Ibsen’s
A DOLL’S HOUSE
In a new version by Zinnie Harris

A Study Guide
Written by Sophie Watkiss
Edited by Rosie Dalling
Rehearsal photography by Marc Brenner
Production photography by Johan Persson

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Cast and Creative Team

Cast

GILLIAN ANDERSON. NORA
Trained: Goodman Theatre School.
Theatre: includes The Sweetest Swing in Baseball (Royal Court), What the Night is For (Comedy), The Philanthropist (Connecticut), Absent Friends (New York).
Television: includes Bleak House, X-Files – Emmy Award.

CHRISTOPHER ECCLESTON. NEIL KELMAN
Trained: Central School of Speech and Drama.
Theatre: includes Electricity, Hamlet (WYP), Miss Julie (Haymarket), Waiting at the Water’s Edge (Bush), Encounters (NT Studio), Aide-Memoire (Royal Court), Abingdon Square (NT/Shared Experience), Bent (NT), Dona Rosita the Spinster, A Streetcar Named Desire (Bristol Old Vic), The Wonder (Gate).
Film: includes Amelia, 24 Hour Party People, The Others, Elizabeth, Jude, Shallow Grave, Let Him Have It.

ANTON LESSER. DR RANK
Trained: RADA.
Film: includes Einstein and Eddington, Miss Potter, Girl in the Cafe, River Queen, Imagining Argentina, Charlotte Gray, Jack and the Beanstalk, Esther Khan, The Last Years of Schumann, FairyTale: A True Story.
TARA FITZGERALD. CHRISTINE LYLE

Trained: Drama Centre.

Theatre: includes And Then There Were None (Gielgud), Clouds, A Doll’s House (tour), A Streetcar Named Desire (Bristol Old Vic), Antigone (Yvonne Arnaud/Oxford Playhouse/Old Vic), Hamlet (Almeida/New York), Our Song (Apollo/tour).

Film: includes Five Children and It, I Capture the Castle, The Lion’s Mouth, Dark Blue World, Rancid Aluminium, New World Disorder, Conquest, Childhood, Brassed Off, A Man of No Importance, Sirens, Hear My Song.


TOBY STEPHENS. THOMAS

For the Donmar: Betrayal.


MAGGIE WELLS. ANNIE

Trained: LAMDA.

Theatre: includes Three Sisters II (Orange Tree), Les Enfants du Paradis (RSC), The Miser (Young Vic/tour), The Wandering Jew, Countrymania (NT), The Seagull (Almeida), As You Like It (Shakespeare’s Globe), Misery (English Theatre, Frankfurt), The Cherry Orchard (Roundhouse), Mystery Plays (Northcote), Pennyblue (Stephen Joseph, Scarborough).

Film: includes Foreign Affairs, Photographing Fairies.

Television: includes Holby City, Doctors, Tracey Beaker, The Bill, Uncle Silas, Where the Heart Is, The Famous Five, Peak Practice, Love on a Branch Line, A Winter’s Tale, Saturday Sunday Monday, Marked Personal.
TED O’NEIL. IVOR
Ted has appeared in a number of television commercials and recorded a number of voiceovers. *A Doll’s House* marks his professional stage debut.

WILLIAM NYE. IVOR
William attends Stagecoach Theatre Arts.
Theatre: includes *Tales of Hoffmann* (ROH).

LEAH DAVIES. EMMY
Leah is making her professional stage debut in *A Doll’s House*.

ABBY NEGUS. EMMY
Abby attends Colin’s Performing Arts School.
Theatre: includes *Dick Whittington* (Queen’s, Hornchurch), *Les Misérables* (Queen's).
Television: includes *Waybuloo*, *Staraoke*, *The Story Makers*.
Abby has also appeared in a number of television commercials.
HENRIK YOHAN IBSEN. AUTHOR

Henrik Johan Ibsen was born in 1828 in Skien, a small town on the coast of Norway. His father was a merchant whose business failed, forcing the family to move to a farm in Gjerpen. At the age of 16, Henrik was apprenticed to a pharmacist in Grimstad and two years later was compelled to begin supporting his illegitimate child, born to a servant girl. In 1850, he moved to Christiania (now Oslo) where he studied and earned a little from journalistic writings. In the same year he wrote two plays, Catilina and The Burial Mound.

Ibsen had hoped to become a physician but, after failing university entrance examinations, was appointed in 1851 as ‘stage poet’ of Den Nationale Scene, a small theatre in Bergen. In 1852 the theatre sent him on a study tour to Denmark and Germany and, in 1857, after the theatre went bankrupt, he returned to Christiania to become Artistic Director of the new Norske (Norwegian) Theatre.

In 1858 he married Suzannah Thoresen, the stepchild of the novelist Magdalene Thoresen. Their only child, Sigurd, was born the following year. To this period belong The Vikings of Helgoland (1858), The Pretenders (1864) and Love’s Comedy (1862) which was produced with some success. In 1864, he settled in Rome where he wrote his great poetic drama Brand. This made him a reputation throughout Europe and earned him a state pension. Brand was followed by his final verse play, Peer Gynt, written in 1867.

Ibsen’s following plays include Pillars of Society (1877), A Doll’s House (1879), Ghosts (1881), An Enemy of the People (1882), The Wild Duck (1884), Rosmersholm (1886), The Lady from the Sea (1888), Hedda Gabler (1890), The Master Builder (1892), Little Eyolf (1894), John Gabriel Borkman (1896) and When We Dead Awaken (1899).

The last years of Ibsen’s life were clouded by mental illness and he died in Christiania in 1906.

ZINNIE HARRIS. AUTHOR

Plays: include Fall (Traverse, Edinburgh), Solstice, Midwinter – also directed (RSC), Nightingale and Chase (Royal Court), Further than the Furthest Thing (NT/Tron, Glasgow), By Many Wounds (Hampstead).

Adaptions & Translations: Miss Julie – also directed (National Theatre of Scotland).

As Director: Gilt (7:84), Dealer’s Choice (Tron Theatre).

Television: includes Spooks, Born with Two Mothers, Richard & My Boyfriend.

Radio: includes Silver Whale Fish, Master of the House – also directed.
KFIR YEFET. DIRECTOR

Theatre: includes Is That All There Is? (Almeida/New York), Fantaisie Nocturne (Turtle Key), An Evening with Beau and Ri (Gate), Shimmer/Don’t You Ever Call Me Anything but Mother (Mermaid), Berio’s Recital 1 (tour), The Soldier’s Tale (tour), The Snow Queen (QEH).

Film: includes It’s Not Unusual – BAFTA Award, Body and Soul, Ellen.

Television: includes Wavelength.

ANTHONY WARD. DESIGNER

For the Donmar: Small Change, Mary Stuart (also Apollo/New York), Uncle Vanya, Twelfth Night (also New York), Assassins, Nine, To the Green Fields Beyond.


Opera: includes The Makropulos Case (Met), Tosca (Zurich/Antwerp/Barcelona), Manon Lescaut (Paris/Antwerp), Peter Grimes, La bohème, Yolande, L’Etoile (Opera North), Gloriana (Opera North/ROH), Macbeth (ROH/Paris), Dialogues des Carmelites (ENO/WNO), Il Ritorno d’Ulisse in Patria (Aix).

Dance: includes Nutcracker! (Sadler’s Wells/tour).

HUGH VANSTONE. LIGHTING DESIGNER

For the Donmar: includes Small Change, Mary Stuart (Apollo/New York), Grand Hotel, Pacific Overtures – Olivier Award, Twelfth Night, Uncle Vanya, Juno & the Paycock, The Blue Room – Olivier Award, The Front Page, Insignificance.

Theatre: includes Tanz der Vampire (Vienna/Oberhausen), Shrek (New York), God of Carnage (Gielgud/New York/UK tour), Boeing-Boeing (Comedy/New York/UK tour), Spamalot (Palace/Melbourne/Las Vegas/New York/US tour), The Three Musketeers (Boston), Present Laughter, Rafta, Rafta..., Market Boy, The Cherry Orchard – Olivier Award (NT), The Pain and the Itch (Royal Court), Epitaph for George Dillon (Comedy), The Graduate – Olivier Award (Gielgud), The Unexpected Man – Olivier Award (RSC).

Opera: includes The Carmelites (ENO), Carmen (Opera North), The Bartered Bride (Glyndebourne).
TIM PHILLIPS. COMPOSER & SOUND DESIGNER

Theatre: includes Water (Lyric Hammersmith/Filter), National Hero (Pleasance), The Master and Margarita (BAC), Double Cross (Michael White Productions), The Marquise, The Secret Rapture (Bill Kenwright Productions), Playing the Victim (Royal Court), Faster (BAC/Filter).

Film: includes Come Here Today, Instinct, Viaje a San Pedro, The Last Post, A Row of Lights.

Television: includes Entourage, Shameless, Talk to Me.

Tim is the co co-Artistic Director of Filter Theatre.
A new version of a classic text

‘The cast have deliberately not gone back to the original, but it keeps seeping through’

Paul Hart, Assistant Director, A DOLL’S HOUSE

The social and cultural positioning of Henrik Ibsen’s original play

‘A woman cannot be herself in contemporary society, it is an exclusively male society with laws drafted by men, and with counsel and judges who judge feminine conduct from the male point of view.’

