

DONMARR

behind^{the}
scenes

VERSAILLES

by Peter Gill

Written by Ben Woolf

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Introduction

Welcome to this Behind the Scenes guide to the Donmar Warehouse production of VERSAILLES. As part of the series of events surrounding the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War, the Donmar is proud to have programmed this major new play, written and directed by Peter Gill.

In this guide you will find a wealth of information to contextualise and open up the world of the play. This guide includes details of the historical context surrounding the events of VERSAILLES, some of the key themes and ideas touched on in the play, and an introduction to some of the characters. You will also find the rehearsal diaries of our Resident Assistant Director, and an interview with the designer, Richard Hudson.

Above all, the play is about the characters on stage – their thought and emotions. The war is always present but it is only every touched on obliquely. We have attempted to provide some small level of context here, but it's important to remember that the play doesn't need any foreknowledge of history to make sense. This guide is only a set of footnotes to the production.

'I chose not to write about the more elevated people who dictated the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. The principal characters in the play are for the most part drawn from the middle class, which provided in large part the management of the system which ruled the country and the Empire as they were then.'



Peter Gill

We hope you find this guide interesting and informative. To view the Behind the Scenes guides for other productions please visit www.donmarwarehouse.com/discover/resources.

Ben Woolf

Sam Maynard



Alongside VERSAILLES, the Donmar has organised IMPOSSIBLE CONVERSATIONS, a series of events with leading political and cultural commentators exploring the debate around the legacy of the First World War. For more information, and to listen to podcasts of these events, [click here](#).

Section 1:

Background to VERSAILLES



Francesca Annis and
Barbara Flynn

A Brief History of The First World War

'It is important for young audiences - for all of us - to remember how much the First World War still affects us and how much of the world we live in was made by it, created by it and the peace treaty at the end of it.'

 Peter Gill

The First World War was fought from 28 July 1914 to 11 November 1918.

It was a conflict of unprecedented scale. Over 9 million soldiers died and many more civilians were killed.

The war was fought between two groups: the Allies (focused on Britain, France and Russia) and the Central Powers (focused on Germany and Austria-Hungary). Over time, the war drew in many of the remaining great powers, spreading to draw in armed forces from all over the world.

Fighting took place in Africa, Asia and the Middle East, but the majority of the fighting was in Europe, particularly in the trenches of France.

The experience for the men on the front line was brutal. It was the first mechanised war, in which the tools of industrialisation were used to fight and kill. Tanks, machine guns, barbed wire, poison gas and artillery shells were used for the first time. So traumatic was the experience that many of the surviving soldiers were left deeply psychologically damaged – a state which became known as 'shellshock'.

Simon Williams



Timeline of key events

1914	28 June	Assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand (the Austrian heir) in Sarajevo.
	July	'July Crisis' – a period of uncertainty, ultimatums and build-up to war.
	28 July	Austria-Hungary declares war on Serbia.
	August	Germany declares war on Russia, France and invades Belgium.
	4 August	Britain declares war on Germany – many think they will be 'home by Christmas'.
	19 October	The First Battle for Ypres – the beginning of trench warfare.
	29 October	Turkey (the Ottoman Empire) allies with Germany in the war.
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1915		Women begin to take on traditionally men's occupations.
	22 April	The German Army uses poison gas as a weapon for the first time.
	25 April	The Allied Forces launch an attack on the Ottoman peninsula of Gallipoli, which became one of the most disastrous offences of the war.
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1916	24 January	Conscription introduced in Britain.
	21 February	Germany initiates the Battle of Verdun on the Western Front with the aim to 'bleed to death' the French army. It lasts over ten months, killing between 700,000 – 1 million men.
	1 July	Battle of the Somme. Approximately a 1.2 million men are killed and wounded.
	7 December	David Lloyd George becomes Prime Minister of Great Britain
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1917	6 April	America, under President Woodrow Wilson, declares war on Germany.
	31 July	Battle of Passchendaele in Ypres (Belgium). October Revolution (Bolshevik/Communist) in Russia means Russia withdraws from the War.
	11 December	Britain captures Jerusalem.
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1918	8 January	Wilson proclaims the Fourteen Points, laying out the American goals for the War.
	November	German army collapses, the navy mutinies.
	11 November	Germany surrenders, asks for an armistice.
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1919	January – August	The Paris Peace Conference
	28 June	The Treaty of Versailles is signed. British conscripts demobilised (released from the army to go home).

Causes of the war

'We are now taught to applaud the great achievements of the 19th Century almost uncritically - the industrial revolution, the energy expressed in expansion, the unparalleled technological and scientific advances, the cultural ferment, Dickens and Darwin - without remembering to what extent the First World War was essentially a product of the same century.'

 Peter Gill

The War was triggered by the assassination by Serbian nationalists of the Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo (today the capital of Bosnia & Herzegovina). After a brief stand-off (the July Crisis), Austro-Hungary declared war on Serbia. The other great European powers – Russia, France and Britain (*the triple entente*) – had complicated, interwoven treaties that dragged them into war also.

However, the assassination of the Archduke was just the final straw in provoking a war which was caused by a wide variety of factors:

1 The Legacy of the French Revolution and Napoleon

The French Revolution of 1789 was an overthrow of the old regimes – the rule of Kings, Queens and aristocratic nobility. Under the banner of Libert , Egalit , Fraternit , the old feudal system was abolished, the inviolability of the Church challenged and power shifted from a small elite towards a broader base.

Following the upheaval of the Revolution was a period of instability and fear ('the Reign of Terror') that led to power being taken by Napoleon, a great military leader.

Napoleon conquered most of Europe, spreading the ideals and institutions – particularly the rule of a common law ('the Napoleonic Code') – of the French Revolution. This led to a broadening, across Europe, of the franchised vote and the greater emancipation of ethnic minorities, including the Jews, further challenging traditional national, religious and ethnic identities.

After Napoleon's defeat, Europe was left with redrawn national boundaries and blurred cultural borders. The ease with which Napoleon had overwhelmed the rest of Europe had also instilled in rulers the wish to protect their borders to stop them ever again being so easily conquered.

2 The Rise of Nationalism

Nationalism is the belief that nation supercedes other forms of identity formation. It is a belief system that places a high value on patriotism, pride, national loyalty.

Before the 19th Century many people living in Europe would not even necessarily have identified as belonging to one country. Italy and Germany, in fact, did not even exist as nation states but were, instead, loose collections of states and principalities that ruled themselves independently.

Gwilym Lee



The 19th Century saw nationalism spread throughout Europe. Italy and Germany became unified and countries began to proclaim a single, coherent national identity.

Political, economic (and military) unity meant that what had once been a loose collection of states – though complicated and inefficient – small countries was now transformed into a smaller number of large blocs competing for power and resources.

Ideologically, the passion and belief of nationalism stirred a desire to extend borders and seek national glory. This led to a new militarism – a belief in the military – for example a broadening and strengthening of the Junker (officer) class in Germany. And, more widely, a belief that the interests of the military were the same as the interests of the country.

3 Militarism and the Arms race

The early 20th Century saw a surge in spending by the Great Powers on their military forces, particularly in the Anglo-German naval race. Industrialisation, mechanisation and advances in technology – including the early development of aviation – led countries to build war machines that had previously been unimaginable.

Britain had traditionally ‘ruled the waves’, dominating the world’s seas through the strength of its navy. This naval supremacy was a key support to their Empire, allowing them to protect and control colonies, trading partners and protectorates across the planet.

Germany, led by the aggressive Kaiser Wilhelm II, sought to build an empire of their own to gain resources, colonies and trading partners. They worked to build a navy that equalled Britain’s own. Britain had, at the time, a policy – ‘the Double Standard’ – that meant that they aimed to maintain a fleet double the strength of the next two strongest navies.

So as Germany increased her military spending, Britain responded by expanding her fleet. The biggest symbol of this naval race was in the construction of Dreadnoughts – a type of particularly powerful battleship – that both nations competed to produce in the early 20th Century.

4 Imperialism:

*Take up the White Man's burden,
Send forth the best ye breed
Go bind your sons to exile,
to serve your captives' need;
To wait in heavy harness,
On fluttered folk and wild—
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
Half-devil and half-child.'*



The White Man’s Burden by Rudyard Kipling (1899)

In the early twentieth century, as now, the world found itself more economically connected and interdependent than ever before. The industrial capitalism of the 19th Century had led to an incredible boom in the trade of commodities and goods around the world. France and, particularly, Britain had vast Empires that provided markets and materials to fuel economic growth.

Germany, under the Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, had been slow to build an Empire. But, from the late 1880s, a ‘scramble for colonies’ began and the European powers accelerated their land grabs. By 1914, most of Africa and Asia were brought under European rule. This led to greater competition for the few remaining uncolonised areas and a jostling for those countries that seemed like they might be vulnerable to being won over.

