



GASLIGHT STUDY GUIDE

STATE EDUCATE 2020

STATE THEATRE
COMPANY SOUTH AUSTRALIA

SYNOPSIS

Bella Manningham is on edge. She's hearing footsteps in the night, pictures are moving by themselves and the gaslights in the drawing room dim without even a touch. Her husband is constantly disappearing. He tells her she may be mad and she starts to believe him... As her grip on reality begins to slip, she finds herself in the middle of a mystery most foul.

A mind-bending Victorian thriller, Patrick Hamilton's *Gaslight* is the stuff of legend. Written in 1938 and spawning the 1944 film starring Ingrid Bergman and Charles Boyer, director Catherine Fitzgerald brings this classic creep-show storming into 2020 in a production that sees it become more vital than ever.

For more, watch the trailer for the show online:
statetheatrecompany.com.au/shows/gaslight

HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE / 4-19 SEPTEMBER, 2020

RUNNING TIME

Approximately 160 minutes (including 20 minute interval).

SHOW WARNINGS

Contains adult themes and depictions of domestic abuse that may be triggering to some audience members.

Those affected by the themes in the production can seek support from:
1800 RESPECT National Sexual Violence, Domestic Family Violence
Counselling Service on 1800 737 732 or at 1800respect.com.au

LIFELINE on 13 11 14 or at lifeline.org.au

KIDS HELPLINE on 1800 55 1800



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CAST & CREATIVE TEAM



Playwright

Patrick Hamilton



Director

Catherine Fitzgerald



Designer

Ailsa Paterson



Sound Designer

Andrew Howard



Lighting Designer

Nic Mollison



Bella Manningham

Ksenja Logos



Jack Manningham

Nathan O'Keefe



Sergeant Rough

Eileen Darley



Elizabeth

Ellen Freeman



Nancy

Katherine Sortini



Stage Manager

Abigail Heuer



Assistant Stage Manager

Steph Bone

// Stage Management Secondment: Jennifer King // Accent Coach: Jennifer Innes //
// Répétiteur: Carol Young // Fight Choreographer: Ruth Fallon // Understudy: Martha Lott //
// Production Manager: Gavin Norris // Deputy Production Manager: Gabrielle Hornhardt //
// Head Mechanist: Vince Louch // Head Of Lighting: Rick Worringham //
// Lighting Board Operator: Cameron Lane // Sound Board Operator: Patrick Pages Oliver //

Costumes made by State Theatre Company South Australia Wardrobe. Set made by State Theatre Company South Australia Workshop.



A BIT OF BACKGROUND ON PATRICK HAMILTON

Born on 17 March 1904, English novelist and playwright Patrick Hamilton first came to prominence with his 1929 play, *Rope*. Although he had already tried his hand at acting and written two novels, *Rope* was his first real success. The play had a six-month run in London's West End and a Broadway production, the latter under the name *Rope's End*.

Hamilton wrote a trilogy of semi-autobiographical novels in the 1930s, which reflected on his dissatisfaction with modern life. While respected, these works did not garner the author as much attention as *Rope* or his later play, *Gas Light*.

Gas Light, often stylised as *Gaslight* and sometimes called *Angel Street*, was written, and first performed on the stage, in 1938. It was turned into a British film in 1940 and a Hollywood adaptation starring Ingrid Bergman, Charles Boyer and Joseph Cotten was released in 1944. The play, and the films based on it, inspired the term 'gaslighting', and it contains one of the most blatant examples of the kind of psychological abuse to which this term refers.

Hamilton's life and work was influenced by his rough childhood with an abusive father, his excessive drinking, his engagements with sex workers, his Marxist political beliefs and a car accident in the 1920s that left him disfigured. Although disdainful of modern life, his works contributed to its culture. Both *Rope* and *Gaslight* were turned into successful films, which made Hamilton wealthy.

Hamilton wrote 13 novels and 10 stage plays between 1925 and 1955. With his career, health and outlook declining over time, Hamilton continued to drink excessively. He died of cirrhosis of the liver and kidney failure on 23 September 1962 at the age of 58. He was survived by his second wife, Lady Ursula Chetwynd-Talbot.

A photograph of Catherine Fitzgerald, a woman with short dark hair, looking off to the side. She is wearing a bright red jacket over a dark top and a colorful, patterned scarf. The background is a dark, textured wall.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE FROM CATHERINE FITZGERALD

Gaslight was written in 1938 by Patrick Hamilton, an avowed Marxist, who in many of his plays and novels displayed a strong sympathy for the poor and disempowered. The term 'gaslight' is derived from the title of the play and has recently enjoyed a resurgence in the everyday vernacular to describe mistrust in relation to gender and world politics, in particular men and political leaders.

The play is set in the later part of the 19th century, and while essentially a melodramatic thriller, the underlying themes and discourses relating to patriarchal power and class are as relevant today as they were then. I tend to think of our production as a feminist thriller, a 'friller', with gender relationships at its core.

The non-traditional casting of Eileen Darley as Inspector Rough in our production serves to expose and explore the historical narrative of the play through a contemporary lens, and it is an acknowledgment that up until recently, it has been women who have been at the forefront of supporting women who live in domestic violence situations to escape to safety. The play is a very astute analysis of psychological and emotional violence, beginning with the isolation of Mrs Manningham from her family and friends, and the mind games that cause her to question her own sanity as the threat of being sent to the asylum hangs over her.