An extract from Ibsen’s planning notes for A Doll’s House.²

Ibsen was inspired to write A Doll’s House as a direct result of the traumatic events in the life of the successful Norwegian writer, Laura Petersen (1849-1932). In 1871, eight years prior to writing his play, Ibsen got to know Laura when she sent him a sequel she had written to his play Brand. He called her his ‘skylark’, the pet name given to Nora in the original script. Laura’s husband contracted tuberculosis and was advised by his doctor to travel to a warmer climate to recover his health. She secretly arranged a loan to finance the trip. When repayment of the loan was demanded in 1878, she did not have the money and forged a cheque. The forgery was discovered and the bank refused payment. It was at this point that she gave her husband a full account of her actions. Despite the fact that her motive had been to save his life, he treated her like a criminal, telling her she was not fit to bring up their children and committing her to a public asylum. When she was discharged, she begged her husband to take her back, for the children’s sake, which he begrudgingly agreed to do.³

At the end of 1878, Ibsen recorded some ‘Notes for a Modern Tragedy’, excerpts from which are printed below:

There are two kinds of moral laws, two kinds of conscience, one for men and one, quite different, for women. They don’t understand each other; but in practical life, woman is judged by masculine law, as though she weren’t a woman but a man. The wife in the play ends up having no idea what is right and what is wrong; natural feelings on the one hand and belief in authority on the other lead her to utter distraction….She has committed forgery, which is her pride; for she has done it out of love for her husband, to save his life. But this husband of hers takes his standpoint, conventionally honourable, on the side of the law, and sees the situation with male eyes.⁴
The Laura figure Ibsen subsequently creates in his play, whom he calls Nora, lives in a culture in which she is marginalised because of her gender; she is not permitted to fully participate in society and, as a married woman, cannot borrow money without her husband’s consent. Her fraudulent action of securing the loan is both a result, and a defiance of her exclusion. Joan Templeton suggests that ‘Nora’s criminality is a silent, covert rebellion that looks forward to the final, noisier one’, a reference to the now legendary sound of the front door slamming as Nora walks out on her husband and children at the end of the play.

By placing these ideas at the heart of his play, Ibsen was contributing to the topical debate about women’s positioning in society which was taking place in Norway at the time; their roles were restricted to those of wife, mother and sexual partner. However, in his native Norway, Ibsen’s contribution to this debate in *A Doll’s House* was overwhelmingly seen as an outrage with his seminal notion that a woman could walk out on her husband and children.

This fury followed the play to England ten years later, when it received its first production at the Novelty Theatre, London, on 7 June 1889, with Janet Achurch making theatrical and social history as Britain’s first Nora. ‘It is difficult today to conceive of the shock and outrage caused in Victorian England by Ibsen’s play, *A Doll’s House*,’ comments Professor David Thomas in his programme note to the Donmar’s production, ‘in this play Ibsen deliberately challenged all the cosy assumptions of Victorian England about marital relationships, sexual politics and patriarchal control’, a view corroborated by academic Joan Templeton:

‘Ibsen was accused not merely of advocating the destruction of the family, and with it, morality itself, but of a kind of godless androgyny; women, in refusing to be compliant, were refusing to be women.’

*Joan Templeton, Ibsen’s Women*
A DOLL’S HOUSE, transposed in time

The issues at the heart of the play have almost the status of myth: female consciousness juxtaposed with male consciousness and determinism (like the Fates of Ancient Greece) juxtaposed with free will.

Professor David Thomas

From her previous involvement with the play as an audience member, Zinnie Harris felt that a lot of ‘historical thinking’ was necessary in order to appreciate the social implications of the play in its time, and to realise how shocking Nora’s departure from the family home actually was in the late nineteenth century. She wanted to find a context for an audience to appreciate Nora’s actions without requiring an understanding of the social conditions of the play’s original setting, which is her rationale for shifting the setting to London in 1909. ‘This gives a clear hundred years between now and the action of the play’ explains the playwright, ‘a period that is distant, but not too distant to appreciate the social and political resonances of the time. It is an interesting era, too, in terms of the Suffrage movement campaigning for women’s rights, and the international political turmoil prior to the Great War.’
Apart from the play’s new setting, the other notable change in this version is that Nora’s husband, Thomas Vaughn, is a politician, as is Neil Kelman, the man from whom she borrows the money. Thomas has just been appointed to the Cabinet, replacing the recently dismissed Kelman. This denotes a key shift in status of the two characters: in Ibsen’s original, Torvald (Thomas) has just been appointed manager of the Credit Bank, and Krogstad (Kelman) is a member of staff who has been dismissed from his post at the bank. Harris has also invented the masterstroke of locating the action in Kelman’s former home. She liked the idea that this was a period when a conviction politician such as Lloyd George could succeed in our parliamentary system, which she saw as drawing parallels with Kelman as a non-conformist outsider. During the early stages of the rehearsal, it was considered that Thomas would most likely be Minister for Trade; a position deemed to be the right level for a Member of Parliament newly appointed to the Cabinet. As the company delved into the political context of the period, the irony of Thomas being a politician with Liberal views, yet espousing Victorian attitudes towards his marriage, became apparent. ‘The People’s Budget was something that Thomas may well have been working on, as well as Education Reform’ comments Yates, ‘so much of the legislation of this period is still around and effects us now’.
Synopsis, Act 1.

The following synopsis provides an overview of the themes and ideas that Zinnie Harris has chosen to establish in her version of the opening act of the play. The synopsis is divided into the sections used by the cast and creative team for rehearsal purposes. The page numbers refer to the published Faber and Faber text of her version of *A Doll’s House.*
Section 1: Nora, Thomas, Annie, up to Thomas’ exit (pp1-18)

1909, Christmas Eve. The room in a large Victorian house, quite bare apart from a Christmas tree. Nora is decorating the tree. Her husband, Thomas, calls to her from offstage, using his pet name for her, ‘mouse’; she doesn’t want him to come into the room until she has decorated the tree. He ignores her wishes, ‘remind me’, he says, ‘in this house, who are the adults and who are the children?’ It becomes evident that the family have just moved house, and Thomas is frustrated in his attempts to work because he cannot find any of his belongings among the packing cases. They enter into a playful exchange of banter: Thomas questions where the new Christmas tree decorations have come from, insisting that ‘they’re a gross mis-use of money’. Nora counters his claims, ‘This tree is going to be perfect’, she says, ‘it looks like an illustration from a book, don’t you think?’ With their change in fortune, Nora wants everything to be ‘just right’ this Christmas: Thomas has just been appointed to the Cabinet, after the sudden departure of the former minister, Kelman, whose ministerial home they have just moved into. We learn that Kelman was single, which is why Nora believes the house looks drab and needs ‘a huge amount of decoration’. Thomas cautions that his salary doesn’t come in until January, and they will have to live within their means until then. Nora suggests that they might take out a small loan for Christmas, an idea which Thomas strongly rejects; it is important that they are prudent, ‘We are living in the public eye, now, and that means that we will be under scrutiny all the time.’ Thomas offers Nora a small bundle of money from his wallet in his appreciation of how the ‘essentials add up’ at this time of year. The mood between them becomes more intimate, but is broken by the bell at the front door ringing. Thomas is anxious that the caller might be bringing important news in relation to his work. Nora tries to bring her husband back into the moment by assuring him that Annie, their servant, will answer the door, and, as it’s Christmas Eve, it is hardly likely to be a work related visit. Thomas muses that it might be the delivery boy, bringing more goods, bought by Nora because it’s her nature to spend money, ‘Maybe I should dress you in pound notes and be done with it.’ We hear Annie calling through the library door, there is a visitor for Nora, a Mrs Christine Lyle, who says she has an appointment at 3pm. Nora has totally forgotten about the appointment. Thomas challenges Nora; are they really going to be interrupted by a friend of hers? She is adamant that she will see Christine because ‘she hasn’t got as much as we have and she’ll have taken the tram from the other side of the city to get here.’ She goes on to explain that Christine is an educated woman, a former school fried, who is extremely intelligent, resourceful, honest and hard working, and she wants a job. Thomas wishes Nora would ‘just say this boldly’ rather than ‘going round the houses’. Nora responds by saying that it’s in her nature, ‘Little Nora must squirrel and squeak.’ Thomas agrees that he can find Christine a job, but is still disgruntled that they have been disturbed and doesn’t understand why Nora has to meet her today. Nora counters Thomas’ argument, which culminates in an explosive reaction from Thomas: ‘you have no idea how important I am do you? It’s almost quite sweet. The whole country is looking to me now, as part of the cabinet.’ The bell rings again and Annie comes to the door: Dr Rank is here to see Thomas. Nora says that Thomas can keep Dr Rank waiting, and asks Annie to tell him to call back. Thomas refutes this suggestion: this is no way to treat their friends and Dr Rank has no doubt some important business to discuss with him, and ‘business must come first.’ Thomas goes to leave the room, and Nora attempts a reconciliatory gesture before he leaves, telling him that she loves him and will ‘make it up’ to him. Thomas closes the scene prior to his exit: Nora must understand how serious his new post is, ‘this is everything I have worked for Nora.’
Section 2: Nora, Christine (pp18-29)