‘The First World War is no great advertisement for much of the world before it. Unfettered capitalism, increasing expansionism, a small governing elite, a limited franchise, nationalism all ensured that by 1914 nothing, certainly not the liberalism expressed in Bloomsbury London and its equivalents elsewhere in Europe, could prevent the war. It became inevitable.’



Peter Gill

A soldier's experience of the War

*No doubt they'll soon get well; the shock and strain
Have caused their stammering, disconnected talk.
Of course they're 'longing to go out again,' –
These boys with old, scared faces, learning to walk.
They'll soon forget their haunted nights; their cowed
Subjection to the ghosts of friends who died, –
Their dreams that drip with murder; and they'll be proud
Of glorious war that shatter'd all their pride...
Men who went out to battle, grim and glad;
Children, with eyes that hate you, broken and mad.*



Survivors, 1917, Siegfried Sassoon

In 1914, many believed that the War would, as Edith Rawlinson says in *VERSAILLES*, be 'over by the winter.' Instead it ground on for years, killing millions in the trenches.

Particularly at the beginning of the War, military leaders on both sides failed to grasp the changes in strategy that modern warfare necessitated. Battles were fought with 19th Century tactics, not taking into account the invention of machine guns, modern artillery and barbed wire. Men were made to go 'over the top' of their trenches to their certain deaths. In the Battle of the Somme, for example, over 50,000 British and French soldiers were killed in a single day without making any significant gains.

The British Army has since been described to as 'lions led by donkeys' – brave men led towards their doom by ignorant and uncaring officers and generals.

Although the guns and weaponry had advanced, medicine was comparatively unmodernised. There were no antibiotics, for instance, meaning that many died away from the battleground of disease and injuries.

Moreover, whereas previous wars had relied on professional armies, the Great War was lethal enough that it quickly needed to find troops through conscription. Many young men with no experience – some with no desire to fight – found themselves in the trenches, in extreme stress, in desperate circumstances with little training.

For some surviving soldiers – like Hugh's friend Bunny Sedgwick Bell – the experience was so traumatic as to be utterly overwhelming. Social attitudes towards mental health problems were unsophisticated and largely unsympathetic. Shellshock was thought to be a sign of weakness and there was little understanding of, for example, what we would term Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Soldiers who refused to fight – because they were too frightened – could be executed for cowardice.

The horrors of the trenches is the focus of the war poetry of soldiers such as Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen and Robert Graves.

Francesca Annis



Women during the War

'The First World War greatly changed the lives of women, in Britain certainly. After it, they were eligible to vote, there became wider choice and opportunities in work. Dress changed, in part because of so many of them having been working in factories during the war - hems went up, hair could be worn short.'

 Peter Gill

'The Home Front' was the term used to describe the experience of those in Britain throughout the War.

Before the War, women had been largely confined to traditional 'women's' jobs – such as domestic service. But the Suffragettes were been fighting to get the vote. In June 1913, Emily Davison had thrown herself under a horse at the Epsom horse race. Earlier in the year they had tried to blow up the family house of David Lloyd George, then the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the future Prime Minister. But when war broke out, Emmeline Pankurst – the leader of the Suffragettes – instructed them to stop the campaign and to support the government.

With many men – especially those of working age – fighting overseas, there was a necessity to involve women in the war effort. 'Manpower' was scarce so, for the first time in significant numbers in Britain, women worked in industrial labour. They were employed in factories, produced munitions in hazardous conditions (they were called the 'Munitionettes' or 'Canary Girls'), mined coal and worked the land – harvesting crops (as the Women's Land Army and the Women's Forestry Corps). Women were also trained in the use of rifles to defend the country in the event of a land invasion.

However, when the War ended and the men began to return home, there were real concerns about unemployment. The jobs that women had successfully undertaken from 1914-1918 were returned to men.

The brutal fact is that they [the British soldiers] have had four years, those that have survived, of stability, of at least knowing where their next meal is coming from. Now they are disbanded, what will happen when they get home? For many it will be hard, with things as they are.. and now with a wider suffrage too.

Geoffrey Ainsworth, Act One

Still, the vital contribution of women in the War effort made a lasting contribution to changing wider social attitudes towards them. In 1918, the passage of the Representation of the People Act reformed the electoral system and extended the vote to include almost all men (previously it had been related to property ownership) and to begin the inclusion of women.

Barbara Flynn



America and the Fourteen Points

You will remember that it was not an unconditional surrender, in November. Germans understand that any treaty they sign will be based on the American president's peace plans. They are to be the basis for negotiations.

Leonard Rawlinson, Act One

Under President Woodrow Wilson, America had stayed neutral throughout the first three years of the War. But American public opinion had been outraged by the atrocities reported of German soldiers in Belgium in 1914 and the sinking of the Lusitania – a British passenger ship on its way to New York – in 1915.

In 1917, German submarines (U-Boats) began to sink American commercial ships travelling to trade with Britain and France. In April 1917, America declared war on Germany.

Woodrow Wilson proclaimed that America was involved in the War for moral, idealistic reasons – rather than, for example, to protect American trade or to support American allies. He formally expressed American goals for the war in fourteen separate goals – aims that became known as the Fourteen Points.

As well as making specific demands – such as an end to the Ottoman Empire and a reduction of military spending – the Fourteen Points was, at heart, a declaration of the right to self-determination. Simply put, Wilson believed that the citizens of countries should choose for themselves how they should be ruled.

Christopher Godwin,
Francesca Annis and
Adrian Lukis



Gwilym Lee



The Fourteen Points became well-known throughout Germany towards the end of the War. The Allies used them as propoganda, translating them into German and dropping them behind enemy lines. Many Germans felt that it was on these terms that they had surrendered.

It was a controversial document. Wilson hadn't consulted with any other leaders before announcing the Fourteen Points. And there were many living in Britain and France, particularly, who thought the Fourteen Points naïve, unrealistic and wanted Germany to be severely punished for having, as they saw it, aggressively pursued a bloody War.

There is going to be a difference between the terms which the Americans hope they can impose and what, in reality, they will be able to obtain. We all, I think, hope for a lasting peace. But that doesn't stop many of us from wanting Germany punished for what she did in prosecuting the War. Hanging the Kaiser is not only a back bench Tory issue, you know... And I may say you know my views are relatively quiet, compared to those you would hear expressed in my club.

Geoffrey Ainsworth, Act One

1919 Paris Peace Conference and the Treaty of Versailles

By 1918, Germany and the Central Powers were losing the war. Germany asked for an Armistice and, on 11 November 1918, there was a ceasefire, ending hostilities.

The Paris Peace Conference was convened in January 1919. Over thirty countries were represented, but the Conference was dominated by the 'Big Four' – David Lloyd George (British Prime Minister), Woodrow Wilson (President of the United States), Georges Clemenceau (French Prime Minister) and Vittorio Orlando (Italian Prime Minister). These four men met informally throughout the Conference and dictated most of the terms of the Peace.

The principal purpose of the Conference was to define Germany's terms of surrender. Of utmost importance was agreeing a schedule of 'reparations' – payments from Germany to the victorious allies to compensate for the damage done to their economies over the war years.

I imagine there is a bill to be paid for this war and who is to pay for it pray? Should we who didn't seek it?

Majorie Chater, Act One

Also at stake was the carving up of huge swathes of foreign territories and colonies. As Leonard relates in VERSAILLES:

...The hurried nation making, the arbitrary drawing of borders. Treating Africa as if it was ours to be disposed of, at will. The king making. Puppeteering in the Middle East where, having been rid of the Turks, they find themselves client states of the French and the British, and American eyes on it all.

Act Three

The Conference also aimed to set limits and conditions for Germany's army, preventing her from maintaining an army above a certain number and size.

The nature of the Conference – that it was attended by the leaders of the most powerful countries on Earth – meant that time was severely limited in dealing with hundreds of incredibly complicated, interconnected issues. This exacerbated a gross lack of understanding and expertise. Simply put, the Conference had only a small window of time to make broad, sweeping decisions relating to a huge amount of detail that affected everybody on the planet.

Against all of this, Germany was excluded from sending any meaningful representation. The Allies threatened with the ultimatum that if the Germans didn't sign the treaty, the war would be resumed.

'Armies, navies, railways, economies, ideologies, history: all these are important in understanding the Paris Peace Conference. But so, too, are individuals because, in the end, people draw up reports, make decisions and order armies to move. The peacemakers brought their own national interests with them, but they also brought their likes and dislikes. Nowhere were these more important than among the powerful men... who sat down together in Paris.'

 **Paris 1919: Six Months That Changed the World, Margaret MacMillan**

John Maynard Keynes

John Maynard Keynes (1883-1946) was amongst the most influential people of the 20th Century. He was a British economist who profoundly changed the way we understand economics.

A maths prodigy, Keynes studied at Eton and Cambridge University before joining the British Civil Service and working as a clerk at the India Office. After a few years he returned to Cambridge and began to write and publish papers on economics.

