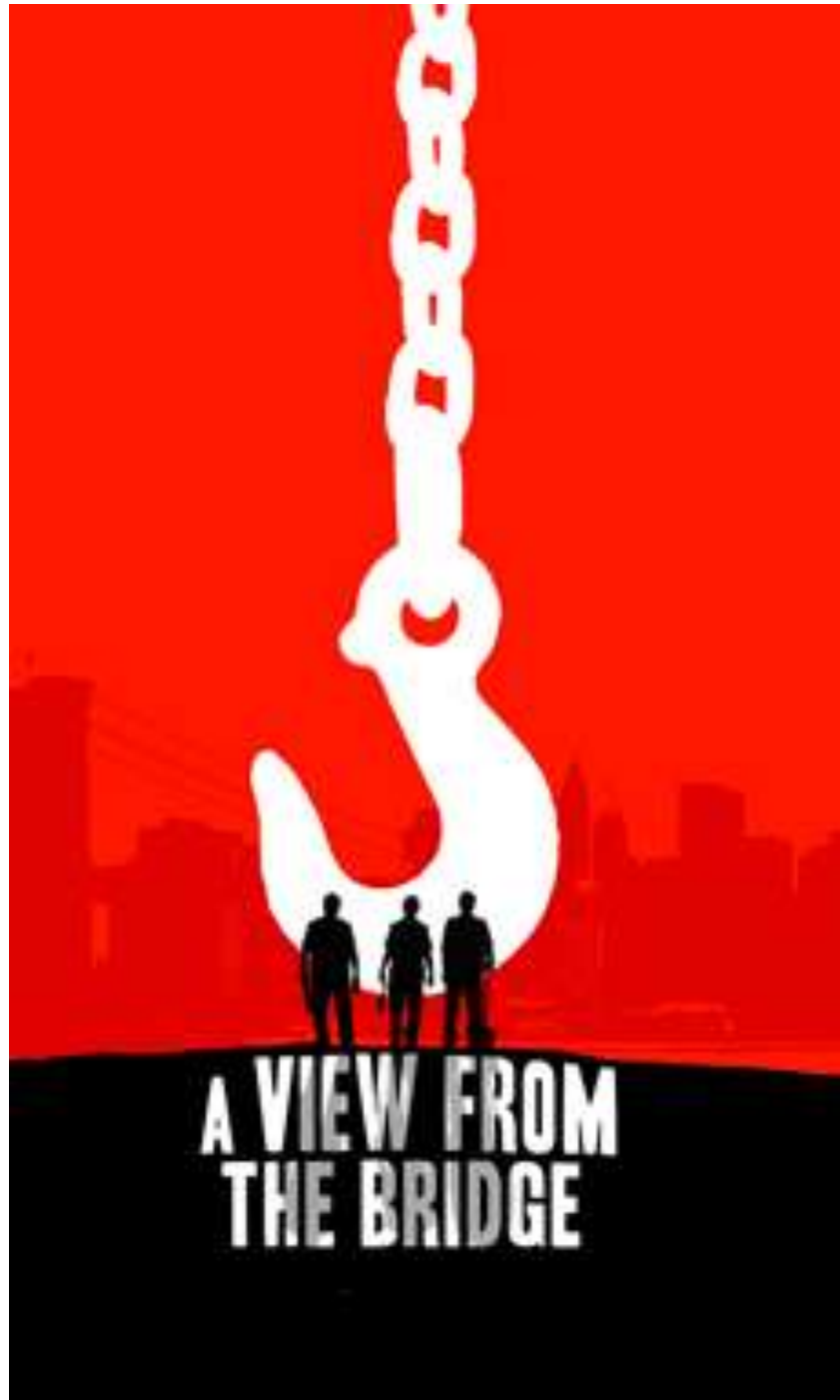


A Young Vic Production

Inside: A View From The Bridge

By Arthur Miller

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Welcome to the Young Vic's series of Inside guides. We hope that they will provide you with an insight into our productions and take you on a journey through the creative process.

They are compiled by emerging directors who are part of the Young Vic's Director's Network. The director undertakes research and interviews with actors and the creative team, giving you unique access to the production.

The Director's Network provides positive and proactive support for emerging directors by offering a range of opportunities to help them develop their craft.