Nora is left on stage alone. She puts the money Thomas gave her in her stocking and takes a moment to regain her composure before welcoming Christine. As soon as she sees Christine, she comments on how cold she looks, insisting she puts her gloves back on to warm up. Christine gets out her gloves but does not put them on, saying she’d prefer not to wear gloves in the house. Nora takes hold of the gloves and sees that they have holes in the fingers. She gives them back to Christine without comment. Nora tells Christine that Thomas has agreed to give her a position as a government clerk. Christine gets something out of her bag, Nora’s favourite sweets, macaroons, payment for Nora’s kindness. Nora confides that she’s only supposed to eat macaroons occasionally, because Thomas worries about her teeth and her hips. Christine goes to put the bag of macaroons away; she doesn’t want to displease her new employer. Nora stops her, taking the macaroons, and cramming them into her mouth. ‘This world is upside down’, says Christine, ‘but you, you’re completely the same.’ Christine believes that the years haven’t favoured her as much as Nora. Nora contends that she has had her share of hardships, which Christine laughs off, ‘what? The maid off sick, not enough money for macaroons?’ She tells Nora that when her husband died, she was left with nothing; it was her own resilience that kept her going. It was only
because she was so glad to see the back of him that she kept going; she hadn’t married for love, but because her mother was sick and she needed a man with an income. Nora tells Christine of her own hardships: eight years ago Thomas had a breakdown, and went quite mad, ‘an exhausted sad kind of mad that fills the day with tears.’ She acknowledges that she has never put a foot inside the poorhouse, but has ‘slept next to a man that for six months hardly recognised me and I him.’ He had just started in politics and Nora had to take him away before anyone found out how bad he was. She had to find the money for the cost of the trip and did ‘what any man would do’, she borrowed the money. Christine contends that this is impossible, as Nora would have needed her husband’s consent. Nora counters this claim, ‘if you’re prepared to think like a man, you can find a way around this.’ Thomas assumed that the money was her inheritance, as her father died at this time. But, as it turned out, there was no money left to inherit from her father. Nora has worked to pay back her debt, and also saves from money that Thomas gives her, and both she and Thomas wear second hand clothes, Thomas going to Parliament every day with ‘no idea that he is wearing a dead man’s suit’. The Christmas presents she has bought are all second hand, which she has given to the delivery boy to bring in as new. ‘Would you rather I had taken a lover?’ says Nora, ‘would that be more acceptable?’ to find ‘some old man who could write a cheque for the whole amount?’ Christine is worried for Nora, but Nora is adamant that she was right to save her husband’s life and is proud of her actions. The front doorbell rings, Christine says she should go. Nora takes the money from her stocking, offering it to Christine to take a taxi. She refuses.
Section 3: Nora, Christine, Kelman, Annie, Dr Rank, Thomas (pp29-35)

Annie comes to the door; there is a gentleman here to see Thomas. As Nora enquires who the gentleman is, Neil Kelman walks into the room, ‘just an old friend, Mrs Vaughn’. Kelman asks whether he is going to be invited in, ‘or should I stand on the threshold? My threshold I should say.’ He makes a few cursory comments about the house, and, as it is Mr Vaughn he has reputedly come to see, who is not in, he makes his apologies and leaves. Nora is agitated by Kelman’s nerve at making an appearance, ‘You would think with all the scandal that he’d just go and hide his head the sand.’ Christine acknowledges that she used to know Kelman, asking Nora if he is married? He was, says Nora, ‘the poor woman had better sense than to do a long sentence with him and died early it seems, leaving him with a couple of boys.’

Someone taps at the door, Nora, believing it is Kelman again, implores him to leave them alone. Dr Rank appears around the door, ‘but you told me I was always welcome?’ Nora apologises, introducing him to Christine as ‘our good friend.’ Dr Rank and Christine have already met, during their ‘unexpected wait’ in the library. Nora tells Dr Rank that Kelman has been to the house. Dr Rank saw him leave, ‘He’s going to be a thorn in your husband’s side that one.’ Christine challenges Dr Rank that the allegations against Kelman have not been proven, and that he is innocent until proved otherwise. ‘For members of the public maybe, but members of Her Majesty’s Government?’ questions Dr Rank. Christine, disquieted by his opinions, makes her excuses to leave. Before she can do so, Thomas enters the room. He is infuriated, having just seen Kelman leave the house. Nora introduces him to Christine, who expresses her gratitude to him for offering her a position. Thomas tells Nora he is going to have to go out for a while. Christine uses this opportunity to announce her departure. Thomas suggests they walk down the road together, so that they can discuss her new job. Thomas and Christine leave.

Section 4: Nora, Rank, Annie, the Children (Emmy and Ivor), Kelman (pp35-46)

Left alone on stage, Nora inquires about Dr Rank’s health (we later learn that he has tuberculosis of the spine). Although he says he is a little worse, he forgets the pain when he is with others. At this moment, Annie brings the children onstage. Nora and Dr Rank laugh and play with the children. Kelman appears. Dr Rank, and then Nora, notice his presence; the children sense their mother’s tension. Kelman wants a word with Nora – on her own. Dr Rank protests that he can’t allow this, but is eventually persuaded by Nora that she can ‘manage’ Kelman. Dr Rank leaves with the children.

We learn that it was Kelman who provided Nora with the loan; she assumes that he is here to collect his next payment, which, she anxiously points out, is not due until 8th January. But Kelman hasn’t come here about the money. He wants Nora to intervene on his behalf, soliciting the public support of her husband to cast doubt on the allegations against him. In the ensuing confrontation between the pair, Nora rejects Kelman’s request. He then blackmauls her: having ascertained that she fraudulently secured the loan from him by forging her dying father’s signature, he threatens to expose the fraud if she does help him. Outwardly, Nora protests her justification for acquiring the loan through deception: she did it to save her husband’s life, to which Kelman responds, ‘the press take no account of motives.’ The threat firmly in place, Kelman leaves.
Section 5, Nora, Annie, Thomas, Emmy (pp46-52)

Nora is left momentarily alone on stage. Emmy appears and asks who the man was her mother was speaking to. Nora asks Emmy not to mention this to her father because, ‘sometimes, we girls must have a little secret between ourselves. Away from the boys.’ As Emmy leaves, Annie appears with more boxes that have just been delivered.

Nora is again left alone on the stage, surrounded by the boxes, as Thomas comes in. He asks Nora if anyone apart from the delivery boy has been to the house? Nora says not. ‘Not telling fibs are you Nora? Not singing out of tune? says Thomas, announcing that he has just seen Kelman walking out of the gate. Thomas is agitated by Nora having spoken to Kelman, and then having lied about it. Nora attempts to speak up for Kelman, but is firmly put down in her attempts by Thomas. He changes the subject, picking up on the suggestion of their neighbours, the Sylvester’s, that they hold a gathering on Boxing Day, as they did last year. Thomas suggests that Nora can wear fancy dress, as she did the year before. Nora diverts the conversation back to Kelman, asking if what he did was ‘something so terrible.’ Yes, says Thomas, it was fraud. Nora suggests it could have been a mistake, or that maybe Kelman had no choice. Thomas retorts that everyone has a choice, particularly the choice to be ‘bold enough, remorseful enough, to admit guilt and take the punishment.’ Deception grows, he tells Nora, and such deceit can infect children; exposed to lies on a daily basis, the deception ‘seeps into their blood through the atmosphere of the house. The lies of a parent, there is nothing so destructive really. How can a child believe or know what’s true ever again?’ Thomas draws a line under the discussion, and the act closes on his line: ‘Now, enough of this talk of men like Kelman, let’s enjoy Christmas eh?’
Inside the rehearsal room

‘The backstory is being uncovered organically. The wonderment of being in this house, that they don’t own’

Paul Hart, Assistant Director, A DOLL’S HOUSE

The rehearsal process

Rehearsals begin on day one with director Kfir Yefet introducing the cast to key design concepts for the production. He is supported by designer Anthony Ward and playwright Zinnie Harris, with the visual aid of the scale model box of the set design. ‘We looked at Zinnie’s idea of setting the play in the empty drawing room of a large Victorian house’, explains Kfir, ‘and the challenge for us was: how do we give an empty room character? We kept being drawn back to the idea of setting the action in a library, and what this room stood for, even when it was empty.’ He contextualises the opening of the play; here is a well to do family who have only just moved into this large Victorian house in the St James area of SW1. They have only been there a few days. He invites an imaginative response from the cast: what is it like coming into a large, empty room, the biggest you have ever inhabited, with shelves you can’t fill, as you do not have enough books? Gillian Anderson (Nora) observes how the dynamics of a relationship shift focus in different size houses and rooms; she poses the question, what happens to a relationship when a couple move to a different space, and the relationship has to function on a new level? Toby Stephens (Thomas) highlights how this house is the apotheosis of the success of his character’s political career. Kfir emphasises Zinnie’s masterstroke of making this the former ministerial home of Kelman, ‘he has read the books that were in the library, and has earned his place in his former home – but Thomas hasn’t yet.’

Designer Anthony Ward explains how these ideas have contributed to his design: ‘everything is being dumped in this room, even the Christmas tree! It is all being put there for now, until the family is settled and the right place is found for everything. Overnight, between Acts One and Two, things will move. Psychologically it is very interesting – you can put everything you don’t want to think about now in this room.’ Gillian comments that it is probably the biggest tree and the biggest room that Nora has ever had to contend with. ‘On a subconscious level’ adds Kfir, ‘the tree is something to be “trussed up”.. Nora being the character she is would probably jump up and put a star or fairy on the top!’

The whole design has been conceived to convey the idea that ‘Society’ feels bigger than us as individuals. This is accentuated by a circular skylight in the ceiling of the room, a feature that will be lit during the production and used to isolate Nora and Thomas at key moments in the action, functioning as a visual reference to the interchange between Nora and Thomas in the opening of Act One:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thomas</td>
<td>We’re living in the public eye now, and that means we’ll be under scrutiny all the time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nora</td>
<td>I don’t like it when you talk like that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas</td>
<td>like what?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nora</td>
<td>as if there’s this eye, this great public eye that watches everything.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Anthony has created a circular sense to the design, giving the audience the feeling that they are in the room with these characters. As a continuation of the circle, all entrances will be made from the voms (the side exits cutting across each side of the auditorium at the Donmar). Stage right as a rule will lead to the exterior, stage left to the other areas in the house. Entrances and exits are made by all the characters throughout the play, with the exception of Nora, who remains in the house throughout the duration of the action until her departure at the close of the play. The audience will hear the door opening and shutting as people come and go from the house.