One of Keynes' fundamental beliefs – which have since become known as 'Keynesian economics' – was that countries should intervene to provide employment for its citizens. Unemployment was not the fault of, for example, laziness but a natural product of a capitalist economy. Keynes argued that in times of recession or high unemployment, countries should stimulate their economies by spending more money to employ more people, ideally in a productive capacity but if necessary to do anything. This is expressed in his 'Coal Mine' thought experiment:

If the Treasury were to fill old bottles with banknotes, bury them at suitable depths in disused coalmines which are then filled up to the surface with town rubbish, and leave it to private enterprise... to dig the notes up again... there need be no more unemployment and, with the help of the repercussions, the real income of the community, and its capital wealth also, would probably become a good deal greater than it actually is. It would, indeed, be more sensible to build houses and the like; but if there are political and practical difficulties in the way of this, the above would be better than nothing.



**The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money,
J. Maynard Keynes (1936)**

When The First World War broke out, Keynes went to work in the Treasury, initially under David Lloyd George, then the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who later became the Prime Minister and led Britain through the War. Afterwards, Keynes was dispatched to the Versailles Peace Conference. There, he was to serve as a financial advisor to Prime Minister Lloyd George.

Once in Paris, Keynes found himself increasingly frustrated by the apparent wish amongst the victorious Allies to punish the Germans. The French Prime Minister Clemenceau, in particular, argued successfully for the Conference to extract incredibly high reparations (repayments) from Germany. This was partly to penalise Germany for starting the war and partly to compensate the Allies for the damage to their own economies during the War.

Keynes believed that such punitive terms would destabilise the German economy to the point that another European war would be inevitable. He described it as a 'Carthaginian Peace' – referring to the brutal peace imposed on Carthage by Rome in the 1st Century BC. Keynes passionately believed that it was vital for Germany to be able to re-establish a productive economy.

In despair, Keynes resigned from the Conference in May 1919, three months before the signing of the Treaty of Versailles. The Treaty imposed brutal penalties on Germany. Many Germans considered the terms to be economically unfair and politically humiliating.

It has since become generally acknowledged that Keynes' predictions were, at least partly, vindicated. That the terms of the Treaty contributed to the collapse of the German economy in the mid-1920s (in Weimar hyper-inflation) contributing to creating the unstable environment in which Hitler and the Nazi Party could rise to power and commit the worst atrocities of European history.

Keynes wrote a candid, deeply critical account of his experiences in Paris called *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, published later that year. It was a bestseller in Europe and America.

My purpose in this book is to show that the Carthaginian Peace is not practically right or possible. Although the school of thought from which it springs is aware of the economic factor, it overlooks, nevertheless, the deeper economic tendencies which are to govern the future. The clock cannot be set back. You cannot restore Central Europe to 1870 without setting up such strains in the European structure and letting lose such human and spiritual forces as, pushing beyond frontiers and races, will overwhelm not only you and your 'guarantees,' but your institutions, and the existing order of your Society.

 **John Maynard Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1919)**

Eleanor Yates



Keynes returned to Cambridge, where he returned to writing. He became bursar of King's College Cambridge – taking control of the College's investments ('the Chest') to speculate with extraordinary success in the stock markets.

Keynes provided some of the inspiration for VERSAILLES' protagonist, Leonard Rawlinson. However, there are some key differences between the two. Unlike Leonard, for instance, Keynes was a prominent member of the Bloomsbury set.

'Leonard is not meant to be a representation of Maynard Keynes, though I have used Keynes economic argument in the Second Act. Gerald and Leonard are, as it were, Bloomsbury only by association. They are well educated public school village boys.'

 Peter Gill

Helen Bradbury



The Bloomsbury Set

'[My sister Mary] works in a bookshop. [She]... is very in with the chaps who run it. Two very literary chaps. Buggers, of course... Conchies at any rate... In Museum Street. I went there with Mabel once. In among the print shops. The most curious place. A house more than a shop. Seemed packed with Mary's other friends and no one else. She knew lots of all that crowd. All mostly pacifists. Curious little hand painted sign outside.'

Hugh Skidmore, Act One

In VERSAILLES, Constance Fitch is linked with a set of literary 'types' in London that closely resembles the Bloomsbury Group. A loose, bohemian group of intellectuals, they included writers such as Virginia and Leonard Woolf and E.M. Forster as well as artists such as Duncan Grant and the economist John Maynard Keynes.

Bloomsbury gave a structure for members to discuss and comment on each others' artistic ideas. It had no formal ideology but – as Constance's speech reflects – the group tended to be liberal, feminist, pacifist, socialist and with a more fluid attitude towards sexuality. They were all strongly influenced by G.E. Moore, a Professor of Philosophy at Cambridge University.

The Group was influential throughout the first half of the 20th Century. Virginia and Leonard Woolf founded the Hogarth Press, which published Virginia's own writing, much of T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*, along with Keynes' account of Versailles Peace Treaty, *The Economic Consequences*.

The group were named because they lived mostly around the (expensive) Bloomsbury area in Central London. Their core members were exclusively upper-middle-class. In the play, Leonard 'resolutely despises' them, adding that 'in order to lead their style of life you need access to more cash than I have'.

Josh O'Connor and Edward
Killingback



Section 2:

The Donmar's Production



Josh O'Connor

Cast and Creative Team

Cast (in order of Speaking)



Edith Rawlinson
FRANCESCA ANNIS



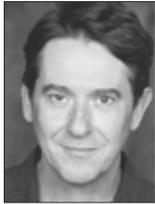
Mabel Rawlinson
TAMLA KARI



Constance Fitch
HELEN BRADBURY



Hugh Skidmore
JOSH O'CONNOR



Geoffery Ainsworth
ADRIAN LUKIS



Leonard Rawlinson
GWILYM LEE



Ethel Tyler
ELEANOR YATES



Majorie Chater
BARBARA FLYNN



Gerald Chater
TOM HUGHES



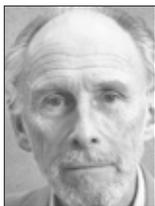
Henry Sedgwick Bell
EDWARD
KILLINGBACK



Angela Isham
SELINA GRIFFITHS



The Honourable
Frederick Gibb
SIMON WILLIAMS



Arthur Chater
CHRISTOPHER
GODWIN

Creative Team

Director	PETER GILL
Designer	RICHARD HUDSON
Lighting Designer	PAUL PYANT
Sound Designer	GREGORY CLARKE
Music Consultant	TERRY DAVIES
Casting	ALASTAIR COOMER CDG and VICKY RICHARDSON

An introduction to the characters

Edith Rawlinson (Francesca Annis)

'Edith is an intelligent and enquiring mother. She has two quite difficult children: they're both very strong in their own way. One is a son, Leonard, who quietly goes about his business and doesn't ruffle her. But the daughter, Mabel, is much more a woman of her time, coming up to the twenties. So it's difficult... they're both in their own way a handful for Edith.'

But she's an intelligent, caring woman. And you feel that, in the play, she is both an interesting character in her own right and a cypher to draw out the information from these men. You have to remember that in 1919 there was very little communication. They're living in the country – in a village. So they're totally reliant on these conversations to get the news.

After dinner conversations are meant to be social – they should just be social chitchat. But in fact, because of who Edith is – and who the other people in this play are – it gets channelled into this very important political discussion.'

Francesca Annis

Edith Rawlinson is the mother of Leonard and Mabel. The first and third acts take place in her house – described as 'a large, arts and crafts, Victorian villa near Tonbridge, in Kent.' We learn that the house was built by Edith's husband for their family. She is now, it seems, a widow.

Edith is consistently supportive and protective of Leonard, though worried when he returns in Act 3, having resigned from his prestigious job in Paris. She also expresses concern and disapproval of Mabel's 'prevarication' about her engagement to Hugh and encourages her to marry him – saying that Hugh is 'kind'.

Edith describes herself as 'very middle class'. Peter Gill says:

'The plays explores what the responsibility of the middle class is or should be. Is its purpose to perpetuate things as they are, as a means of creating stability, or should its role be more progressive leading the rest of us forward? Even now, we largely dependent on the middle class for leadership even though since the Second World War there has been a greater infusion from below. At the time of the play, DH Lawrence for example was the only writer of any significance to have come from the working class.'

Mabel Rawlinson (Tamla Kari)

'I'm not as refined you, mummy. You like things to be nice. I don't want them to be nice because I'm not nice.'

Mabel Rawlinson, Act Three

Mabel is Edith's daughter and Leonard's sister. She is engaged to Hugh Skidmore, a young returning officer.

We learn that Mabel is at college in London, living in Baker Street in London with a family friend – the artsy Mildred Rivers. During the course of the play we also discover that Mabel is grappling with the decision of whether or not to go through with her engagement to Hugh. Her mother points out that, unlike some of her acquaintances, Mabel's options are somewhat limited by her lack of a comfortable, reliable income.

'You're used to a comfortable life, Mabel... Mildred Rivers has money, you have none. Miss Fitch has a University education and works in her bookshop for pin money, because she can afford to. You have only the money your grandpa left behind. And that buys you a visit to Florence.'