In our production we also allow for a bit of a nod and a wink to the male impersonators who were so popular in music halls in England during the Victorian and Edwardian eras. The most famous of these was Vesta Tilley, who challenged the dominant ideology that women were deemed to be beautiful, charismatic domestic creatures with no or little agency. Vesta Tilley cleverly undermined the values of the 'dominant sex' and upper class 'dandy' with satirical lyrics and gestures. Indeed, in our play, Mr Manningham frequents the local club and music hall where he also indulges in the pleasure of 'unemployed actresses'.



This underlying theme of impersonation, or pretending to be someone you are not, with references cleverly laced throughout the writing, serves to remind us that theatre itself is artifice.

Ultimately, *Gaslight* is a wonderfully entertaining and satisfying revenge fantasy, full of suspense, fun, fear, humour and surprise. Set in one room over one afternoon and late evening, *Gaslight* offers wonderful opportunities for shadowy and eerie lighting as well as for a theatrically edgy soundscape. It is beautifully written, full of exposition, and yet exquisite storytelling at its very best.

It has been deeply exciting to be back in the rehearsal room once again with a brilliant cast and artistic team, especially during these crazy times, and I thank Mitchell Butel and State Theatre Company South Australia for the opportunity. We are also really honoured to be the first mainstage production to open the new Her Majesty's Theatre, which in the early 1900s was home to the famous Tivoli Theatre that housed music hall entertainment. We've had to make a few adjustments to adapt our production to what is essentially a theatre designed for big music shows, as have you with the chequerboard seating arrangements. The good thing is that we are all out and about and back in the theatre.

We love the synergy of being here and hope you do too. Enjoy.



AN INTERVIEW WITH CATHERINE FITZGERALD

Why is *Gaslight* relevant in 2020?

Gaslight was written in 1938, and set in the later part of the 19th century; however, its disturbing underlying themes and discourses are as relevant today as they were then. The play is essentially a melodramatic thriller, and I tend to think of our production as a feminist thriller (a 'friller'), with domestic violence, patriarchal power, and class and gender relationships at its core. Ultimately though *Gaslight* is a wonderful satisfying revenge fantasy and I am hoping that together we will create a truly enjoyable production full of suspense, fear, humour and surprise.

What will your reimagining of *Gaslight* look like?

All plays are reimagined with every new production because each production is brought to you by a completely new artistic team and occurs within a different time in history.

The non-traditional casting of Eileen [Darley] as Rough, the detective, will serve to expose and explore the historical narrative, discourse and gender politic of the play within a contemporary lens.

It also allows for a nod, a wink and homage to the music hall male impersonators who were so popular during Victorian and Edwardian England - where the dominant ideology deemed women beautiful, charismatic domestic creatures with no or little agency. The most famous male impersonator was Vesta Tilley who assumed the values of the 'dominant sex' and upper class 'dandy' and cleverly undermined them with satirical lyrics and gesture. Indeed, in the play, Mr. Manningham frequents the local club and music hall where he also indulges in the pleasure of 'unemployed actresses'.

Our production will pretty much honour narrative and discourse of the original with a homage to theatre itself and theatrical traditions with a cheeky acknowledgment that women actors and women's stories have pretty much taken second place in the mainstage and theatrical space.



Domestic violence is still a major and serious issue in contemporary Australia, so whilst the play is full of scary, thriller charm we will not go soft on the discourse and narrative of the oppression of Mrs Manningham as well as the class politics (and oppression) of the maids depicted in the play. Mr Manningham is manipulative and a perpetrator of psychological domestic abuse. He gaslights his wife to the point where she questions her own sanity and threatens her with being sent to the asylum.

How have you prepared for *Gaslight*?

I've read the play heaps and heaps of times. I've researched the history of detectives and their roles in England, I've researched Edwardian and Victorian England, music hall male impersonators including Vesta Tilley, Hetty King, sat down with Ailsa and looked at pictorial references. I've watched both films. I've researched murders and crime in England and read about Patrick Hamilton. I've been researching and planning for this for such a long time now I've almost forgotten all the research I've done.

As a director, how do you build suspense and keep the audience on the edge?

I think in most plays action and suspense come from the characters inner struggles - look at *Hamlet*, for example. *Gaslight*, however, is a thriller and the use of music, soundscape and lights will be crucial in helping create the suspense, which in turn will be helped by Ailsa's claustrophobic set. I have no doubt the actors will be able to build the suspense in what will be a very delicate balance between melodrama and a thriller.



CATHERINE FITZGERALD WITH ELLEN FREEMAN AND NATHAN O'KEEFE DURING REHEARSALS.
PHOTO: SIA DUFF.

What next?

Our “What next?” sections include questions and activities based on previous pages. These can be used for individual reflection or as class exercises.

Do you feel this production was suspenseful?

If so, what elements worked to create this sense of suspense? What scenes or moments felt most suspenseful?

If not, what do you think could have made the production more suspenseful? Choose a moment or scene in the play to analyse how your suggestions would have helped to build suspense.

Whether or not you agree that the production creates a feeling of suspense, ensure you consider direction, design, script and acting, and how these elements interact or work together, in your response and analysis.

Write down your thoughts and responses and/or discuss in pairs or as a group.