Anthony has deliberately chosen not to anchor the setting to a permanent dynamic, with the heaviness of sofas and lamps and the prescriptive details of Ibsen’s original drawing room setting. Instead there will be removal crates, and even children’s toys, piled up. He is keen that things are being pulled out of the boxes during the action, that this space doesn’t feel like home. The packing cases won’t be comfortable to sit on, and there will probably only be one or two chairs which the men will sit on, to make themselves comfortable in this environment; Christine will probably sit on them, too. Anthony also explains how he has given consideration to the ‘Doll’s House’ of the play’s title: ‘our doll’s house will be hermetically sealed, as if it has a lid on it.’

**Observation point**

Anthony Ward describes the setting for the Donmar’s production of A DOLL’S HOUSE as ‘a masculine place, which Nora struggles to make feminine.’ How is this communicated in production? How does Nora’s relationship with the space, and the people in it, develop and shift as the production progresses?
After this discussion, Kfir facilitates a read through of the play, to get a sense of rhythm in Zinnie’s writing, and to hear the ‘music’ of the text. During this process, several issues concerning the relationships between characters transpire: Anton feels interested in the backstory between Thomas and Dr Rank – did he administer to Thomas when he was ill? How much does he know about Thomas’ breakdown? Gillian and Tara consider how close Nora and Christine were at school, both believing keenly that they should have been best friends; Nora taking the superior ground, being snappy with Christine, as replicated in their relationship in the play. As they complete the read through, Zinnie observes that, although there is a logical timescale to the action with it taking place on Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and Boxing Day, Nora’s journey is greater than that; Act 3 could be taking place thirty years later in her marriage.

During the remainder of the first week, the cast run through the play at a pace, so that a dialogue can be had with Zinnie, who is only going to be present in rehearsals for the next few days. Assistant Director Paul Hart expands on this process: ‘We set up the space, sometimes sitting on crates and reading the text, or jumping up and playing a bit of a scene – establishing what felt right, instinctively. Kfir didn’t ‘direct’ the cast; he let the work happen organically with Zinnie’s input.’
The second week of rehearsal involves an intensive grooming of the text to discover what lies underneath it. Kfir’s way of accessing the text is through close scene by scene analysis; asking questions, but still honouring the words. He is flexible in terms of how the text can sit comfortably with the actors and become their words, whilst still maintaining the artifice that Zinnie supplies, i.e. the hierarchy she sets up between the characters. Ffion Hague, the production’s historical advisor, joins the cast to discuss the political context of the play. She talks about ‘the code of society’ at the time. This helps Toby Stephens appreciate that Thomas is exercising this code, attempting to maintain personal control, yet, at the same time not quite being able to control Nora.

Kfir consults Ffion on some of the creative choices that have been made so far. For example, does their character choice for Kelman make sense? That he is an ‘underdog’ from the North, and is asking Nora for help? She supplies examples of political figures around at the time who can support this choice. Her book, The pain and the Privilege: the women who loved Lloyd George, is interesting in terms of developing Thomas’ character, and for assessing what was acceptable within the strictures of society, and how the suffragette movement needed to work with people in power, i.e. getting Lloyd George on side. ‘Understanding the power men had at this time when working on a play about female emancipation, particularly when suffrage was being campaigned for outside the door, has been useful for us’, explains Paul, ‘Ffion said that Nora, leaving her family home during this historical period, would have had a difficult time, but would have been taking a small step forward for the next generation; every generation has its martyrs.’
Rehearsing the final scene of Act One

It is week two of rehearsals, and the rehearsal room at the Old Vic has become a playful and experimental place. Director Kfir Yefet has created an inspiring working environment by covering each of the four walls with research materials relating to the political, cultural and social milieu of the turn of the last century, the setting for Zinnie’s version of the play. Quotations that crystallise the essence of the play are prominently displayed on the wall adjacent to the acting area:

‘I have begun work on a drama of modern life.’

Ibsen, letter to his publisher, May 1879

‘Marriage is the only actual bondage known to (English) law. There remain no legal slaves except the mistress of every household.’

John Mill

‘You are requested not to discuss Mr Ibsen’s Doll’s House’.

From Scandinavian society invitations, Christmas 1879.

‘My task has been the portrayal of human beings’.

Ibsen

‘Yesterday is false. Today alone is true.’

Hugo von Hofmannstahl, Gestern

The dimensions of the Donmar stage have been marked out, and the performance area is littered with the crates integral to Anthony Ward’s design concept for the production, with children’s toys, crockery, and personal effects, tumbling haphazardly from their lids. The actors have wholeheartedly entered into the main conceit for the play’s design: what would happen if the action was played in the most chaotic room of the house, with the characters surrounded by packing cases?

A 10 feet high fine Christmas tree dominates the back wall, and the scent of pine fills the room.

Actors Gillian Anderson (Nora) and Toby Stevens (Thomas) begin work on the last section of text prior to the close of act two, under the assured guidance of director Kfir Yefet.
Stage 1: contextualising the scene and investigating text

The actors begin seated with Kfir on the crates in the designated acting area, in anticipation of reading through the scene to carefully assess the intention for each line prior to walking through the scene. Before this work begins, Toby wonders whether he would take off his hat and coat prior to entering the library, as he has just returned from the outside world. Would he still have his brief case? Kfir thinks it is important that he still has these items, which could possibly be dusted with snow, demonstrating how cold and hostile the outside environment is, so that, over the two and a half hour duration of the production, the audience get a sense of the world Nora is going into.
Toby has thought through the logic of Kelman coming to see him in the previous scene, believing that this motivates Thomas to go and work on his article about Kelman, and that he has just returned from dictating parts of the article to a clerk. Kfir supports this decision, as it helps Thomas with the first stage of irritation that he shows towards Nora when she begins talking about Kelman. Kfir also shares the fact that, during his last rehearsal, Christopher Eccleston was beginning to explore the energy of what had happened between himself and Thomas in the study, and how humiliating this was for Kelman. Toby corroborates this view, ‘whatever happened in there was pretty unpleasant!’ And, adds Kfir, ‘pretty brief’. Toby imagines the conversation, ‘it must have been along the lines of “as my successor, can you say something that makes my life more bearable”, and I’ve replied, ‘no way.’ I’ve been firm, but he still has an idea that Thomas can be manoeuvred by Nora’. In light of this, Gillian questions whether her earlier line to Dr Rank, ‘I don’t see what he [Kelman] wants here, there’s no possibility of getting his seat back’ sets the idea that ‘once you are out, you are out’, too early. Kfir thinks this earlier line shows what’s in Nora’s mind regarding how she saved Thomas from losing his seat during his illness: ‘she knows it’s so important to avoid scandal at all cost; she’s aware of this from talking to Christine. It is another component that prepares her for Act Three.’ Gillian doesn’t think that her ability to leave Thomas is purely intellectual, ‘people have survival mechanisms’.

Printed below is the text for the scene, with the salient comments made by Gillian, Toby and Kfir during first part of the rehearsal, where they read through the text, italicised in red:

*The delivery boy brings in boxes.*

Nora watches.

*More and more boxes.*

**Kfir:** ‘Christmas is piling up in front of you. When the delivery boy leaves, it would be nice to have Nora on her own for a while.’

She stands up.

Thomas comes in.

**Thomas** back at last.

Anyone here?

**Nora** no, just the delivery boy.

**Thomas** the delivery boy?

**Nora** please Thomas I think I have a headache coming. Yes more boxes but only essentials.

**Thomas** and someone else

**Toby:** I would like to transplant ‘someone else’ with ‘anyone else’.

**Kfir:** I know what Zinnie would say, the line leaves it open to Nora tell him that Kelman was here.

**Toby:** And Thomas’s instinct is to protect Nora.

**Nora** I don’t think so

**Thomas** not telling fibs are you Nora? Not singing out of tune?

**Kfir:** The metaphor is lost here; in Ibsen’s original, Torvald (Thomas) calls Nora his ‘skylark’. However, it is something that has informed Tim’s composition of the music.

**Nora** I can’t recall any

**Thomas** really Nora, I just saw Kelman this minute walking out of the gate. I passed him on the path, he’s hanging around here like a ghost
Kfir: As Christine said, Kelman is a bit like a stalker.
Gillian: Is the simile of the ghost in the original?
Kfir: No, but the idea of ghosts is very strong in the play, with dead wives, and dead husbands.
Nora: oh.
Thomas: what’s going on?
Nora: nothing
Thomas: don’t tell me he started plaguing you with tales of his innocence?
Beat
Thomas: That contemptible man
Nora: He has two boys
Thomas: Nora, really. What on earth possessed you to even talk to him? And then on top to tell me a lie
Toby: That line is saying ‘talking comes before something else’. That’s the important thing – Nora and Kelman have had a dialogue behind my back.
Nora: not really a lie
Thomas: yes, you said no one was here.
Beat.
Thomas: A lie is a lie Nora, however small
Nora: he’s lost everything Thomas
Thomas: Nora! Enough.
Nora: and it’s all just allegation, nothing has been –
Thomas: Enough!
Nora: He decided to become a politician, he knew how it works.

Pause.
Thomas: I had an interesting conversation with Mrs Sylvester yesterday
Nora: oh
Thomas: she was wondering if we’d be having a gathering like last year
Nora: a gathering
Thomas: she said it would be very seemly, for Boxing Day
Nora: Everyone enjoys our gatherings, and now we’re in this post
Toby: Shouldn’t this be ‘now I’m in post’? I’m thinking of what Nora says at the end of the play, ‘It’s all about you’. Wouldn’t it be ambiguous for the audience to hear the ‘we’re’?
Kfir: I’m sure Zinnie would say that this is the phalacy.
Gillian: We have seen a lovely relationship that works up to this point, wouldn’t this be too much of a flag? It would make for a greater slap in the face at the end?
Kfir: Ibsen saw them as two vaudevillians, two mutually dependant roles who understood how the relationship operated. And there is an element here that they are the party people, as everyone enjoys their gatherings.
Toby: This scene sets up what the marriage is all about.
Nora: if you like
Thomas: I thought it was a good idea. Celebrate our arrival
Nora: And you could wear fancy dress Nora, just like last year
Thomas: You can count on the Sylvesters to make good suggestions
Nora: And you so enjoy dressing up
**Toby:** What I don’t understand is why I object to Nora spending a few pennies on Christmas tree decorations, yet I’m prepared to fork out on a party?