Edith Rawlinson, Act Three

Tamla Kari



Constance Fitch (Helen Bradbury)

'Constance represents a very particular social group. A group that's educated, literary and slightly bohemian. She's a pacifist, communist, intellectual. And that went with a way of presenting yourself which stands against the other people [in the play]. So she enjoys this very middle-class sphere but also has a toe in a bohemian world.'

Helen Bradbury

Constance is a friend of Mabel's and, increasingly through the play, a friend of Geoffrey's. Constance lives in Marchmont Street in Bloomsbury, and works in a bookshop, where she associates with a group reminiscent of the Bloomsbury Set. We learn that she was at university with Leonard.

Leonard describes Constance as 'upper middle-class' and her family seem to be wealthy – her parents live in Hyde Park. Her political opinions, though, seem to be more radical than the other characters, particularly about the role of women in society.

Hugh Skidmore (Josh O'Connor)

Hugh is Mabel's fiancé and, in the First Act, a young officer awaiting demobilisation having survived the War.

Despite often being prompted, Hugh never answers questions about his experiences in the War. Though he never speaks of it openly, it seems clear that it has deeply affected him.

In the Second Act he visits Leonard in Paris, where is upset to learn from Henry Sedgwick Bell that his cousin Bunny, a schoolfriend of Hugh's at Eton, is suffering from shellshock. As he says to Mabel, 'I find it necessary to be with someone who has heard a shell explode... You've all moved on, you see.'

'As an actor, it's just so interesting to learn about this period. The first week [of rehearsals] was like going to school with the world's best history teacher. Peter has the most astonishing mind for history. It's not just what was directly related to the play but anything and everything. How politics was then and how it [compares] to now. For me to understand where Hugh's coming socially and politically made all the difference.'

Josh O'Connor

Adrian Lukis



Geoffrey Ainsworth (Adrian Lukis)

'Not an intellectual, but intellectual enough. Especially for an evening out. And easy and supportive and amusing.'

Constance Fitch, Act Three

Geoffrey is a local businessman and a family friend of the Rawlinsons. Geoffrey is an active man of strong, robust, right-wing politics. Throughout much of the play, Geoffrey is involved in planning a memorial to the fallen soldiers.

Despite a relatively uncomplicated social and political outlook, Geoffrey is not uncultured. He goes to the opera and takes As Leonard says, 'He has two lives, which meet only very occasionally.' We later learn that Geoffrey has a mistress and a child in London.

'I'm an old country Tory. Will it work and what's best for me is how I tend to look at things.'

Geoffrey Ainsworth, Act One

Leonard Rawlinson (Gwilym Lee)

'Leonard's privileged in the sense that he had a good education and comes a good family. But he's middle-class. He's not landed in any way. He doesn't have the sense of entitlement that you might get from a public school like Eton or Harrow. He's not come from the almost feudal world [of the 19th Century British class system]. He's part of a new generation of middle-class specialists'

Gwilym Lee

Leonard Rawlinson is a young economist with a specialism in coal production in the North East of England. The play follows Leonard's journey to the Hotel Astoria in Paris, where he serves as a financial adviser to the British delegation.

We also learn that Leonard was in love, secretly, with Gerald Chater, a young, local officer who has died during the War. Leonard is tormented by never knowing the possibilities of the relationship. Gerald describes Leonard as having been 'scared' and Leonard must come to terms with whether this relationship was, in fact, an opportunity that he missed.

During the play, we see Leonard's worldview challenged as he sees first-hand the inefficiency of the Conference and its delegates. He is frustrated when his recommendations are ignored and left to wonder whether his contribution is worthwhile: whether he can better fulfill his responsibilities by playing the politics of the situation or whether he should take a principled stand against it altogether.

'I found I could no longer do my work...confusion, anger, conscience, anger, disillusion, conscience...I couldn't square what I was doing with my honour, if you like, my intelligence, if you like, my beliefs, if you like.'

Leonard Rawlinson, Act Three

Ethel Tyler (Eleanor Yates)

Ethel is the maid in the Rawlinson's household.

It's a small part but it's beautifully written. She's a complete character with a whole offstage life as well. Her brother has been away to the war and in the First Act he's come back. But by the Third Act he's had to move away again because there's no work. Ethel's the working class voice in the play.

Eleanor Yates

Marjorie Chater (Barbara Flynn)

'My mother worries about standards and the servant problem and sees herself and her kind as an endangered minority, while remaining one of the most priveleged in the world.'

Gerald Chater, Act One

Marjorie Chater is the mother of Gerald, a young officer who has been killed in the War. She is wife to Arthur Chater and a family friend of Edith Rawlinson. For much of the play she is in mourning.

In terms of class, background and social position, Marjorie Chater is similar to Edith. And, to the other characters on stage, she largely kind, grateful and considerate. She seems, though, to be somewhat less liberal in her politics.

'We are enough of a hotchpotch already and I don't see why, if you dislike a people, you should persecute them and I don't know any Jews except for Mr. Silverman at the solicitors and I wish them the best of fortune. But my niece is married to an Irishman and very charming he is, but that's about as far as it goes with me, and I'm not more bigoted than the next person. But, it depends on keeping the stock pure as can be now, more than ever, in this time of change.'

Majorie Chater, Act One

Barbara Flynn



Gerald Chater (Tom Hughes)

I'm a simpler chap... I don't complicate things like you do, Leonard. It was never any bother to me in the way it was to you. But I was always glad to get them [your letters]. Always. Anything from you.

Gerald Chater, Act One

Gerald, the son of the Chaters, was an officer in the Great War but has been killed on the front. He was Leonard's lover. Gerald was much more at ease with his sexuality than Leonard. During *Versailles*, Gerald returns to Leonard – teasing, comforting and challenging him.

Gerald, the son of the Chaters, was an officer in the Great War but has been killed on the front. He was Leonard's lover and appears to Leonard as a memory or ghost.

Leonard grapples throughout the play to understand the meaning of the War and to understand how the world can move on. Gerald, however, seems bitterly resigned to the ongoing reality which caused the War in the first place. Leonard teases Gerald for being a 'contrarian'.

Gerald, far more than Leonard, was at ease with his sexuality and, throughout the play, reminds and teases Leonard for having been anxious about their relationship.

Henry Sedgwick Bell (Edward Killingback)

He has no fire in his belly.

Leonard Rawlinson, Act Two

Henry is an adviser sharing Leonard's office in the Astoria hotel in Paris. Whilst Leonard is filled with frustration and tortured angst about the lack of consideration given to his recommendations, Henry seems to be resigned to it.

To Leonard's dismay, Henry, is more concerned with Millicent Forbes on the floor below than with his report on petroleum production in the Persian gulf.

Angela Isham (Selina Griffiths)

I have always thought it wise to listen to Angela Isham.

Gibb, Act Two

Miss Isham seems to be a lynchpin of the British delegation. She is, it seems, the administrator and secretary of the office and gently cajoles the delegates to keep the operation functioning.. She is, it seems, aware of everything that happens. Miss Isham seems to be sympathetic to Leonard's concerns, but diligent in her work and duties.

The Honourable Frederick Gibb (Simon Williams)

He has that independence of mind which is always ready in the even to come down on the side of everything that is reactionary and cruel.

Gerald Chater, Act Two

Gibb is a British civil servant – a diplomat and a consummate politicker. Leonard is frustrated by him and outraged by his apparently sanguine approach to what Leonard recognises to be urgent issues of vital importance.