Supporting materials

Articles and interviews with Catherine Fitzgerald

Links under the Gaslight drop-down menu at:

statetheatrecompany.com.au/state-educate-resources



CAST Q&A

with Ksenja Logos
(Bella Manningham)

What do you see as the main themes in *Gaslight*?

It's interesting because the term 'gaslight' comes from this play, originally, and it is a term that's associated with psychological abuse. We see the origins of it in Mrs Manningham, who knows she's being manipulated because she's watching the light go up and down. I guess that's the major theme, this idea of emotional manipulation - not just by Mr Manningham, but by everyone. Everyone has got their own agenda and they're putting it upon her. Mr Manningham just does it in the most obviously manipulative and destructive way. There's also the theme of gender politics, which will be evident in the production, and ideas about class.

Coming off the back of COVID-19 and lockdown, the theme of isolation is also quite interesting. As the drama is happening in one room and people are being acted upon, I think people will be able to relate to that, coming out of that space.

What do you want the experience of *Gaslight* to be for an audience?

The experience we're hoping to give audiences is to touch base with the great, well-written older play and we are presenting it within that melodramatic experience. I think it's something that could sit quite easily within a modern presentation, but we are bringing the 'melodrama' back. I think that will be interesting for audiences. It's certainly interesting as an actor, it's not something I've done before. There's a lot of gesture, heightened emotion and expression.

Ultimately, the play is a thriller and we are hoping to give people that experience and tension - the wondering, the working out, and the best part of all murder mysteries: 'where are the jewels hidden?' It should be a great piece of entertainment and escapism, that's what we are hoping to give the audience.



CAST Q&A

with Nathan O'Keefe
(Jack Manningham)

Who is your character? How do you bring this character to life?

I play Mr Manningham, the husband of Mrs Manningham, the master of the house and he's also... without giving too much away, he's essentially the villain of the show. I don't think we are giving anything away, these days we all know the term 'gaslight' or have at least heard of it and where it comes from, so it's no spoiler to say he is a bit of a villain in the play.

The important thing when you are playing the villain, especially in a well-known play, is you can't play him straight away as a baddie, because otherwise you're just doing one layer of the character. With this character, what I've tried to explore are the reasons he behaves the way he does and where he thinks he is doing the right thing. It's one thing to come out and be like, 'I'm the baddie so I'm going to indicate that for the audience', you can do that, but then you're making all the decisions for the audience. What I want to do is justify, for him, what he's doing and why he's doing it so it makes sense. Then it's up to the audience - they have to work, they have to be the ones that can judge him. It's not for me to judge him. They decide if he's the villain or not. My approach to characterisation is to justify all of the character's actions for their own gains.

What do you think are the main themes of the show?

I think the main theme I have noticed in this play is the theme of control - control of yourself, of your own emotions, and control of others.

This play is set in the Victorian era, the late 1800s where there was quite a defined class system within the house. Mr Manningham, my character, is the master of the house, which means he is the decision maker - the boss, if you will - of the household. Generally, things have changed these days, but he certainly is the



power in the house and exerts a lot of power over others. The play looks at what happens when you start to lose that power, when things are no longer under your control, when you aren't making all of the decisions. How does that manifest itself? This happens for each and every one of the characters. At one point they've got control, some more often than others, then at some point they will lose control. Certainly, Mrs Manningham is being led to believe she has less control than she does. So it really is a balance of power, a balance of control. I would say that reclamation of that control of self is, I think, the key theme of this play.

We hope our version conveys this, but is also an entertaining and escapist experience for the audience.

How are you feeling about returning to the theatre?

This event is far more special than most shows just in terms of the circumstances, I think. Not only are we lucky enough to be performing *Gaslight* in the fully refurbished Her Majesty's Theatre, which is just mind-blowing alone, but it's the first show back since this pandemic of COVID-19, this kind of world-shifting event.

Through this time it's been challenging, but also easy to forget that we have things like theatre and we have things like art and culture that pick us up as a society and move us forward. We still have the human spirit and we are going to continue that tradition. This is not going to beat theatre, art as a whole, society as a whole - I think that encapsulates what we are doing. We are defiantly stepping forward and saying we as people, we are going to survive this. And how are we going to do that, but by continuing to share stories together.



CAST Q&A

with Eileen Darley
(Sergeant Rough)

What do you see as the main themes of *Gaslight*?

I think what's really interesting was that Patrick Hamilton wrote the play in 1938. Now, imagine what was happening in the world at that time. We were bang smack in the middle of the Second World War; all through the 1930s we had The Depression. So there are lots of themes in the play about the world outside being, as my character says, "full of pain". There are people who are struggling and it's a society that's not running harmoniously, so there are some resonances of where we're at, at the moment in the world, in Australia.

I also think through that time there was an explosion of Freudian understandings of the world, and I think the play has got a lot of Freudian symbolism in it. It has all kinds of themes about things being locked down.

Hamilton wrote it in 1938, but set it in 1880. I think he did that because gaslights didn't exist in 1938 - we had electricity by that stage - and he really wanted this image of the light being a character in itself. The light kind of shifts its meaning, but it's often a kind of representation of Mrs Manningham's unconscious. It relates to her burgeoning realisation that life as she plays it on the outside is not actually what it seems, and that there's a whole other world. There are a lot of themes about opening up, opening drawers, opening jewels.

In his own way I think Hamilton was really trying to critique the society in which he wrote the play.