**Kfir:** The Sylvesters are rich Americans – the sort of people who are about to sail on the titanic. They have probably offered to pay for it.

**Toby:** That’s what’s important then, and what I need to get into my head.

**Nora:** Do I?

**Thomas:** come on don’t take that tone with me. You’ll love it, I’ve already spoken to Annie and the staff about it. I was waiting to surprise you. You can dance and everyone will be charmed. Just like last year, Yes?

*Thomas nods.*

**Nora:** Wonderful.

**She smiles.**

**Thomas:** we’ve got a lovely Christmas ahead. The best.

We will try not to fill it with work, and enjoy ourselves.

*She nods.*

**Nora:** But can I just ask, was it really something so terrible that Kelman did?

**Thomas:** Nora, I’ve just said no more

**Nora:** I can read it for myself in the papers

**Thomas:** you’ve never shown any interest in the papers

**Nora:** I’ll call for one tomorrow

**Thomas:** fraud.

If you want to know.

That’s what he did.

**Kfir:** I’ve discussed this with Chris, and we feel that there is more to be unravelled here. What occurred to me after we had our talk with Ffion [Ffion Hague, the production’s historical adviser] about the Marconi incident, was that he took other politicians down with him. How else can Thomas go from being an MP to a Trade Minister literally overnight? If the Prime Minister lost half his cabinet, Thomas is now one of the new squeaky clean young replacements.

**Toby:** Thomas certainly has an aspirant quality.

**Nora:** that was all

**Thomas:** that was all? How can you say that?

**Nora:** maybe it was a mistake

**Thomas:** I dare say it was

**Nora:** maybe he had no choice, I mean

**Thomas:** Everyone has a choice, however bad it gets you always have the choice. Or even yes, fine, I can conceive of a situation where one feels they have no choice, but afterwards, you should then be bold enough, remorseful enough, to admit guilt and take the punishment. But this man, he went on covering up his crime, until the circle of deceit just got worse and worse –

**Nora:** how much worse?

**Thomas:** Much much worse. Of course it did because Nora that’s how fraud and deception works. It starts out with a small misdemeanour, perhaps not so dreadful in the grand scheme of things, but it’s in the covering up, the secrecy required to maintain that discretion that the deception grows, until my dear it has the perpetrator by the throat and there is no way back. That’s why of all crimes I fear fraud the most. It always leads to a court case and a throttled man.
And as a politician, our staple is trust. That is, after all, all we have to give to the public.
And he lost it.

Toby: It's a lot of stuff to say! Nora doesn't understand politics, so I talk to her like a child.

Gillian: I like the word 'secrecy' that you use here, for the domino effect it has on Nora.

Kfir: Yes, and it has to be scary, compounded by the reference to the children in a moment.

Gillian: The way you did it at our previous rehearsal scared the living daylights out of me! Remember, by talking about it, we lose the momentum. When we come to run it, it will be clear that Thomas told her not to mention the subject of Kelman again, and when she does, it unleashes his anger.

Kfir: It definitely has a spiralling effect.

Nora: how dreadful

Thomas: But the children, his children, that is the worst of it. On a human level

Toby: This is another gear – he's pompous, the moralising politician.

Gillian: It's getting into 'the sins of the father', because he says I've done what I've done because of my father.

Kfir: There is a lot more of that in the original play.

Nora: why the worst?

Thomas: Children are like little sponges, they absorb what's around them. And if what is around them is deceit and lies, then what else will become of them?

Nora: are you sure?

Thomas: Kelman's boys will already be on the road to moral ruin, there is no question.

Nora: no?

Thomas: what chance did they have really?

Exposed to all those lies on a daily basis. Thinking your parent to be one thing, only to find out they're another? A child can’t survive that. Not really. It seeps into their blood through the atmosphere of the house. The lies of a parent, there is nothing so destructive really. How can a child believe or know what's true ever again?

Nora gasps.

Thomas: hey, but no more.

Now enough of this talk of men like Kelman, let's enjoy Christmas eh?

Toby: What I like about going through the text in this way, is that I gain an understanding of what it is I'm trying to say.

Gillian: Then, when we play it, the rest slips into place when we find it emotionally.
Stage 2: playing the scene

Kfir suggests that this might be the time to start becoming aware of the ‘inner circle’ designated centre stage in the design concept for the production. This will be marked out by the oval glass ceiling panel, which will be lit at key moments during the production. The convention will only be used to highlight moments between Nora and Thomas, heightening the emotional and psychological state of the relationship at that given time. The first time that Kfir wants to use the effect is at the close of this scene:

As everything else goes black on stage, the oval will be lit. I want to go through a moment of suspended time at the end of your scene, ‘let’s enjoy Christmas’, inviting you somewhere.

After the interval, your children will be standing in the same positions as you were at the close of this scene.

Gillian and Toby run the scene in its entirety. What is striking about the overall effect of the scene is the way that Thomas ‘controls’ Nora. It is evident why Thomas wants to bring closure to the situation, yet the impact of the aggression behind the delivery of his line ‘Enough!’ is devastatingly shocking. This display of status by Thomas disquietens Nora and shifts the mood of the scene; Nora’s inner anxiety is palpable. After running the scene, Toby acknowledges how the
previous stage of the rehearsal process, where they talked through the scene, really helped him to understand the dynamic of the relationship. ‘I discovered during that discussion, that I really don’t like Nora talking about Kelman, and this helped me drive through the emotional force of the scene when we ran it.’ Toby is still wrestling with why Thomas has such a pathological hate for Kelman. Kfir identifies it as fear – fear of what has happened to Kelman: ‘I would describe it as Thomas seeing Kelman as a distorted mirror of himself. Thomas is the ‘black hole’ that everyone is skating on, he is half mad, and fears what it would do to him if he was destroyed like Kelman.’

**Observation point**

When you see the Donmar’s production of A DOLL’S HOUSE consider how the ideas expressed by the director and actors in rehearsal are portrayed in performance. In terms of lighting and design concepts, have any of these ideas shifted in any way?
Conversations inside the rehearsal room, week 3.

Toby Stephens – Thomas

What was your relationship to the play, and to Ibsen’s work generally, prior to being involved in this production?

I have built up my relationship to the plays as a reader and an audience member. I’ve seen a fairly good spread of his plays: A Doll’s House, Hedda Gabler, Ghosts and also Peer Gynt. This is the first time that I’ve worked on one of his plays as an actor.

What key discoveries have you made so far about your character, Thomas Vaughan?

I’m still discovering as I go along. I think what is great about Zinnie’s version is that she has created a believable relationship between Thomas and Nora that isn’t all bad; a relationship between two people credible to an audience, so that at the end of the play one feels, although Nora is walking away from this relationship, it is very sad. It’s inevitable in a way, but also very sad. At the beginning of the play, one should like these people; they have a functioning, if not slightly dysfunctional, relationship; it’s not all that bad. As the play goes on, there is more and more revealed about what is wrong with the relationship and how it is dysfunctional. If the circumstances of the play hadn’t come about, they would have probably carried on. It’s only the enormous pressures on Nora that catalyse this event at the end, which is her walking away from the marriage.
As an actor, do you have any preferred rehearsal processes that you use to develop a role?

I find that I don’t favour any specific method. I change from production to production, depending on what is required. With this, I feel that mostly, what is required is a stripping away of any finesse. The play is set in the Edwardian period, but essentially they are just people talking to one another. Somebody said the other day that Ibsen had written the original play in a form of Norwegian that was very, very plain. Plays at that time were usually written in a very formalised style, whereas he wrote *A Doll’s House* in an everyday style. There was a different dialect used by the actors when they performed the play, and this had never been done before. He employed this style because he just wanted to show people talking to each other as real people. So, for me, what I have been working on is a stripping away, to try and get to the truth of what the characters are saying to one another, of who they are and the dynamics of the relationship. I think what is revealed in the play about Thomas is how childish he is, and how much he needs Nora emotionally. I think this is a very male thing; we want comfort from relationships, we want to be stroked, and we want instant access to that. Although he is doing this very grown up job and sometimes seems like a very grown up person, beneath it is a very fragile, and infantile man.

That’s what Dr Rank says about Thomas to Nora, ‘He’s a sensitive soul, under the politician’s skin there is a little child.’

And I think she sees this all the time, because he reveals it to her. And in the first scene I think there should be element of that which should be quite fun and amusing; and I think the audience should almost be seduced by it. Then, as the play goes on, they see how it is actually a nightmare having a relationship based on those principles. It is like a bottomless well, giving to someone like that, and it becomes very demanding.

The way the play is structured, Thomas and Kelman meet onstage, but never play a scene together in front of the audience. Yet Kelman’s actions appear to be the driving force behind Thomas’ behaviour in his scenes with Nora. What rehearsal strategies have you used to establish your attitude towards Kelman and bring this into your onstage relationship with Nora?

It’s one of those questions that I’ve been asking myself a lot: why does Thomas have such a pathological dislike of Kelman? He’s very scathing about Kelman, and absolute about his condemnation of him and everything associated with him – his family, his children. Thomas sees him as a corrupting force. I’ve likened it to a sort of vertigo, a fear of being this politician who has so much to loose. As you rise up higher and higher, you become more and more isolated as more and more people want you to fall. So it’s having a terror about this fall. It will eventually happen; hopefully not in the same way that it happens to Kelman. When Thomas wants to distance himself as far as he can from Kelman, little does he know that the man has infested his marriage, his home, everything, and will be his downfall – in every way. I think it is right that they don’t meet on stage: what would they say to one another? I think it is better that all that stuff happens offstage. There is a feeling that they skirt around each other; Thomas hides from him, ‘I’ve just seen Kelman coming out of the gate’, he says to Nora at one point, but they keep missing each other, avoiding one another.
You are working with a classic text, yet also working, in effect, with a new play. What are the contemporary resonances of this new version of the play?