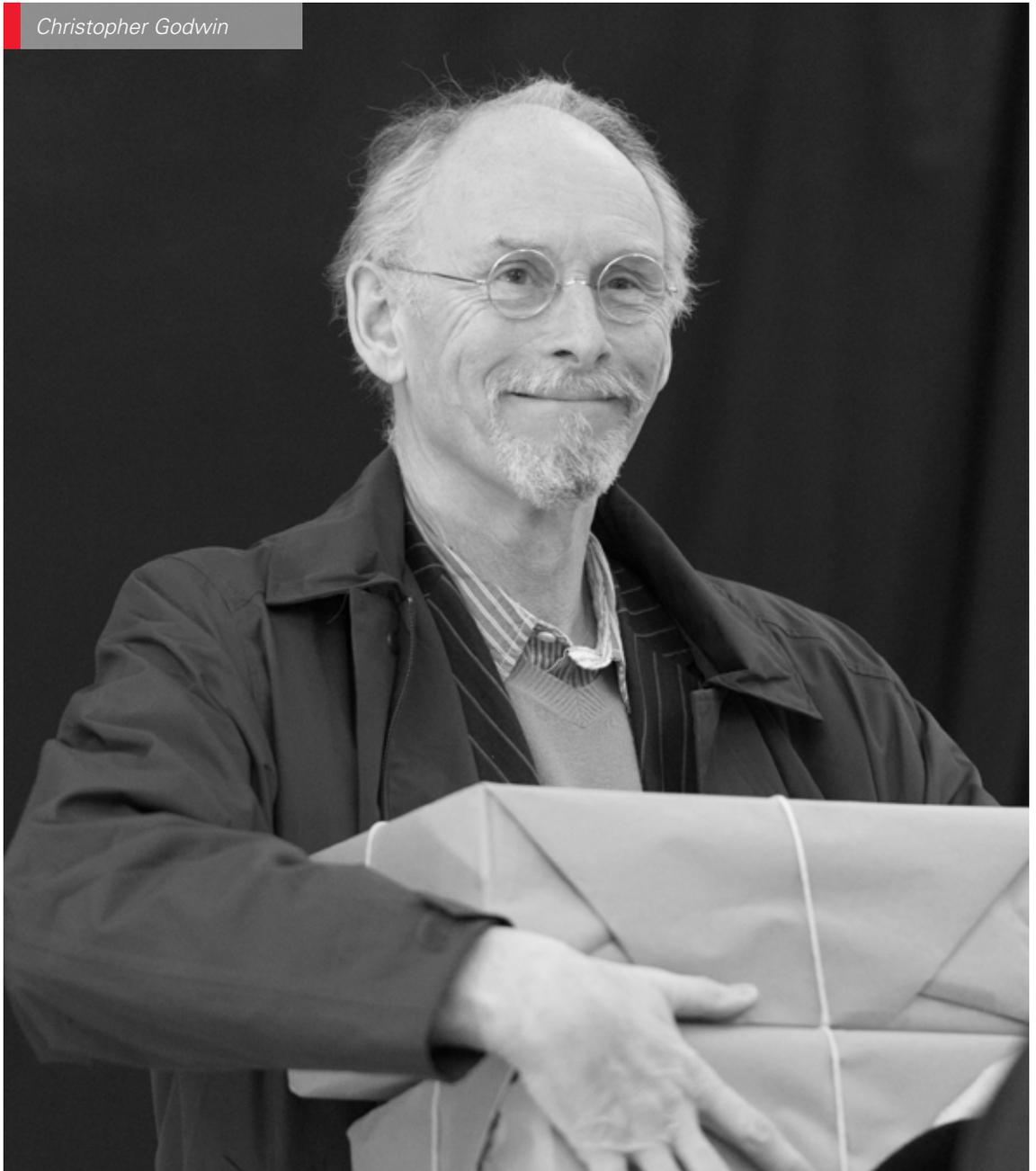
Arthur Chater (Christopher Godwin)

He still finds the easiest of things hard, just at present.

Mrs Chater, Act One

Arthur Chater is Gerald's father. Deep in grief for his son: he is unable to come to the Rawlinson's house in Act One and breaks down in Act Three. Arthur seems to be broadly more supportive of Leonard's decision to resign from the conference, saying that '*Leonard is a pilgrim. He is. A pilgrim... You do what you must*'.

Christopher Godwin



Josh Seymour's Rehearsal Diary

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The cast take it in turns to become human statues, sculpted by their fellow company members into gradually developing tableaux

Resident Assistant Director Josh Seymour's Rehearsal Diary

WEEK ONE

We begin VERSAILLES rehearsals on a bright, brisk January morning, at the beautiful Chelsea Old Church. The day starts with a meet and greet. Artistic Director Josie Rourke speaks to the assembled cast, creative team and theatre staff about her long professional relationship with Peter Gill, from working as his assistant director early in her career, to inviting him to direct *Making Noise Quietly* at the Donmar two years ago – and now, his return to the theatre to direct the premiere of his new play *VERSAILLES*. Josie vividly described receiving the play and reading it overnight, knowing immediately that she had to programme it. Josie concludes by telling us “the reason you take over a theatre is to work with great people”, and in Peter, the cast and crew feel acutely aware that we are about to work with a great man of the theatre.

After the meet and greet, the cast dives into a music session, led by composer and conductor extraordinaire Terry Davies. The session is intended to be an ice-breaker, to help initiate a company atmosphere, and allow people to get their nerves out the way. Although several cast members seem hesitant at first, before long everyone is gaily trilling their parts of the romantic sextet from 1899 musical comedy *Florodora* – the ice-breaker has been successful! The cast learns several more songs, including the contrastingly nationalist and communist anthems *Rule Britannia* and *The Red Flag*. Peter asks the company to sing these anthems whilst imagining the attitude their character would have to each song. This brings a sudden,

subtle focus to the work we had done in the session, and connects the frivolity of the music-learning with the seriousness of the task we as a company have ahead of us.

Moving to our regular rehearsal room in Covent Garden, we spend the next few days examining various extracts from enormously contrasting sources, with a particular focus on the idea of tone. Peter explains the importance of an actor being able to work out what the play is that they are in – how to detect, and accurately play, its tone. The array of texts Peter has selected for this exercise is eclectic and highly entertaining – we move from Wilde to Congreve to Shakespeare to Woolf, whilst gradually reading our own play in a non-sequential way. A fascinating

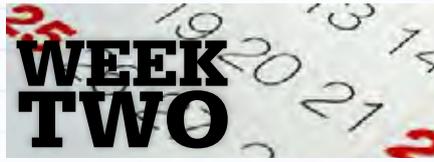
discussion about class within the texts we have read ensues. We compare our play with the other sources we have been performing, and Peter provokes us all to explore the idea that coming from the upper classes, with the education and articulacy it offers, gives people the confidence and perceived right to express one's opinion and to take one's time while doing so.

On Wednesday we have a model box showing from our designer Richard Hudson, and a read-through of the play in its entirety. The read-through leads to a discussion in which people share what the things they didn't understand in the play. Peter, an endless source of knowledge for us all, offers a constant flow of explanations to our questions, touching on fascinating historical and political topics ranging from women's voting rights to the origins of Zionism to the power of the press in the early 20th century. Much of Thursday is spent on further absorbing group discussion – we discuss our knowledge of our own family members' involvement in World War I, followed by exploring our personal experiences of educational institutions and the moral imperatives they instil. After so much intense conversation, Peter decides it is time to get up from our chairs, and so he leads the company in “an exercise in not thinking”. The cast take it in turns to become human statues, sculpted by their fellow company members into gradually developing tableaux.

This soon becomes related to the characters of the play, as the cast collectively creates frozen images

which are typical to each character – a sensual exercise in trust and going with the flow.

The week ends with a focused session between Peter and Gwilym Lee and Tom Hughes, who play Leonard Rawlinson and Gerald Chater. Their relationship is at the heart of the play, and Peter uses this session to explore the characters, particularly helping the actors to access and enjoy the class of the men. We read several of their scenes together and Peter precisely picks through each moment with the Gwilym and Tom, illustrating with precise examples the effect that his writing is attempting to achieve, for example Peter describes a moment of fanciful hypothesising for Gwilym's character as "lying in the long grass looking up at the sky." It is an ideal session to end the week on, typifying as it does Peter's immaculate sensitivity towards the characters he has crafted – the same precise delicacy he is now applying to the process of bringing the play to life.



It's been a productive and fascinating week in the Versailles rehearsal room.

We spend the first few days of the week working through the entire play in a fairly speedy fashion, loosely staging each act, opening up possibilities without locking anything down and asking questions without necessarily answering them. Most of Monday is spent working through Act One. As the act develops and more characters enter the scene, Peter outlines the importance of keeping the action mobile without it seeming hectic, to ensure good sightlines and to allow the discursive sequences to assume a clear physical shape.

Peter moves around within each scene as the actors work, conducting the drama like a piece of music, offering detailed observations and suggestions to the cast which subtly shift meaning and tone. We experiment with replaying short sections multiple times, changing the spaces which the characters occupy each time, and seeing how this affects the dynamics of the relationships within the scene.

On Tuesday, we move on to Act Two, and the play moves to Paris. This act requires us to focus on ensuring that the complex arguments between the characters play out for the audience in a clear and dramatic way. We spend most of the day ensuring that we are effectively articulating the political position of each character. We sketch out a structure of the act's arguments so that we can come back and explore the detail later on.

Gwilym Lee and Edward Kilingback



Barbara Flynn and
Francesca Annis



Peter emphasises the importance of the actors maintaining vigorous “up” energy throughout the discursive sections of the act – whilst ensuring that the audience is unaware of the effort this requires, instead being swept along by the persuasive, equally weighted arguments offered by each character.

The next day we move on to the play’s final act. Peter encourages the cast to experiment with the play’s sense of period and class, using Gwilym’s line “I won’t, too much port,” as an example. This infuses the scene with a dynamic sense of fun, as enjoying the ‘poshness’ of the characters liberates the actors from the worry of overplaying their class. Peter explains that the audience will also take pleasure in seeing the actors show a conscious sense of the specific world which their characters come from.