But as well as that, of course, it's an absolute classic, rip-roaring potboiler of a thriller, or as director Catherine Fitzgerald would say, a 'friller' (feminist thriller), because it couldn't really be left in its current form. There are certain things people just wouldn't accept, particular the changing role of women.



Who is your character? How do you bring a character to life?

My character is Detective/Sergeant Rough, clearly the elder man in the piece. So I am doing a bit of cross-gender characterisation. How did I come by him? First of all, I think, primarily, Rough is a bit of an outsider. He was a bit of an unorthodox policeman to begin with, and obviously he's also an outsider because I am a woman playing a man. On top of that, he's Irish in a very Victorian world of the English stiff upper lip, so he proved a kind of counteraction to this Victorian world where there are very clear social mores and social roles of men and women at play.

How I come by any character is really through embodiment, so when you are speaking your lines they are really coming from your feet and pelvis and chest and shoulders and head. It's not a matter of just using the cognitive part of your brain but all of you, and that's how I would approach any character. This one in particular, being masculine, I had to kind of break down and unpack what are some of the generalisations of men's movements compared to women's movement. On top of that there's consideration of the Victorian age, so thinking about a wider base of support, less lateral movement of the hips and so forth.

"You never heard of the celebrated Sergeant Rough, madam? Sergeant Rough, who solved the Claudesley Diamond Case – Sergeant Rough, who hunted down the Camberwell Dogs – Sergeant Rough, who brought Sandham himself to justice...?"

- Sergeant Rough



SPEAKING WITH

Ellen Freeman (Elizabeth)
& Katherine Sortini (Nancy)

On the themes and form of the play

Ellen Freeman: Because it's a psychological thriller, and there are elements of farce, very small elements of farce, it doesn't matter what happens in the storyline. Comedy is a serious business, you know, and in this play some of the comedy is just a relief for the audience. The themes are really determined by the fact that it's a thriller and we totally depend on the director to determine pace and levels. The thing is not to give anything away.

Katherine Sortini: I hope it's really just an exciting night. Like Ellen said, it's got a little bit of comedy for some relief, but it really is a tension-filled play, and for me, that's really exciting. I think people will be on the edge of their seat, I think people are going to be clinging to their chairs, and, for me, that's great entertainment.

Ellen: I agree, we just hope that we can take people on a journey that is exciting, it's also education in a way, particularly for young people to recognise the changes that have taken place in society over 100 years.

On character

Katherine: I play Nancy, a 19-year-old cheeky maid. When I first started speaking to Catherine [Fitzgerald], she had a vision for my character, so there has been a lot of work on her voice and accent, and on her physicality, which is very light and free. It's good to go back to the script and see what others say about your character, what the character says about themselves, and try to figure out what the truth is and what impression your character gives to others.

Ellen: My function in this play, as Elizabeth, is to assist an ex-detective to solve a cold case. That's my function, to assist him. It doesn't mean to say I know what's going on, it just means I know that when I am confronted by this ex-detective about this cold case for murder and burglary that I have agreed with him to make this house accessible for him. That is my function.



On the relevance of *Gaslight* to modern audiences


Katherine: Obviously, there is gaslighting in the play, which means we are looking at a relationship that has a lot of emotional and psychological abuse. I think that is relevant now, particularly because there's this form of gaslighting in the digital age of, for example, texting and not really knowing who's on the other side... It's also [easy for abusers] to take control of who you are contacting, to go through your phone. It's easy for that person to potentially track and control what you're doing, it happens a lot in modern day which is why this play is so relevant now.

In the play we see this kind of behaviour in a microcosm with the play happening over one evening. It's this couple in Victorian England, so not the same location we are in now, but the close analysis of this relationship allows us to see how long this sort of behaviour has been going on and the effects of it. The director calls this play a 'friller', a feminist thriller. I think casting a female actor as Rough is feminist in the way that all these females are coming together - not so much my character, but the others - to help this women to break the chains of an emotionally abusive relationship.

Ellen: I agree, the whole thing about this play is it has such contemporary relevance. Also, the changing and the shift in power of where women are in society is so blatantly obvious, but in actual fact it's a big reminder of 'my God, women were just so disempowered 100 years ago'. All of that is in there, which is an interesting aspect of the play, absolutely.

All cast Q&As, including these responses from Ellen Freeman and Katherine Sortini, are based on video interviews and have been edited for length and clarity. Video interviews are available under the Gaslight drop-down menu online at statetheatrecompany.com.au/education-resources.

ELLEN FREEMAN (LEFT) AND KATHERINE SORTINI (ABOVE) DURING GASLIGHT REHEARSALS.
PHOTOS: JESSICA ZENG.

A woman with blonde hair styled in an updo, wearing a white lace-trimmed dress with a red sash, sits in a dark wooden chair. She holds a lit oil lamp in her right hand. The background is a dimly lit room with warm, out-of-focus lights.

EXPLORING THE CHARACTERS

BELLA MANNINGHAM

Bella Manningham is described in the script as being about 34 years old. It says “she has been good looking, almost a beauty – but now she has a haggard, wan, frightened air, with rings under her eyes, which tell of sleepless nights and worse.”