What is good, is that this version has moved away from the issues in the original play that are a bit removed from us. For example, women, to a greater extent, are a lot more emancipated than they were back in Ibsen’s day. So this version moves it slightly nearer to us, and makes it a piece about a relationship and a woman’s role within a relationship, and how that can still become very skewed and confining. She is the mother, the lover, the one who tends to the emotional needs of the man. The strange thing is that the woman can be very powerful under those circumstances, but at the same time can be utterly powerless at any moment. Nora has a lot of power, and we can see that she influences Thomas enormously; she gets a lot out of him by manipulating him. But at the same time he can flip it, and turn on her, taking the power away from her. That’s a very interesting, and I think quite truthful dynamic in relationships. Power shifts from one to the other, and then there will be moments when you are in harmony and it can be really lovely. But most of the time, it is out of kilter, with one person in control, withdrawing love or affection, and the other one looking for it, and vice-versa. I’m hoping that what will be revealed is that it is a play about a modern day relationship and how dysfunctional that can be.

Are there any ideas in the play that have emerged at this stage in rehearsals that have surprised you?

Yes. It’s not an area of the play that I’m directly involved in, but the politics of Christine’s life are quite revealing, showing how difficult it was for a woman to survive independently during this period. Then there is the dynamic between Christine and Kelman, who, at the end of the play, are moving into a relationship that will be more balanced, because of all the turmoil that they have been through. The journeys that they have been on are very interesting: Kelman has lost everything, and is now back to ‘ground zero’; Christine is desperate for release from confinement in a life that is just about survival really. At the end of the play, one hopes that they are going on to some future that will be much more even handed – a relationship that is good and solid. Whereas Nora and Thomas are gone.
Maggie Wells – Annie

What was your relationship to the play and to Ibsen’s work prior to being involved in this production?

I have done a lot of classical theatre – Shakespeare, Gorky, Chekhov – but never Ibsen. There are not a lot of parts for me, there weren’t even when I was younger! It is exciting to be part of it now, though.

Zinnie has combined the role of the nurse, Anne-Marie, with that of the maid in this version of the play to create the role of Annie. What creative possibilities and challenges has this presented you with?

One of the most interesting scenes between Nora and my character is gone, but I’m using the information that it contains about my relationship with Nora as background information on how I behave with Nora. Annie’s history is that she had her own child and it was taken away from her as a baby. Instead of nursing her own baby, Annie is given Nora to wet nurse. She’s brought Nora up and has been with her all this time. An amazing history is there within this character; she is not just any servant.
Every time Annie comes on stage, the challenge is to make everything matter: she is the ‘everyday’ of the life of the house. Life still goes on during the events of the play—the cook is still cooking, the gardener is still gardening. I would like to think that the audience get to know who Annie is. There are levels there, which give texture to the world of the play.

Zinnie has invented the masterstroke of setting her version of A Doll’s House in Neil Kelman’s former home, with the action taking place within days of the family moving in. How has this setting and timing influenced the way you have approached playing the role of Annie?

Because of the way the set has been designed, nothing is fixed. No-one is comfortable. There is the added dimension that it is Christmas, and my job is to make the family feel at home. Yet there is the sensation of shifting ground; no-one has found their space. The discomfort has a sense of danger to it. They are all trying their best to establish their space; Annie is trying to sort the children out. Kelman comes into this chaos bringing the added dimension of emotional disorder.

What has been the most useful research that you have done to support your interpretation of the character?

I played one of the downstairs characters in the television series, Upstairs Downstairs, devised by Eileen Atkins. It was set in the same period as this production, and it was a politician and his family living upstairs. Eileen Atkins’ mother had been in service, and I remember the research into the detail of how downstairs was run, and how everything that went on between the family upstairs, the servants knew about downstairs. I brought this back into my memory bank when first rehearsing the scene where I witness Thomas and Nora in a private discussion; they are oblivious to Annie’s presence, she is a servant, so her opinion doesn’t matter. She is a non-person. One thing to remember though, is that this household isn’t typical of the period. There would be more servants; Annie wouldn’t be answering the door as well as taking care of the children for example. I’ve justified it by deciding that Annie is holding the fort in the new home until more staff are appointed after Christmas.

In this version, all the characters refer to themselves, or are referred to, as children. Indeed, Nora’s children actually appear in the play. What do these references, and the physical presence of the children on stage, bring to the production?

I haven’t really got that far in my thinking yet, as we haven’t run the play in its entirety. But it certainly is ‘children’ all the way; all the adult characters are childlike in their behaviour. Annie has probably babied Nora all her life. When I first rehearsed bringing on the parcels in Act One, I initially approached it by playing the action critically. Kfir questioned this: should I really pre-empt the criticism Thomas displays when he sees the parcels? This made me think that I could play it that Annie spoils Nora, offering up the parcels as if they are more child like treats for her.

So you are implicit in keeping Nora as the small child?

Yes, I am. In a way, she is the spoilt child: she is so adorable, that everyone gives in to her, and allows her to play that role.
**What rehearsal techniques have you used to establish your role?**

One useful technique I use is called ‘points of concentration’. I identify both the external and the internal points of concentration for playing a scene. The external points are: it’s Christmas; it’s cold, it’s winter, and the house isn’t heated; I’m exhausted because I have been up since 4 am in the morning, working. An internal point of concentration might be that I am worried about Nora, or I could be worrying how I am going to look after the children. I still identify an objective for the scene, but the point of concentration helps me to play the scene. For example, I might decide to play it as if I’m exhausted, and then as if it is Christmas. I might try several of them out during a rehearsal, and then discard some of them. Experimenting in this way gives you a picture of your character. You can identify your points of concentration for each scene; it gives you a facet to that scene. Sometimes you can get locked into doing a scene in a certain way, points of concentration help to free up a scene. I also use this technique to ‘freshen up’ a role during the run of a play. For example, I might play my opening scene as ‘it’s a new house’. I always let the other actors know I am going to do this. It is a Stanislavski based technique which I learnt when I worked with the director Mike Alfreds, and again when I worked with Shared Experience.

**What are the central ideas in the play that seem to be emerging at this stage in rehearsals?**

In this version, it is still fundamentally a play about women, about how a woman’s lot is not a happy one. What is interesting is that Zinnie has made Nora and Thomas’ marriage a happy one, that it is sexy and warm, which is why she has had to cut away certain scenes from Ibsen’s original text. That is why it makes it more shocking when Nora walks out; the audience haven’t been led into this choice.

**What advice would you give to a student who was preparing the role of Annie for performance?**

Don’t be frightened of having a small part. You have to inhabit your space, even if it is a small space for only three minutes. As Stanislavski said, ‘there are no small parts, only small actors.’ He also believed that everyone on stage is a contributor to what is going on. For me, it’s all about Annie, and she comes onstage with her life.
Anton Lesser – Dr Rank

On one level, you are working with a classic text, on another, with a new play. How has this impacted on the rehearsal process from your perspective?

I’m a bit old fashioned; I have a reverential attitude to text. I don’t look at a text and think “How can I adapt this to how I want to do it?” – in the way that a movie actor would find it natural to do with a film script. I came up through the RSC where you are dealing with material you don’t tinker with! My feeling is, how can I make what is here, and untouchable, work? So, I’m having to be a bit relaxed with that attitude, because this is a new version of a classic text, and the version allows you to be flexible. A version is already one step removed from the original Ibsen. Indeed, it’s already one step removed after being translated, so we are now two or three steps removed. I feel that we can dare to be a little more relaxed with it under these circumstances. If the text says “I will”, I can say “I’ll” if it feels more natural.

With your classical background as an actor at the RSC, what has been your relationship to Ibsen, and to A Doll’s House specifically?

I’ve never been involved in a production of the play prior to this, I’ve only seen one production of it at Stratford with Stephen Moore as the Thomas character, Torvald, and Cheryl Campbell as Nora. It was in a small space and it was terrific. But I don’t know a lot about Ibsen!
This version of the play is set in the Edwardian period. What research have you carried out, either individually or as a company, to support the production process?

Ffion Hague came in to talk to us – and that was fantastic. She is the author of The Pain and the Privilege, a book about the women in Lloyd George’s life. Her presentation of that period, delivered from the perspective of a politician’s wife, was so interesting. Kfir invited her into rehearsals because Zinnie was thinking of Thomas’ character as the English equivalent to the Welsh politician and former Prime Minister Lloyd George at that time. He also thought it would help identify the play’s contemporary political resonances, about sleaze etc. Ffion talked about what it was like to be a politician’s wife today, how she resisted doing the things expected of her – in terms of how to behave and dress – when William Hague became leader of the Conservative Party.

Zinnie has located the action of the play in Neil Kelman’s former home and Anthony Ward’s design identifies the room as the library, pared down from the elaborate drawing room setting prescribed by Ibsen. From your perspective, how have these two factors influenced the rehearsal process?

I haven’t looked back to the original, because I quite like to come to things completely innocently. I know if I had steeped myself in the original that would not have been a salutary thing to do, as I would have approached rehearsals with so much baggage! For me, this room, this setting – the house that once belonged to Kelman – is all that I know about the play. So, I haven’t had to make a shift.

Coming to the play afresh, are there any particular discoveries that you have made about your character, Dr Rank, at this early stage in the rehearsal process?