As we work through Act Three, Peter maintains a sense of gentle experimentation. His constant, encouraging mantra of “don’t worry, it’ll be fine” supportively guides the cast through each

suggestion, no matter how unsure they initially feel of their ability to achieve it. The cast, having now spent a few days working on the mark-up of the set, are becoming increasingly confident with the layout of the space, and are starting to move around it with an instinctive understanding of which positions are strong and how to create interesting images.

We work through the action slowly, Peter subtly transforming the dynamics of the scene through meticulous notes and alterations -

On Thursday evening, I lead a group of the younger cast members to the Garrick Club, where we are given the rare experience of having a tour of the Club (though only male members of the cast are permitted). This trip gives us a fascinating insight into the world of gentleman’s clubs, to which most of the male characters in the play

would have certainly belonged, and with which we ourselves are entirely unfamiliar. We are all amazed by the opulence of the building, its intriguing traditions and magnificent collection of portraits, and the visit opens up a complex political discussion which we continue in the rehearsal room the next morning.

On Friday, we return to the top of the play, and begin to develop detail within the skeleton structure we created earlier in the week. Peter seamlessly transitions between speaking from the perspective of the director and then with the voice of the writer, drawing attention to patterns in the writing which gives the cast helpful insights into the interior lives of their characters, and the tone of the play. We work through the action slowly, Peter subtly transforming the dynamics of the scene through meticulous notes and alterations – for example, we rehearse one character’s entrance around six times, altering the pace and energy of the entrance each time and seeing how this entirely changes the story that offers to the audience. We end the week by focusing on a particularly challenging section of debate in Act Two. Peter discusses the idea of classical argument in Greek tragedy, and the origins of theatre in Greece, when it existed to offer public moral debate. It is our task to ensure that the audience is able to follow each step of the argument offered by the characters. As the cast become more assured with their own grip over their characters’ debates, so the scene’s progression becomes more confident and clear. It is a heartening end to a week full of experiments and discoveries.

WEEK THREE

Monday morning of Week Three begins with a music session, as maestro Terry Davies rejoins us to lead the cast in some rousing period tunes. Peter encourages the cast to perform one song, heard in the play being rehearsed by the British Empire delegation, with the attitudes of these characters. This allows them to make luxuriant use of the playful lyrics and sing with ostentatious poshness.

Later in the day, Peter encourages the cast to think about what problems they feel they have to solve in the week ahead.

We discuss the progress we are making, and the cast agree that they are moving closer to discovering what the play itself is, rather than trying to mould it into something else, and how to be true to this. We then get down to the business of rehearsing, continuing to explore Act Two. Peter begins to craft moments in exquisite detail, transforming sections of the play which may last only four lines into mini-three act dramas in themselves. This process continues throughout Tuesday as we approach the end of the act.

On Wednesday, we move on to Act Three, beginning with something of a Home Economics lesson, as we meticulously work through a scene involving sewing to ensure that each threading of the needle is perfectly timed. The character of Hugh, a young man returning from the war, is key to this act, and we discuss the awkwardness surrounding the other characters' attempts to talk to him about his experiences – language is inadequate to express the horror of the events he has witnessed, and so the characters' speech nervously dances around tackling the topic. Peter emphasises the fact that the play is an ensemble effort – all 13 cast members are tasked with

keeping the energy up in the air, like a ball, at all times, passing it to each other, in order to help guide the audience through the narrative.

We finish Act Three at the end of the day and return to the top of the play, spending a considerable amount of time on the very first page. Peter gently leads Francesca and Tamla, who play Edith and Mabel, through numerous permutations of the opening scene until we have established what feels like the ideal tone to introduce the play, establish where we are for

... the physical life of the show is like a flame - it will look different depending on where you are located, but if you have fuelled it with honesty and passion, the heat will be present from every possible vantage point.

the audience, and subtly provide them with a significant amount of crucial information without them ever feeling it is an expository tactic. Peter explains the necessity to be accurate with the writing and not over-colour it, demonstrating how placing too much emphasis on the language, rather than simply speaking it, makes the play feel like a pastiche of a period, rather than allowing the characters to become living and breathing people of the era.

Selina Griffiths



On Thursday we begin the complicated task of choreographing the crockery in the Act One tea scene. Everyone is required to keep alert and focused as we begin to organise the complex routine of tea cups, sugar bowls and cake knives that the scene demands. Naturally, we don't get it exactly right on our first attempt – some characters end up force-fed three or more cups of tea in the space of five minutes of stage time. Fortunately, we still have time to develop the detail of this sequence further and ensure that the passing out of refreshments is made credible. Peter points out the usefulness of the tea paraphernalia, and all the business that it brings onto the stage. Grounding the scene in the recognisable, physical context of an English tea party provides an accessible context for the political

dialectic which takes place in the scene, ensuring it never becomes abstract and is always rooted in the minutiae of people's lives.

On Friday, we work on one of the key scenes between Leonard and Gerald, and the events in Paris which surround it, exploring the linguistic playfulness of their relationship. Peter describes the progression of young men like Leonard and Gerald as "from wearing velvet suits aged 6 straight to the Foreign Office," neatly articulating the way that their class upbringing and education gives them access to a frivolous and imaginative skill with language. Peter modulates the scene with deft, subtle notes, tweaking until it has achieved the precise tone that he wants. A section where Leonard teases his colleague, for example,

is only four lines long, but under the astute shaping effect of Peter's notes, it tells us as much about the two men's lives as many other plays manage in a whole act.

Peter ends the day's work by talking about the physical life of the production, which is gradually emerging as we discover, as a company, what the play is. He discusses how working on three sides means that the physical life of the show is like a flame – it will look different depending on where you are located, but if you have fuelled it with honesty and passion, the heat will be present from every possible vantage point. At the end of the day, the Donmar office staff visit the rehearsal room to catch up with the cast and crew, making for a very merry end to a productive week.

WEEK FOUR

We begin the penultimate week of rehearsal by discussing the difficulty of playing characters you disagree with, or may even dislike. This is particularly pertinent to the morning's work on Act Two, in which several characters are caught in moral conundrums. Peter explains the importance of not holding a character at a remove because the actor is nervous of being disliked by the audience, and this important note allows people to ally themselves with their character in a tougher and more dramatically satisfying way. As we work through the act in detail, Peter continues to mine the drama of each moment, illustrating how, for example, a line as prosaic and casual as "things have definitely moved on" can suggest and narrate dramatic events outside of the scene for the audience.

We then return to the top of the play, where the tone of the action in the Kent drawing room contrasts significantly with the political machinations in Paris as depicted in Act Two. Peter encourages the cast to act as if the entire play will maintain the lightly comic tone of this initial domestic situation and

not to weight down their acting with the foreknowledge of the tonal shifts that are approaching.

On Tuesday, we work on several sequences between Leonard and Gerald, exploring the dynamic of their relationship, in particular the way they take joy in using language, scoring verbal points from each

other as if conversation is a sport. As an exercise, Peter instructs Gwilym and Tom to perform one of these scenes laid down on the ground as if lying in the long grass staring up at the sky. This exercise frees the scene from its context within the play, instead allowing the actors to simply experience the essence of the boys' relationship and the mood that it evokes.

On Wednesday, we explore the final act of the play in depth. Peter focuses on the ways in which the climactic decision made by Leonard in this act affects everyone. Each character must have an individual relationship with and response to what happens, and these ramifications must palpably ripple across the stage. In order to help with this, Peter creates an impromptu improvisation of the dinner party which precedes the act, describing certain images which the actors then create. This usefully allows them to access their experiences immediately prior to this difficult and emotional scene,

and has an immediate impact on the stakes in the act when we return to it. We also experiment with how intoxicated the characters are in this scene, having been imbibing wine and port beforehand. The actors alter their levels of drunkenness to see how this shifts the dynamics of the scene – for example, being drunk might allow someone to blurt out a question that, played less tipsily, they would have to muster up their courage to ask.

The fact that we are rehearsing a scene containing the line “what do you make of the national rail strike that is coming?” in the week that a London-wide tube strike causes travel chaos across the city indicates the resonance of the play with the world that we live in. The questions posed by Leonard in the final act are still very much unanswered today, and remain the cause of ferocious debate.

Over Thursday and Friday, we begin to run longer sections of the acts, allowing the cast to begin piecing together their journeys over the course of the show. We spend Friday intensively working on Act Two, and have an incredibly useful and productive day. We experiment with accelerating the pace and urgency of the scene, working to create a sense of bureaucratic confusion and panic. After this day of focused work, the actors are far more confident with the act’s challenging arguments, and the conflict of the act emerges even more clearly and dramatically as a result. It is an encouraging note to end on as we head into our final week in the rehearsal room.

WEEK FIVE

Our final week in the rehearsal room begins in jolly style with the cast recording a song, under the baton of Terry Davies, which features at a pivotal moment in the play. The merriness continues through the day, which is spent entirely working on Act One of the play, running together progressively longer sections and scrupulously refining the detail. When we work on the tea scene, for the first time we use real tea, cake and sandwiches. This, naturally, puts everyone into a most excitable mood and potentially causes some sugar highs as we run the sequence numerous times, leading to a high volume of treats consumed.