Bella at first seems like a flustered, confused sort of person, but we come to understand that this is not necessarily her nature but the effect of prolonged psychological abuse by her husband, Jack Manningham. His words and actions have made her doubt her ideas, conclusions and even her sanity. She is not sure if it is her own mind she is unable to trust, or the actions of her husband or another person in the house. She is often left alone in the house and has become estranged from her family, who disapproved of her marriage to Jack. She seems to be a ‘damsel in distress’.

JACK MANNINGHAM

Jack Manningham is described in the script as a “tall, good-looking” 45-year-old man. He is condescending and manipulative, often insulting his wife in sly ways and undermining her at every opportunity.

He appears to be motivated by his desire to keep his true intentions and night-time actions hidden from Bella. However, he also appears to take pleasure from manipulating and threatening his wife. Jack is the clear villain of the piece.

“I begin to believe I imagine everything. Perhaps I do. Are you here? Is this a dream, too? Who are you?”

- Bella Manningham



SERGEANT ROUGH

Sergeant Rough, also known as Detective or Inspector Rough or simply 'Rough', is a retired police detective with an apparently illustrious career - although his accounts of his own deeds are never verified by any other character in the show. He seems to be motivated by his desire to stop a suspected murderer from stealing jewels. Why he wants to do this is less apparent. His actions interrupt the trajectory of the Manninghams lives by intervening in Jack's mission and bringing new information to light. His actions help to save Bella from the probability of being sent to an asylum for her 'madness', making him a heroic figure in some ways.

ELIZABETH

The Manninghams' cook and housekeeper, Elizabeth is one of the few residents of the house who appears to care for Bella's wellbeing. Not much is said about Elizabeth's character in the script, but she appears to see much of what happens in the house and is the one who provides entry and aid to Sergeant Rough. She seems sensible and practical. In this production, she often offers moments of comic relief.

NANCY

Nancy, the Manninghams' maid, is described in the script as a "self-conscious, pretty, cheeky girl of nineteen". Nancy is often impudent and is often disrespectful of Bella. Her enjoyment of going out at night and spending time with young men is observed by other members of the household, something that was worth remarking upon at the time as it may have been a sign of 'immoral' behaviour. Bella and Nancy make their dislike of one another obvious at different moments throughout the play.

LEFT: KSENJA LOGOS AS BELLA MANNINGHAM. PHOTO: JESSICA ZENG.
ABOVE: DIRECTOR CATHERINE FITZGERALD (SECOND FROM RIGHT) AND THE
CAST OF *GASLIGHT*. PHOTO: SIA DUFF.



THE CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM GOING THROUGH THE SCRIPT DURING REHEARSALS.
PHOTO: JESSICA ZENG.

What next?

Pick a character from *Gaslight*. What are the key differences between the chosen character and the other characters in the story? List any important physical features, their emotions and their key motivations or desires. Come up with ideas about their speech, posture, mannerisms and gestures. Why do you think these work for the character? For example, if you think the character should speak in a low or quiet voice, what does that mean? Are they timid and unsure? Or trying to keep their temper or other emotions under control?

Many of the characters in the play have hidden motivations or things they are keeping secret. Write a letter from your character to someone they trust – this may be another character in the play, but is more likely someone you'll have to imagine. Have them reveal something about themselves that they never say aloud in the play itself.

Perform the letter as a monologue. Remember to keep the list of their physical characteristics, emotions and other mannerisms in mind in your performance.

Supporting materials

Video interviews with the cast on a variety of topics:
statetheatrecompany.com.au/state-educate-resources



DESIGN ELEMENTS

AN INTERVIEW WITH AILSA PATERSON,
SET & COSTUME DESIGNER

Could you describe the feel you're trying to create with the set design for *Gaslight*?

When Catherine [Fitzgerald] and I started talking about the feel we wanted to create with the set design for *Gaslight*, we were really struck by this stage direction that read, “an air is breathed of wretchedness, poverty and age”. So we’re trying to create a very realistic, naturalistic, highly detailed set.

The show is set in an 1880s, Victorian era drawing room. Initially you think it’s this perfect snapshot of this domestic scene, but we want to gradually give the sense that these things are not actually perfect - the rugs are very faded, the wallpaper is peeling, there’s mould and mildew, and this overwhelming sense of claustrophobia due to how cluttered and contained all of the set elements are.

We sort of break away from that highly detailed naturalism in that we have really floated this room in a void and is in fact elevated off the stage with blackness all around. It also has a kind of architrave frame that gives the sense that the room and play are almost like a case study of this couple and the situation they’re in.

We found it quite interesting that, as a topical link, instances of domestic violence increased during lockdown for COVID-19, and we’re looking at this couple who are very much contained in their one environment. and as an example of toxic masculinity. This really resonated for us.



What kinds of techniques or processes did you use to create the set design for this production?

The design process for this show really started with a lot of period research. It was really important for us to have a look at many, many references of the architecture of the time, details of this type of room from the time, and in this particular location as well. The play is set in 1880s London and the stage directions actually provide a very careful description of the type of house it's set in. With those specific directions, we had a really great opportunity to do very particular research as to what that would have looked like at the time.

We then had to transfer that idea in order for it to provide the sense of claustrophobia and confinement we wanted. We looked at different ways we could sort of skew the naturalism called for in the script to put our own stamp on the piece. That kind of thinking led us to start looking at these isolated rooms floating in voids and lifting the set.