We are two and half weeks in, so yes, it’s beginning. I must confess, when I first read the script, I thought, what is the function of this character? The tension between Thomas and Nora is so palpable, so tightly sprung, and this comes from the repressive quality Thomas has. One of the play’s central ideas, the desire to live a life where men and women talk honestly to each other, that could almost be a two-hander! That got me thinking, where does my character come into this? To be honest, I don’t yet know, but I’m starting to sense that there are qualities in Dr Rank which illuminate the bits of Thomas that Nora is struggling with. In the great plays of Chekhov and Shakespeare, I sometimes think of the characters as not only themselves, but as elements of one human being that we all are. They are like bits of us that we might have pushed away to keep at bay, or elements that we are trying to embrace. So, a character is always two things: he is himself, but also, in a way, a metaphor for the bits of other characters that they are either embracing or rejecting. So, I see Dr Rank as a character in his own right, but, more importantly, as an element of a man, a human being, a totality. He has qualities that Thomas lacks, such as compassion, openness and friendship.

And, presumably, this is informing your onstage relationship with Nora?

Yes, absolutely. Nora can enjoy these qualities with Dr Rank. I’m just beginning to see the excitement of discovering that. The more you unpick and scratch the surface of the characters as symbols of the whole, as well as just people in a play, it feels as if you are giving an audience more access to recognising bits of them that they may be holding down or suppressing. And art being a mirror, as
Shakespeare said, it becomes a clearer mirror. It implicates the audience further and the production becomes a potentially more nourishing experience to watch, because you are not just sitting back observing a series of characters, you are actually being poked inside and sensing something that is universal.

**Which is why the work of these writers is still being staged.**

Yes, I would say so. The reason why these great writers are so enduring, the reason why their plays are classics, is because they touch on things that are bigger than just an entertaining tale.

**It’s interesting that you highlight the idea of seeing the characters as symbols in this play, because Ibsen’s later work very much delves into symbolism. Five years after writing A Doll’s House, he wrote The Wild Duck, which is categorised as his first experimentation with symbolism. So it’s almost as if these symbols are there, pulsing away, in his previous work.**

Yes, they are. I remember seeing one of his even earlier works *Brand* with Ralph Fiennes, and I found that really powerful. That dealt with archetypes, symbols and metaphor.

In terms of what we have just been discussing, that characters can represent elements of ourselves that we either reject or embrace, it is interesting that in Dr Rank’s scene with Nora in Act Two Zinnie gives him the same line as she gives to Christine when talking to Nora in the previous scene, “don’t push me away.”

That is interesting. It could be something in Nora’s own self that she is projecting, manifested as the external character of Rank or Christine. If you look at it from a psychological perspective, you could say the voices of the characters are the voices of the self, in this case, Nora.

**It is noticeable how often the characters refer to themselves, and each other, as children in the play. Is this a theme that has come to light during the rehearsal process?**

It hasn’t come up overtly yet. But I think we are all aware that the title of the play, *A Doll’s House*, indicates a place where behaviour is relatively child-like, or reminiscent of children. And of course you have got real children present on stage too. So the play addresses the issue of maturity in relationships. There is the moment in the play when Rank tries to express his feelings to Nora, and she says to him, ‘no don’t say it’, and as he leaves the scene, he says, ‘ridiculous little mouse.’ She responds by saying, ‘don’t call me that.’ Later on, when he leaves the house for the last time, he says to Nora, ‘Next year, you can come as yourself’ (to the fancy dress party), and Thomas says, ‘How can she do that.’ And Rank says, ‘oh, she’ll just have to wear her own clothes’. The way she grew up was with masks and disguises, and now she can be herself.

**It makes A Doll’s House a rites of passage play.**

Yes, it does. And I think what Dr Rank is saying here is, I’ve called you a child for years, but now its time to be an adult and put away childish things.
Christopher Eccleston – Neil Kelman

You are working with a classic text, yet, at the same time, with a new play. How has this impacted on the rehearsal process?

Well, I made a decision not to read any of the other versions or translations prior to going into rehearsals. That was my first way of dealing with that; I wasn’t going to look at other versions and say ‘I want this, I want that.’ One way that it has impacted is that there has been a change of status in the characters. In the original version, which I am familiar with because I did it at drama school, Torvald and Krogstad are provincial bank clerks really, whereas here their equivalent characters, Thomas Vaughn and Neil Kelman, are Cabinet Ministers at the centre of government. That’s a huge leap in terms of social status and has had to inform our thinking to a certain extent.
You mention that you were involved in a production of the play at drama school. Has this informed the way you have approached the role of Kelman in this production?

In the second year of training on our course, the students always staged an Ibsen. Our Ibsen was *A Doll’s House*, and I was cast as Krogstad, who is the equivalent character to Neil Kelman in Zinnie’s version. I only got to play one of his scenes, because, being student actors, we all had to have a crack at a part. My closest friend and myself shared the role. I think I did Act One and he did Acts Two and Three. I fell in love with the play and with Ibsen as a writer. It is notable that a major drama school, the Central School of Speech and Drama, used Ibsen as a central pillar for training actors.

What is it that you’ve discovered about Ibsen that makes his plays so special?

He writes three dimensional characters. He writes about the inconsistencies of being human, what Dennis Potter once described as humans being half ape and half angel; the grey moral areas that we all, during our life, move in and out of. He presents characters who are in conflict and try to think or feel their way out of it, in front of us on stage – and I think this is the attraction. One of my fellow students said that he felt you should watch Ibsen as though you were looking through a keyhole. That it should be intensely naturalistic.

In this version, Zinnie has invented the masterstroke of setting the play in Neil Kelman’s former home How has your character’s attachment to the location influenced your approach to the rehearsal process?

One of the challenges of this new version is that, in the original, Krogstad (Kelman) was of a lower social status than Torvald (Thomas) whereas here he is an equal, and that creates new territory, because we don’t have that social clash. There is an equality in this new relationship, and it is something that I am still struggling with. I have decided to play Kelman with my natural, Northern accent, which possibly denotes a working class background and creates a contrast to Toby’s Thomas Vaughn, who speaks with RP (Received Pronunciation). Using the example of the Welsh politician and eventual Prime Minister, Lloyd George, we have established that there were ministers with non-standard English accents in Parliament at that time, in the seat of power. So, that brings all kinds of class conflicts into the play; it certainly helps us mark out Kelman as an outsider, which he undoubtedly is. He’s been pushed to the margins of society, whether this is for the right or the wrong reasons, is for the audience to decide.

You say he’s been pushed to the margins of society, he refers to that himself, doesn’t he, when he says to Nora in their first scene together, ‘I am on the bottom rung of the ladder, there’s only you between me and the gutter.’

He also says to her, ‘You don’t belong here, you belong in the sewer with me.’ But, as Stanislavski said, we can never quite believe what a character says about themselves, and we can also never quite believe what other characters say about them – because all characters have motives. So, what is fact, in this play, is very hard to establish, and whether Kelman is the villain of the piece, who has done all these terrible things, is open to question. We’ve been told these things, but only by people who have a vested interest in Kelman being a bad person. That’s the interesting thing about Ibsen, he makes us question our perception. The central
character of Nora is deeply flawed; she’s not the perfect heroine, she is a real woman. That is the attraction of the play. Real women are not always perfect, as we all know. And neither are real men!

You were referring earlier to Lloyd George, and the status of politicians of this era. Have you, as a company or as an individual, done any historical research that has informed the rehearsal process?

Well, I’m going to be slightly controversial; I’ve always felt that with Ibsen, Strindberg and Chekhov, people can get overly obsessed with the period details. I’m attracted to Ibsen’s plays because of the flesh and blood of the characters. This is what I have focussed on, rather than the period detail. Obviously I will be wearing a period costume, and, in Zinnie’s version, I am using period language. I have concentrated on creating Kelman from the inside out, rather than from the outside in. I’m interested in the elemental and primal things about the character.

With that interest in the primal elements of Kelman, have you made any key discoveries about the character during rehearsals so far?

At this stage, I think the thing that I am working towards, and Gillian and I have spoken about this, is that because of this financial arrangement that Nora has with him, they have a relationship of sorts; they have had to see each other. When human beings spend time together, however brief, there are exchanges on all kinds of levels. For instance, we improvised her arriving to pay the monthly amount, and what may have passed between them. Maybe she asked about his children; maybe he asked about her children; maybe some sympathetic relationship was there, because he wasn’t applying any pressure at this time, he was helping her out (although he was making interest on the money) and there was a tremendous emphasis on manners at this time, on formality, so that would keep the meetings polite. The interesting thing about Nora is that she has a very active imagination. She is a vibrant personality, and it occurred to me that Kelman is completely isolated from female contact (he lost his wife, and is bringing his sons up alone), so that his contact with this woman could be quite moving, and he may depend on it slightly. So all those things and that pre-history, informs their relationship on the stage. And what we learn during the course of the play is that they have similarities, in their contemplation of suicide for instance. There seems to be a bond there; he seems to know what she is talking about and is holding a mirror up to her. As Nora walks out the door we have to presume what becomes of her. How does she survive? I would think she certainly goes to the margins of society. How does a woman who walks out on her husband, in those days, feed herself? How is she viewed by society? She is viewed as an outcast and as an outsider. She has a view of Neil Kelman from the start of the play, that he is a pariah. He has an important line that he says to her: “You know nothing of people.” I don’t think he says it in an accusatory way. He says it in a way that he is surprised at her innocence – coming from bitter experience of how he has been treated.
Kelman never appears on the stage with Thomas. How have you contended with the idea that there is a relationship between these two characters, yet they never meet?

We haven’t improvised around that, and we haven’t spoken about it. But in my thinking time, and in my invented biography, of events etc, I have imagined what that relationship is about. Perhaps me speaking in my accent marks me as different in Thomas Vaughn’s eyes – I don’t sound like him, or his peers, such as Dr Rank. Maybe his politics are different within the Cabinet – on finance or on policy. And the way he conducts himself, maybe he is not as adherent to manners, because he sees the hypocrisy of manners, and that manners can sometimes mask all kinds of filth. I think that when you are on the margins of society, you see certain things more clearly; the Emperor is not wearing clothes. Kelman can see this because he is the malcontent.