We move on to Act Two on Tuesday, Peter continuing to fill the production with immaculately observed detail – for example, instructing one actor to hold a

book closer to his face to peer at it instantly tells us about that character’s stubbornly British short-sightedness. Several pieces of actual furniture, to be used in this

Josh O'Connor



act, arrive in the rehearsal room today, which offers an opportunity for the actors to begin exploring how they can use these set pieces in performance. As more actual props arrive, the environment begins to feel more like a bustling, hectic office, and the actors noticeably respond to and play with the opportunities that the increasingly detailed physical world around them offers – for example, having the actual folders that the delegates use for their work lets us see the ramifications when one particularly clumsy character drops them all.

On Wednesday, we spend time staging the segues between scenes, creating a dreamlike sense of life continuing outside the confines of the play's action. This is intended to save us some time when we begin tech rehearsals next week. For the rest of the day, we work on Act Three, honing detail as we have been over Monday and Tuesday, continuing to

As the week nears its end, we have several full run-throughs of the show, attended by the show's creative team, members of the Donmar artistic staff, and a few invited guests.

run longer sections in anticipation of our first full run through of the play. Peter continues to give meticulous notes, offering the cast precise guidance to ensure their performances remain natural and emotionally honest.

As part of Thursday's work, we are visited by an illusionist, who advises us on how to achieve some specific moments which the play requires. As the week nears its end, we have several full run-

throughs of the show, attended by the show's creative team, members of the Donmar artistic staff, and a few invited guests. It is enormously helpful for the cast to respond to the energy of people who have never seen the play before. Running the entirety of the play also allows the actors to undergo the physical experience of their character's full journey for the first time. This immediately deepens their performances, and brings all the work we have been doing over the last few weeks into sharp, practical focus. After each run, Peter identifies key sections of the play which need to be looked at, and we spend the remaining time in the rehearsal room working on these sections. We arrive at the end of the week ready to move into the theatre and excited to introduce our first audiences to the play.

Tom Hughes





in conversation

A conversation with Richard Hudson, Designer

How did you come to work on this play?

Well, as it happens I've known Peter for about forty years. We lived in the same house when I was a student. But we'd never worked together before.

Actually, this production was something of a change for me. I do a lot of opera and ballet. It's quite a long time since I designed a naturalistic play. I've really enjoyed it. Of course, it's quite difficult at the Donmar to design something naturalistic, because it's a thrust stage. So the balance has been to put just enough elements to suggest where we are and to give a feeling of the period.

Tom Hughes



How does the design process actually work?

In this, Peter sent me the play and I read it several times. I went away and did a lot of research into the period in England and in France. I looked at books on arts and craft architecture. I found books on middle-class interior decoration of that period –photographs and drawings. I looked at arts and crafts furniture and textiles. Then I put together a file of images and colours and textures and things and showed that to Peter.

We went through it together and he told me the things that he liked and the things that he didn't like. He wanted the feel of it to evoke the arts and crafts period but he didn't want it to look too William Morris.

Peter was very keen for it to feel like a family home. So it would have a certain history –there would be some furniture that would look like it came be from an earlier date: Victorian. And possibly in a middle-class family home like that there would be pseudo-Chippendale chairs. Again, being a family home there would be quite a lot of ornaments and mementoes – family photographs.

Typical of that period would be to have a plant stand and a brass pot with a palm in it. Some slightly oriental things, like an Indian screen.

So we had all these elements and then we got the model box from the Donmar and the first decision I made was that we should have a parquet floor which would serve for all the acts. And that in the First Act and the Third Act there should be a carpet.

The colour scheme of the interior was dictated by the carpet: it was one of the first things we looked for.

Tamla Kari



Simon Williams



Then I had lots of meetings with Peter where we played with the furniture. Furniture is difficult at the Donmar because of the sightlines. Obviously you can't have anything that's too high because that will block people's view.

So we chose a low sofa, which has an open back so it doesn't feel too solid. The rest of the furniture is either slightly see-through or very low. And then we dressed it.

There's only an indication of the architecture at the back: there's panelling, skirting, a dado rail and a cornice hanging in the air. There's no actual wall. Just the indication of the architectural details.

We did the same thing with the Second Act. We took away the carpet, took away the furniture. And I've given just the indication of a bedroom in a grand Parisian hotel. Again with panelling – this time marbled panelling – and now a chandelier.

The hotel room has been converted into an office so we got two large Edwardian desks and desk chairs. And all the paraphernalia we need to tell the story: maps and telephones and desk lamps and pens and ink and reference books and waste paper baskets. It takes a lot of dressing.

It's been really interesting to find all the things we need.

How do you make your initial creative decisions? For instance, you've created a naturalistic setting for the play rather than something more expressive.

You're responding to the piece. There's so much naturalistic action written into it: people drinking tea or playing patience. Doing everyday things. So it would have been perverse to put it in an abstract setting.

What role does the model box play in your creative process?

It plays a vital role. Some designers work on a computer and make digital images. But they don't give you any sense of the feeling of the space. For me, I'm just so used to it, I've been doing it so long that it's essential to make the 1:25 model of the space and then fill it with the scenery and the furniture and all the things that are required.

Also to put in a little scale figure so you can see the relationship of the scale of the figure with what the set is.

It's the way I work. We use miniature lights to light the model, so you really get a feeling of what it's going to look like – it's just 25 times smaller!

Have you found it a different process working in the Donmar to working on a physically bigger stage?

It is a different process because usually most of the projects I do, everything is built. From scratch. All the costumes are made. In this case we bought some of the furniture but also quite a lot of it is rented. And most of the costumes are being hired. There are only about five costumes which we've made.

And that decision is largely financial. Because obviously this play only has a finite run – it's not going to run forever. Therefore it doesn't pay to have everything made from scratch. Whereas if I do an opera or a ballet, it's going to enter into the repertoire of the company and it might be around for years.

But the wonderful thing about the Donmar is the immediacy. The audience can feel like they're in the same room. And that has a magic about it.

Does hiring costumes and props change the way you work?

Yes – I rely much more on the costume supervisor and the props buyer and props supervisor, to help me find the things that we need, rather than me just designing something and saying, 'This is what it is.' We've got to see what we can find and then make, hopefully, the best decision for which pieces we can choose.

How faithful to the period are you in your design?

We're totally realistic, right down to the hair. The boys are having period haircuts. Some of the girls are using their own hair dressed in period, some of them will be in wigs.

Hopefully the whole look of it will be genuinely 1919.

How involved are the actors in the costuming process?

They are absolutely involved. I always speak to them on the first day of rehearsals about what I've got in mind. Find out if they have any specific wishes. And then the fitting process is always a discussion as well.

I don't want to make anybody wear anything they're unhappy with. I'd always rather in the fitting they tell me if they're not happy with something or they're not sure about something. We can discuss and then maybe discard what I've selected and choose something else.

I think... I hope that on this project I feel that they all left the fittings feeling happy!

Costumes are terribly important to actors' performances. Particularly period costumes. The women have all got corsets and that changes the way they stand. They've got heels, not high heels in this period but they do have heels. And the men, too, in this period. Certainly they've said in the fittings for the evening wear how having a stiff-fronted shirt and a winged collar makes them stand up straight. And makes them sit up too – you can't slouch in them.

How did you come to be a theatre designer?

I was brought up in Africa, on a farm. And when I was little my godfather built me a puppet theatre. And then I went to boarding school in the middle of the bush. An English boarding school which had two theatres – an indoor theatre and an outdoor theatre. And I just fell in love with the whole process.

I'd never seen anything professional until I came to England when I was eighteen. And I kind of knew that I wanted to be a theatre designer. But I didn't know that you could actually train to do that. It was only when I got here, and in fact I was living in the same house as Peter Gill in Hammersmith, I discovered you could actually go to arts school and train in theatre design.

I did a three year course. And then when I left I was very fortunate to get a job assisting a very famous Greek designer called Nicholas Georgiadis. In fact, my studio in Kensington was his old studio. And I assisted Nico for eight or nine years. And then started doing my own thing.

And, as I say, my career started to take off in opera, ballet and musicals. I've done a lot of plays but not for a while. But one of the things I love about my job is that every single commission is different. Some of them are really big, some of them tiny. And this commission is different from anything I've done recently. So it's been a challenge but also really enjoyable!

Babara Flynn and
Francesca Annis



Section 3:

Resources



Helen Bradbury

Practical Exercises for use in the Classroom

1 The Expert

This exercise is designed to explore what makes for a good argument – to discover how rhetoric can be relished and enjoyed, and to find how the presentation of an argument can be as important as the position itself.

To do this, the group is going to form a panel of ‘experts’ for a TV news show.

Take the front page of a national newspaper and read aloud the main headline. It might be very serious or very trivial. There will almost always be a victim and a culprit. If the victim of the story isn’t immediately obvious, choose another story.