We wanted the space to be activated by the players from the beginning, particularly by this really interesting character played by Eileen Darley. Eileen initially plays a sort of Vaudevillian theatre concert hall singer, then she becomes one of us, an audience member of today, and reveals her own hair beneath the wig worn by Vesta Tilley. In a way, we are breaking down that fourth wall, literally stepping through it, with Eileen describing the scene as if reading the stage directions. She steps into this space and literally activates it.

What is the costume design like for the show?

The costume design for *Gaslight* is also a very naturalistic design. The key focus for us was getting a nice balance between the very detailed, overwhelming pattern and print of the set and a much more muted, realistic tonal palette for



the costumes. There's a use of a lot of block colour and a lot of darker, sort of depressing, muted tones so that the characters look absolutely real and not too perfect. We've drawn on a lot of the stock that State Theatre Company South Australia has from this period, so that we are able to use garments that already have a sense of age and wear. This worn feeling is really important in terms of establishing that these people are trying to appear to look like they belong to a certain class, but in fact they are suffering and there is poverty. The Manningshams are sort of pretending they are at a certain class and economic level, but the reality is it would be the same outfits they've had for many, many years.

The design is very true to period - the late 1880s - which is towards the end of the Bustle period. You'll see in the female garments there's a column-like structure in the silhouette from the front. The bustle is very pronounced, but it's all at the back, not to the side or spreading at all. It's been interesting to carefully observe the underpinnings women of this time wore and we've got all of those layers underneath - corsets, the bustle petticoats, and the bustle itself. These are essential to get an authentic shape with the overgarments.

We have a lovely contrast between what Mrs Manningham wears and then the serving class and the garments they wore, again they're in muted tones but we didn't want to dress the servants only in black because they'll disappear into the set a bit, so we've gone for tones of grey and textured wools and fabrics that have that feel of wear.

LEFT: A SET MODEL FOR GASLIGHT CREATED BY AILSA PATERSON. PHOTO: SIA DUFF.
ABOVE: COSTUME DESIGN DRAWINGS BY AILSA PATERSON. PHOTO: JESSICA ZENG.



SOUND DESIGN

AN INTERVIEW WITH ANDREW HOWARD,
COMPOSER & SOUND DESIGNER

How would you describe the sound design and composition for *Gaslight*?

The sound design for *Gaslight* is very minimal as the whole show occurs in one single location. The music for *Gaslight* is dark brooding and has been written to add tension to the trauma that the character of Mrs Manningham suffers through the piece. I started every piece of music as a solo piano piece then added layers to each of the piano pieces to build the sound palate of the show. This palate is quite minimal and is mostly made up from piano, acoustic guitar and synth.

I've been listening to a lot of Ludwig Goransson's work - *Black Panther*, *The Mandalorian*, *Community* - particularly *The Mandalorian* as it has a very minimalist aesthetic for the bulk of the work. I also always call inspiration from Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross's film work as they also have a minimalist aesthetic. Scores don't have to be complex to convey feeling and meaning. The biggest part of composing a score is being consistent in palate and style.

What processes or techniques do you use to create the sound design and to compose for a play?

In the first instance, I demo some tracks for the director until I find a vibe that they are happy with. After that, I spend a few weeks in the studio writing and recording to try and have most if not all of the music ready to be slotted into the show from week one of rehearsals.

The rest of the artistic design comes after I have finished the technical design and have spent time with the script in the rehearsal room so I can start building a world in which the actors can inhabit.

What is the role of a sound designer? How does this differ from the role of a composer?

The role of a sound designer is twofold. These two parts are the technical design and the artistic design.

The technical design consists of choosing of all the speakers, microphones and all other equipment that will be used for a production. This includes doing technical drawings for where the speakers are in the theatre, measuring all cabling lengths, supplying the weight of any equipment that is flown, and all other speaker information data, such as where the speakers are pointing and their time relationship to other speakers within the system.

The artistic design is sourcing or creating sound effects, atmospheres, pads and drones that will be part of the aural environment, along with any music that is composed by a composer or licensed from a pre-existing source. The designer is responsible for the entire aural environment for a show.

The composer writes and records the music for a show and sometimes also creates the pads and drones as well.

How did you get into sound design and composition?

I got into sound design at university when I started a theatre company with a bunch of friends that were studying at the Flinders University Drama Centre. I was both composing and designing all of the shows we were doing and worked my way up over the years to my current position as Resident Sound Designer at State Theatre. I also worked as a sound engineer at the Adelaide Festival Centre for 12 years, which was incredibly helpful for the technical design aspect of being a sound designer.

With composing, I started playing music at a young age and played in bands. But I decided early on that I wanted to keep my hearing so I moved away from playing in rock bands and concentrated more on being part of a storytelling community.

Diegetic & non-diegetic sound

Gaslight features both diegetic and non-diegetic sound. Diegetic sound is noise whose source is found on the stage or in the action of the play. Diegetic sound effects used in the play are evident in things like the servant's bell and sound of the front door.

Non-diegetic sound is added in and is not drawn from the action on stage - this is the case for the atmospheric music sound used throughout *Gaslight*, particularly during tense moments.



LIGHTING DESIGN

AN INTERVIEW WITH NIC MOLLISON,
LIGHTING DESIGNER

What is the role of a lighting designer?

The role of the lighting designer is to light the actors on stage so they can be seen by the audience - that's the most important job I've got. If the audience can't see the actors, I haven't done my job, so that's the most important thing.

