the line in which Hedda takes the decision to end her life:

Hedda: I'm in your power. A slave. Never free again. I won't accept it!

Ivo describes to Ruth how 'this is the bottom of everything. You want to escape your life. You are not going to let him [Brack] determine your life.'

We see how Ivo has been working towards this emotional climax. Ivo directs Rafe Spall (Brack) to think about his character in act four as a torturer 'circling his prey'. I think back to week one of rehearsals, where Ivo said, 'Brack should be quiet in this scene, who he really is comes

later' and we can start to see how this may become a shocking revelation for the audience.

There is a stage direction in the text from after the moment Hedda shoots herself: 'Mrs Elvsted screams.'

Ivo directs the actors against the stage direction: there is no screaming in response to Hedda's death. They are quiet; they don't care that much about her. The last images in the play are very slow and calm and therefore even more powerful and tragic. With all this tragedy in the final stages of the play, Ivo jokes, 'This is Ibsen, not me!'





# Rehearsal diary: week four

## Extra time

Due to scheduling changes we are able to have two extra days of rehearsal before we begin technical rehearsals. We now use this time to refine the work we have done. This reassures the actors, as they now have more time to rehearse and perfect their work.

On Monday we run through the play, stopping when Ivo has a note for the actors. He's seeking to clarify the scenes; discussing the pace and reiterating original thinking behind moments in the play.

On Wednesday morning we do a run through for the first time. Rufus Norris (Director of the NT) is present, as well as representatives from many departments, including wigs, props, sound and lighting. The run through gives us the opportunity to get a feel for the production as a whole. Only

in relation to other scenes are we able to see a character's journey, from start to finish. For example, at the end of the run, Ivo gives a note to Ruth Wilson to be less 'cranky' at the beginning of the play, as it makes the audience feel less sympathetic towards her. That note aside, her performance is breathtaking.

On Thursday we move into the theatre and see the set in all its glory. The actors explore it with its bold, shadowy lighting, dominating plasterboard walls, buttons, boxes and lighting fixtures – all beautiful and finely detailed. A couple of guns are placed in a transparent case on the back wall of the set. The dimensions of the set now look different in the theatre, and you can see how Jan's design works beautifully from afar, as well as up close.