Working as a group quickly fill out the main facts of the story – who, what, where, when. Try to avoid debating any of the issues involved or arguing any of the backstory/causes. Agree as a group who is the obvious victim of the story – this might be a group as well as an individual.

Choose two participants to play newsreaders/news presenters. These should be two people who enjoy hosting/driving/manipulating a good argument.

The newsreaders should find space for themselves in the room and spend the next ten minutes going over the story, making sure they have all of the most important facts at their fingertips.

Gwilym Lee and Tamla Kari



Split the remainder of the group into four subgroups.

Each group is going to argue one of the following points of view:

1. It was all the victim's [of the story] own fault. They were entirely, 100% to blame.
 2. It was absolutely not the victim's fault. They were passive victims and were in no way whatsoever responsible.
 3. These things just happen – better them than us. We may as well all just get used to it. No use fighting the inevitable.
 4. This must never happen again. The world can and must change for the better. We must all work together to make a better future.
- Each subgroup should find some space in the room and quietly put together a list of 4-6 points that support their overall argument. Spend 5-10 minutes doing this. Don't worry about whether as an individual you personally agree with what your group is saying – just focus on adding weight to the argument.
 - Choose one member of each subgroup to perform as the nominated 'expert' to represent their subgroup's point of view on the story.
 - Set up the space to form a stage that loosely resembles a TV news studio – two chairs for the interviews and four for the nominated 'experts' – one representative from each point-of-view subgroup. Everybody else should be sat out 'front' where the cameras are.

Gwilym Lee



- Start the TV show by having the newsreaders introduce themselves and quickly welcome the audience/cameras to the show before immediately recapping the main facts of the story.
- Have the newsreaders say 'We have with us here today...' and then introduce by name the four interviewees, adding titles like 'Professor', 'Doctor', 'The Nobel Prize-winning' and 'Famous Genius' if they want.
- Ask each of the experts to briefly summarise their overall position in one or two sentences.
- From here, the newsreader's job is to provoke debate and facilitate a good argument between the interviewees. The key here is to make it as difficult as possible for the experts – throw facts and statistics at them to try to knock them off balance.
- In turn, the experts must maintain at all times an appearance of knowledge, as well as defending their position. At no point may they give ground, admit that they don't know something or confess that they don't know a fact.
- When the newsreaders find the experts have made a strong case, they should move onto the next expert and begin to pit them against each other – making them argue between themselves.
- When the interview has reached a peak, the newsreaders should wrap up the debate ('That's all we've got time for...'), thank the expert panel and say good night.

Finally, discuss as a group:

1. What 'expert' speaking techniques were most effective in convincing the audience?
2. Did anyone in the audience find themselves changing their minds about the debate?
3. How important was the role of the interviewer/newsreader?
4. What would strengthen the experts' cases? Did facts and figures feature highly? Or were personalities/relationships as important?
5. Think about how the characters in VERSAILLES argue their own cases. What techniques are most effective for them? Who do you find most convincing in the play?

2

The Living Room

This is an exercise that extends the above exercise, using it as the starting point for devising a short domestic scene. It aims to see whether argument about big ideas and political issues can be woven into an everyday personal/family situations.

- Split into groups of four/five, each with a copy of a newspaper.
- Choose one person to serve as 'writer' – they'll keep a record of what's said during this scenario.
- Each of the rest of the group should think of someone real who they know (personally) extremely well but who nobody else in the room knows. It could be a family member or a close friend from outside school/college. Don't tell anyone else who the person is.
- Thinking about each real character, consider some basic character notes, particularly:
 1. What they most want.
 2. Whether they have a particular way of speaking – a favourite saying/phrase – for example they always end sentences with 'you know' or 'kind of'.
 3. If they have a secret.
- Set up chairs to form an ordinary lounge/living room in a contemporary British home – the room needs a sofa, an armchair and a TV.
- The group is now going to devise a short scene. The writer will keep track of what's going on – writing notes of dialogue and stage direction to record the story as it progresses.

Gwilym Lee and Tom Hughes



- Without introducing themselves, let each character silently find a place within the room. Let them settle silently for 20-30 seconds. Have one of the characters switch on the television. Don't worry about how these characters know each other – that will come out in the scene. Don't try to make it interesting. Don't try to tell each other/the audience any backstory – this is just a group of people watching TV.
- As if they are the voice of the television, the writer should now read the first half of a random article from the newspaper.
- The other actors are now going to react to this news story in their characters. There is no need for them to have any backstory or explanation. The characters should just spontaneously react to the story and take a strong, different position (as in the previous exercise). It should be an argument/position that is as strongly in conflict as possible with that of the other characters.
- Try to make your character enjoy/relish making their argument, even if they are shy.
- Try to use your argument as the way of your character trying to get what they want. So if they want to be in charge, they might argue aggressively – to dominate the conversation. Or if they want to be in a relationship, they might use their argument to seduce the room.
- If the conversation dies out and the room naturally goes silent, the writer should read another part of the (same) article to stimulate more conversation.
- See whether this can lead to a 2-3 minute scene.
- If you can, try to let the characters dwell on their secret towards the end of the scene – although they mustn't give anything away to anyone.

- There doesn't need to be any story. Nothing needs to happen – this is about the dialogue and conflict between the characters. Their exploration of the theme of the news story.
- Finally, use the script that the writer has made to rehearse the scene and solidify it.
- Bring all of the groups back together and perform the short scenes for each other.

Discuss:

1. Whether the scenes worked dramatically.
2. Whether the characters felt realized and rounded even though the focus of the scenes was on the argument.
3. Whether this starting point for devising has any obvious advantages/disadvantages.

Selina Griffiths



Glossary

Below are a few terms that feature in VERSAILLES that you may find useful.

Annexation	The taking of a territory and incorporating it into a country's borders.
Armistice	An agreement to stop the fighting in a war. It doesn't necessarily mean the permanent end to the conflict. Germany's agreement to the 1918 armistice isn't a surrender but an agreement to discuss the terms of a peace.
Bayreuth	German town. Home to a festival of Wagner's operas which Geoffrey has often visited.
Billiards	Game like snooker or pool.
Bohemian	Unconventional, artistic type – in VERSAILLES it is mainly used of Constance's Bloomsbury set.
Bolsheviks	Communists.
British Empire	In 1919, the British Empire was the largest and most powerful in the world. It included colonies and protectorates all over the planet.
Conchie	Conscientious objector. Someone who refused to be conscripted into the army because of moral or religious grounds.
F. O.	Foreign Office – the part of the British civil service that deals with international diplomacy.
Governess cart	A type of small horse-drawn carriage.
Kaiser	The Emperor of Germany. Kaiser Wilhelm II ruled Germany until the end of the First World War.
League of Nations	The international organization founded at the Paris Peace Conference. A forerunner to the United Nations.
Napoleon	Soldier and ruler of France (1804-1814/1815)
Ratification	Formal agreement to a contract or law.
Saar Basin	An area on the border between France and Germany. Rich in coal and economically important. Its capital is Saarbrücken, which Leonard visits.
Self-determination	The act of a people to decide who they are ruled by. It is at the heart of Woodrow Wilson's policy at the end of the war.
Suffrage	The right of a citizen to vote.
Telegram	A message passed over distances via electronic wires to a local post office. It was how the Army would tell families if their sons had been killed.
Tsar	The Emperor of Russia. The last Tsar, Nicholas II was overthrown by the Russian Revolution of 1917.

Bibliography and suggestions for further reading

The list of texts below represent a very small sample of the vast amount that has been written about the First World War and the Treaty of Versailles. However, this list may serve as a useful starting point.

The Economic Consequences of the Peace – John Maynard Keynes (1919)

Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World – Margaret MacMillan (2001)

The Struggle for Mastery in Europe 1848–1918 – A.J.P. Taylor (1954)

The First World War: An Illustrated History – A.J.P. Taylor (1974)

G.E. Moore: Selected Writings – G.E. Moore / Thomas Baldwin (ed.) (2013)

The First World War – John Keegan (1999)

Barbara Flynn



About the Donmar Warehouse

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The Donmar Warehouse is an intimate not for profit 251 seat theatre located in the heart of London's West End. Since 1992, under the Artistic Direction of Sam Mendes, Michael Grandage, and now Josie Rourke, the theatre has presented some of London's most memorable theatrical experiences and has garnered critical acclaim at home and abroad. With a diverse artistic policy that includes new writing, contemporary reappraising of European classics, British and American drama and musical theatre, the Donmar has created a reputation for artistic excellence over the last 22 years and has won 43 Olivier Awards, 26 Critics' Circle Awards, 25 Evening Standard Awards, two South Bank Awards and 20 Tony Awards from ten Broadway productions. Alongside the Donmar's productions, we offer a programme of Education events, which includes subsidised tickets, introductory workshops and post show discussions, as well as special projects which give young people an opportunity to involve themselves more closely in the work of the theatre.

For more information about the Donmar's education activities, please contact:

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