From there, I get to help the story be delivered by using the light to draw the attention to different parts of the stage for the audience. Lighting also reinforces any natural references that are in the script, such as the time of day and whether it's a domestic setting or an urban setting. I then use different qualities of light - different colours, intensities and transitions - to tell the story.

How would you describe the lighting design for *Gaslight*?

The lighting design for *Gaslight* I would describe as similar to film noir in a way. It's very moody, and there's lots of shadow and shafts of light to give a sort of spooky atmosphere.

It's all set in one room so it's also quite naturalistic, which means it's a realistic setting. The gaslight itself is almost like its own character in the play because it's integral to telling the story so that's an important part of the design.

How does the lighting design emphasise or connect with the themes of the show?

It's a very specific naturalistic setting, all in one room, and I'm using the gaslights as the main sources of light. I've thought about the direction of the

ABOVE: NIC MOLLISON IN REHEARSALS FOR *GASLIGHT*. PHOTO: JESSICA ZENG.
RIGHT: NIC WITH DIRECTOR CATHERINE FITZGERALD. PHOTO: SIA DUFF.



light and the way the lights get turned up and down throughout the play, changing the lighting to give the sense the gaslight is emanating from different areas. Apart from visibility and creating an atmosphere, the way the light dims up and down is a device used in the script. It's a way to tell the story - but I won't let it all out because you have to come see the play to see how the light works.

What processes or techniques do you use to create the lighting design for a play?

The starting point for any lighting design is getting the script. You read the script and pull out any references you can use to start thinking about your lighting design - it might say it's a particular time of day, it might be a particular setting, whether it's indoors or outdoors - and you make notes about all these different things. Someone might turn the light on, or someone opens a door and a shaft of light comes through... you're noting all those things.

From there you attend rehearsals and see where all the actors are moving on stage, and you make sure you're lighting the actors where they travel on stage. Best case scenario is lighting should not be very noticeable or detract from the action; it should be very much in the background and not dominate the story.

*"Look. Can't you see? The light! It's going up.
He's coming back."*

- Bella Manningham



ELLEN FREEMAN AND EILEEN DARLEY IN REHEARSALS FOR GASLIGHT. PHOTO: SIA DUFF.

What next?

Choose a type of design to focus on - set, costume, lighting or sound. Think about what sort of direction you might take with your design.

Would it reflect the original setting of 1880s England and a naturalistic design? Or would you choose a different time or place to connect with the themes? Or something more abstract?

Think about the feeling you are trying to create with your design. List how the elements you have chosen might reinforce this feeling. How might you change these elements as the play progresses?

Create a mood board for your design - focus on a particular scene if that is helpful. For set, costume and lighting design, find or draw images and diagrams related to your vision. For sound design, find sounds or songs to create the feel you are looking for.

In writing or in a presentation, explain why you have made these choices and how your design connects with the story and themes of *Gaslight*.

Supporting materials

Video interviews with Ailsa Paterson and Nic Mollison:
statetheatrecompany.com.au/state-educate-resources



GENRE & FORM

RELATED TO THIS PRODUCTION OF *GASLIGHT*

Thriller

Thrillers are often defined by the mood and feeling they elicit. There is often a sense of dread and impending danger or an unsettling feeling of something being ‘not quite right’. Crime and mystery are often components of thriller stories, adding the potential for sudden violence or other menace.

Uncertain motives and hidden information are usually key elements in thrillers. Information and motivations are sometimes shown to the audience, but not to the characters; other times, the audience and characters will be similarly kept in the dark.

These elements create suspense as the audience contemplates and anticipates the outcome, particularly for those characters who are behaving honestly or who are in a vulnerable position.

Music Hall

Popular in the Victorian era, music hall is a type of British theatrical entertainment featuring music, dancing, comedy, circus acts, mime and variety entertainment. At the height of its popularity, music hall performances drew hundreds of people from all classes, although it wasn’t considered a refined form of theatre by some members of the upper class.

Male impersonators were a popular part of many music hall performances, with women dressing up in drag as men to satirise or pay tribute to men of all classes – from policemen and army officer to young boys and aristocrats. One of the most popular male impersonators in Britain was Vesta Tilley, who was loved by the working class for her mockery of the upper classes.

Music hall and vaudeville are considered to be similar types of entertainment, with the latter being the more popular term and form in the United States and France.

ELLEN FREEMAN AND KSENJA LOGOS IN REHEARSALS FOR *GASLIGHT*.
PHOTO: SIA DUFF.



Melodrama

The history of melodrama as a form of theatre extends to plays in the Victoria era where elements of drama were combined with music or song. Typically, however, the term refers to a piece of theatre driven by plot and action, rather than by characters or characterisation. The plot is often sensational, with elements of violence or danger, and plays on the audience's emotions.

Melodramas are usually set within a home and focus on issues of morality. This form of drama sometimes relies on stereotypical characters or roles, such as the villain, damsel in distress or hero. The characters often use pretentious or sentimental language to express their emotions and the acting style can be over-the-top.

Film Noir

The term 'film noir' is generally used to refer to crime dramas that emphasise style and cynicism, often including sexual innuendo or motivations. Many films considered classics of this genre were released in the 1940s and 1950s and are typically shot in black and white. These films are the cinematic counterpart of the hardboiled crime fiction featured in pulp fiction magazines and the works of authors Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett, amongst others.