In terms of your relationship with Christine, how have you approached your first scene, where you have come to the house just to see Thomas presumably, and you walk into the library to find Nora, and with her, Christine – the first time that you have seen her for twenty years?

It’s a huge problem this. How we have resolved it, is that Tara, who plays Christine, is hiding and I don’t see her. But it’s a real dilemma. It was suggested that I might not recognise her, but I was quite insistent that she has always been the burning centre of Kelman’s life, and even if they hadn’t seen each other for say, forty years, if you’ve been in love with a woman that long, you just know her; it’s not necessarily physical recognition, it’s a sense. It’s a cheat that she hides, but if we didn’t do this, she would be in full view during the scene, and we would have to play it with me knowing who she was. There is possibly a virtue in playing it like that, because it destabilises Kelman. But it was decided not to play it like that, because it detracted from the plot. Whether we are right or wrong, I’m not sure. I may not even be sure when we finish the run, and I may never be sure, ever!

Are there any other discoveries that you have made so far about the play that you think might be useful to a student group work-shopping the piece?

I am having great difficulty in the scene between Christine and Kelman in the third act. It’s pivotal to the plot, but in order for that to happen, my character has to undergo a huge emotional transformation during the scene. I don’t think we’ve resolved that so far, either because I’m not acting well enough yet, or because the version of the scene that we have is not correct. But I think it has always been regarded as the problem scene. For Kelman to walk into the room and say to Christine, “I hate you”, and then, “I love you”, is great in theory, but in practice – how do we do it and make it look believable from a human point of view? It has to happen because in the plot, Kelman retracts his letter, but I’m really struggling to make that journey during the scene; it is a real, active challenge.
Tara Fitzgerald – Christine Lyle

You played Nora in Bryony Lavery’s version of A Doll’s House at the Birmingham Repertory theatre in 2004. Has this recent relationship with the play informed your approach to playing Christine in the Donmar’s production?

I suppose what’s unusual about a play that’s taken out of it’s original language, is that simply by rote of the fact that it’s been translated, it becomes something of an adaptation. Primarily, you are looking at who the translator is, and then who adapts it and what they choose to pick out, to highlight; if they want to set some sort of agenda; if they have something really fresh to say through it, political or otherwise. So, in that respect, the two adaptations that I’ve worked on, Bryony’s and Zinnie’s’, feel very different. Certainly, what is interesting for me is approaching the text from a different perspective this time, playing Christine. Although, it would probably be just as interesting to play Christine in both versions too, because they feel like very different pieces.

From observing this afternoon’s rehearsal, the Christine that Zinnie has created comes across as a very strong character; she seems to be driving forward a lot of the action.

Yes, what you say is correct. When I read Zinnie’s adaptation, the first thing that I was struck by was how ‘beefy’; the role of Christine seemed to be. Classically, in the Meyer translation for example – the text that a lot of people have worked on or are more familiar with – there have been comments attached to Christine, and the actress who plays hers, along the lines of, ‘she has to be a very good listener’, or, ‘she has to be able to act very good listening’. And certainly in some of the adaptations I’ve read, that sense of exposition and using Christine as a narrative tool has been very evident. What I really feel about Zinnie’s version is that she has written a rounded character and that’s testament to her skill as a writer. She introduces Christine in a new context to the original, which changes the dynamic between Nora and Christine. In the original, Ibsen has Christine turn up unannounced, she’s the unexpected visitor, which is something that Ibsen uses in his writing quite a lot as a catalyst for the protagonist. But in this version,
we know that they have met already, and that she has made an appointment with Nora to come to the house today. So, already there is a different element to their first onstage meeting, which helps many of the problems of the original where they are meeting for the first time in many years. Also, setting the play in the context of 1909 England, where politically and socially there were a lot of changes taking place for women, it becomes a very interesting time historically to look at it. Christine, while not being directly part of the suffrage movement, is somehow affected by it, and acts as a mouthpiece for a movement that is rumbling somewhere in the capital. There are pictures of the suffragettes everywhere here along the walls of the rehearsal room, of the Pankhursts, for example, who were very active at the time. The suffrage movement was unsettling the old order and a lot of men were very threatened by it.

**Christine is very independent. In the scene you have just been rehearsing, we learn that she is renting her own flat, and has taken on the mantle of looking after herself financially.** How much research did you do prior to the rehearsal process into the background of her world?

The pleasure of working on a play like this for me, is that it gives you the chance to do some research. Also, trying to establish the differences between the character in Norway, and the character here; you need to be careful not to carry some residue over from the original setting, treating it and locating it in its correct culture. For instance, Christine talks about getting a tram to the house, so I researched what the tram system was like in London at the time. The reality of what she was doing, her job, was akin to slave labour. If you weren’t a gentlewoman’s seamstress, and even then you weren’t on very good money, you almost couldn’t exist on your salary. Things were really, really difficult, quite apart from the stigmatisation of being a woman on your own. In terms of status, the play is located within the class context of the country we live in, in a way that it isn’t in its original Norwegian setting. What Ibsen was talking about was the petty bourgeois environment, and what this version is dealing with is the closed order of class in this country at the time and the inherent social taboos. Christine is working in an environment akin to today’s sweatshops in India; that’s the closest comparison to make in terms of what we understand. That existence was hand to mouth. If you could survive it, that was quite something, if you didn’t fall into an institution, or thievery, or some sort of crime, then, actually, you had to be made of very strong stuff. So it’s that sense of being outcast, of not having the luxury of pride, of having to humble oneself and go begging for work.

**How does this impact on the interplay between Christine and Nora, the idea that as, old school friends, your lives were once parallel, but are now very different, and that you have built up this resilience in order to survive?**

What I hope to achieve, and what I believe Zinnie has written, is to convey the effects of having no money on a human being; the wreckage of that and what it can do. This play is very much about money, it’s one of its biggest themes. This is a woman who has none. What ravages does that create on a human being, when they can’t sleep at night because they can’t think where the money is coming from? It is also about regrets; this is a woman who has some huge regrets. I hope to show that Nora and Christine are diametrically opposed. And yet they are still both women, bound by the conventions of the time, and they still have enormous obstacles to overcome, in their separate ways, in order to advance. I’ve started to think about what it means to be a woman, as a result of this. I don’t say I’m
a radical feminist, but I’m very aware of the legacy of the suffrage movement. Through reading and studying, I understand more about what the journey has been for women; it does bring it home. I like to think that we have equal opportunities today, but that’s not true – we don’t have equal pay. And I think what Ibsen was striving for was this huge revolution that could come about for women; but I’m not sure if that sort of revolution was, or is, possible, sadly, although the suffragettes set the wheels in motion.

The play was very controversial when it was first staged, wasn’t it?
Yes, and it’s so important to remember that. When it was written, women were a taboo subject. The possibility of a woman leaving her marriage and children was not open to debate. Women were a mystery. And perhaps, now, what we’ve created, is something unmanageable; we’ve demanded a lot of things, but now they have arrived, the possibility of working and mothering, and running a home, it’s almost too much. More recently a lot of feminists have turned on each other as an interesting development of the movement. What I like about the writing in this play, is that it shows three women, four if you include Nora’s daughter, very clearly expressing their views, and able to help each other.

What is the impact of the action taking place in the unsettled environment of a family who have just moved house?
I understand what you mean, in that it is a dressing up box effect, but I don’t know if I’ve got there yet in the rehearsal process.

In terms of the dressing up box effect, there are copious references to childish behaviour in the text. In the rehearsal I have just observed, you say to Neil, ‘I am not Mouse’, the childish term of endearment used to describe Nora, implying that you are proposing a mature relationship. There is the undercurrent of adulthood and maturity v childhood and naivety in the play. How evident have these ideas been during rehearsals so far?
I think that is certainly one of the themes. It is a doll’s house, set in an archetypal children’s domain. Part of Ibsen’s idea was to show the childish behaviour of Nora and Thomas. Christine and Kelman haven’t had a childhood really. They have had this part of their lives taken away; they have had to assume responsibility at a young age. Christine has had to look after her mother and small brothers. I’m assuming she was quite young when she took on this role, probably too young, missing out on freedom, which is a big part of a young person’s life. I know that Ibsen valued freedom. That’s what he strived for in his writing. And I suppose the freedom of children is the most beautifully expressed version of that, which is why Ibsen brings Nora’s children onto the stage. He pushes forward this idea that most of us aren’t free to be ourselves, or to stand up for what we believe in; we are pushed down, as is Christine, with her acceptance of hardship, and her regret.

It’s interesting looking at Christine’s journey in the play: it’s hardship that brings her to the house to capitalise on her old friend’s new found prosperity, yet it is here that she rekindles her lost relationship with Neil Kelman – which has been the source of her regret. Indeed, Christine’s first scene in the play, where she openly asks Nora to help her get a job in her husband’s office, culminates in the entrance of the man she loves and has not seen for twenty years.
I’m actually wondering, in the reality of it, how she doesn’t know that this has been Kelman’s house. Because she reads the papers, and must know of his position as a politician. She’s a modern woman who keeps up to date politically, and is aware what’s going on in the street, so I think she knows what’s happened to him. I think she’s managed to glean as much information about him as is available.

**Because he is in her consciousness. Therefore, it is not such a shock to see him.**

Absolutely. She doesn’t ever let go of him. She herself says that every single day she regrets what she did; that she knows she ruined both of their lives.
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Development Department
Donmar Warehouse
41 Earlham Street
London WC2H 9LX

T: 020 7845 5815
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