The stories in these films often follow a private detective as he attempt to get to the bottom of a mystery or crime. They are often driven by plot, rather than by character, so are sometimes considered melodramas.

Film noir has a distinct visual style characterised by low lighting, shadows and darkness. Dramatic shadow patterning and contrasts of light/dark are common, often including use of elements that cast an interesting shadow, such as Venetian blinds.



VESTA TILLEY IN (RIGHT) AND OUT (LEFT) OF DRAG. PHOTO: PUBLIC DOMAIN.

What next?

Choose one of the genres or story forms outlined on pages 29-30 and do some research. Once you have a solid understanding of the genre or form, examine how it relates to or is used in this production of *Gaslight*. Use specific examples and quotes to demonstrate the relationship between the play and your chosen genre or form. How did the direction, acting and design elements in this production emphasise this theme, if at all? How might these elements have emphasised your chosen genre or form more? Write down your ideas or discuss.

Think about the themes in *Gaslight* (see pages 32-33). Browse through a newspaper or have a look on a news website. Can you see any of the themes of the show reflected in current world events? Themes and issues like gender roles, domestic violence and gaslighting (political and domestic) are still being discussed by people today, both nationally and internationally.

Choose a theme or issue presented in the play and a news article from the past 12 months that shows how that theme or issue is still relevant. Research how your chosen topic was viewed and talked about in the 1880s/Victorian era (when the play is set) and/or in the 1930s (when Patrick Hamilton wrote the play); compare this to current discourse on the topic. How has the way we see this concept or idea changed from the 1880s and/or 1930s to the present day? How is it similar? Write down your responses using quotes from the play and a news source or sources.



THEMES & CONCEPTS

IN PATRICK HAMILTON'S *GASLIGHT*

Women & Madness in the Victorian Era

The role of a woman in England during the Victorian era was to marry, perform household tasks (which would differ between classes) and show interest in the life and livelihood of her husband. The wife's interests and needs were to come second to those of the 'man of the house'.

The idea of 'madness' and the threat of being sent to a 'lunatic asylum' (a Victorian era psychiatric facility) were used to control women who did not conform to typical gender roles or attitudes. Men could send their wives, daughters or sisters to a mental institution for a wide variety of reasons, the majority of which we would not see as signs of mental illness today. Sending women to an asylum was a method for getting women out of the way, silencing them, or even obtaining their assets.

If Bella had really been experiencing significant memory loss, this would have been a genuine reason to seek medical or psychiatric assistance. However, as the audience learns, Bella is not suffering from any mental impairment, but from the manipulation of her husband. Jack fabricated the symptoms of her 'madness' to get her out of the way, as did many other men of this era.

Gaslighting: Manipulation & Deception

"Gaslight (verb): A form of psychological manipulation where a person seeks to make their targeted individual or group question their own memory, perception and sanity."

The above definition has been used in much of the promotion for this production of *Gaslight* and is a succinct way of summarising this kind of behaviour.

The term 'gaslight' began to be used colloquially from the 1960s, but has seen a huge rise in popularity in recent years. Taking its name from the title of Patrick Hamilton's play, gaslighting is often used to describe psychological manipulation

and deception in the political and social sphere, but also refers to relationships within domestic settings.

Gaslighters sow seeds of doubt in the minds of their 'victims' using denial, lies, misdirection and misinformation. In personal relationships or domestic settings, they will often belittle the emotions and achievements of the person they are gaslighting. As a result, the victim's self-esteem will often suffer and they will be less likely to trust their own judgement. Instead, victims will often turn to the perpetrators as a source of truth. Many gaslighters are skilled liars and are easily able to fool or manipulate not only their victim, but outside parties.

Power is often a factor in the relationship between gaslighters and their victims, with the gaslighter usually being in a greater position of authority. An existing power imbalance often means the victim is more likely to believe in the truth and importance of what the perpetrator says.

Sociopaths and narcissists frequently use gaslighting tactics. Gaslighting is a common factor in many domestic violence situations.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE PLAY

The relationship between Jack and Bella Manningham fits this typical model of gaslighting. Jack, in a position of authority as the 'man of the house' in 1880s England, exerts his powers of manipulation to make Bella question her memory and sanity.

Jack insults, gaslights and manipulates Bella constantly in the play. He also cuts Bella off from her family, orders her around, does not allow her free run of her own home and threatens her with the possibility of being sent to an asylum. She does not appear to be able to leave the house or to have any personal connections outside of it. She is entirely reliant on Jack. His behaviour is undoubtedly abusive. This situation could definitely be seen as a case of coercive control, psychological and emotional abuse, and domestic violence.

POTENTIAL POLITICAL MEANING

During the 1930s, Patrick Hamilton was increasingly enraged by capitalism and fascism, and made this known through his writing. He was an avowed Marxist who believed that the violence being enacted by fascists in Europe would lead to the fall of capitalism.

Gaslight was released in 1938, a year which saw Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party gain more political ground and influence as they annexed and invaded areas outside of Germany. The play premiered just weeks before *Time* magazine named Hitler the "Man of the Year".

An argument could be made that Jack Manningham represents capitalist/fascist power gaslighting his victims, Bella Manningham represents those territories being tricked or invaded by the Nazis, and Sergeant Rough represents Marxism or communism. There is no record of Hamilton making such comparisons, but it seems a reasonable lens through which to look at this work given how often he addressed politics in his writing and the current events of the time.