These packs are produced by the Taking Part Department at the Young Vic. Taking Part is committed to offering our community in Lambeth and Southwark a wealth of opportunities to be involved in the big world inside the Young Vic. We produce work with local schools, young people and adults, which run alongside our professional productions.

From the plays we produce, to the way that we produce them and all of the other work that we do, we'd like to think there's something at the Young Vic that would interest everyone.

If you live or study in Lambeth or Southwark and would like to find out more about our work or get involved please visit www.youngvic.org/takingpart

You can also read our blog to find out what we're currently up to <http://youngviclondon.wordpress.com/category/taking-part/>

If you have any questions about these packs or our work please contact schools@youngvic.org

We hope you enjoy learning about our production from the inside.

The Taking Part Team

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Edited by: Georgia Dale and Daniel Harrison
First performed at the Young Vic on 4 April 2014

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Hello,

Welcome to the resource pack for The Young Vic's production of A View From the Bridge. My name is Susanna Gould. I'm a writer and theatre director, and I'm excited to be able to give you a glimpse into the making of this thrilling production of one of Arthur Miller's best-known plays. The process of researching and writing this pack has been particularly interesting and inspiring because it combines a loved, iconic American text and beautiful, imaginative staging and direction.

I've always loved American writers because of the way they present both a uniquely American experience alongside something very human and universal. Arthur Miller's writing hooked me the first time I experienced it because of its emotional impact – although his characters' lives are tangled up in political issues, it is their personal lives, loves and struggles that are under the microscope. What is exciting about this production of A View From the Bridge is the way Ivo van Hove has combined a stunning visual aesthetic and non-naturalistic elements, with strong, truthful acting, a combination that focuses us on the universal aspect of Miller's play – the part that exists outside of the 1950s' Brooklyn dockside and explores human emotions and behaviour. As radical as some of the decisions are, they are deeply rooted in Miller's text, and illuminate the play in a way that a more traditional production might not.

Behind the production that you see is a large creative team who have unpicked every tiny moment of the play in detail, and brought their own expertise to bear on it, whether this is creating a meticulously focused shaft of light or rhythmically perfect drum beat, or pressing a switch at the correct line of text or turn of an actor's head to ensure these things happen in performance. I hope this pack gives you a sense of this.

The creative process, through which an abstract idea about a play becomes concrete in an end production, is fascinating in itself - the techniques used with actors; the decisions made about design, lighting and sound etc; and how, in practical terms, these are interwoven during the process to communicate the play. Being able to observe rehearsals for A View From the Bridge, and how the production has come together, has been an amazing experience, and members of the creative team have been extremely generous with their time in talking to me about their input.

I've had a fantastic time researching and writing this pack, and I hope you enjoy reading it.

Susanna

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Part 1: The Playwright and the Play



Arthur Miller, 1956 © Bettmann/CORBIS

Part 1: The Playwright and the Play

Arthur Miller and American Theatre

Evolution of the American Stage

The Young Vic's production of Arthur Miller's *A View From The Bridge* will be followed in the summer by a production of another American classic, Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Alongside each other, and writers like Eugene O'Neill, Lillian Hellman and Sophie Treadwell, Miller and Williams are credited with transforming American theatre, as well as having a massive impact on our own British stage. Williams spoke of his "little company of the faded and frightened, the difficult, the odd and the lonely", and, though the two playwrights differed in approach and style, Williams' description of his characters could also be applied to the characters that populate Miller's plays.

To get a sense of how these playwrights transformed American theatre, it is helpful to look at what theatre was like in the US before their emergence. Their way was paved by two previous generations of theatre makers who gradually brought about a shift towards a theatre that engaged with real life, but, prior to this, theatre was a very different place indeed.



Broadway circa 1900

At the turn of the 20th Century, New York's Broadway in Manhattan, the heart of the American theatre industry, produced plays, musicals, burlesque and vaudeville. However, these shows tended to be pure escapism. It has been suggested that in the first twenty years of the Twentieth Century, most plays lacked serious content and on the whole tended to be for entertainment purposes only. Although George Bernard Shaw's *The Devil's Disciple* and Ibsen's controversial *Ghosts* had both been seen in New York at the end of the 19th Century, American plays of this time tended not to deal with contentious issues, or anything that was likely to cause offence. In 1871, Walt Whitman, the American poet, compared the consideration of American Theatre to the consideration of "the arrangement of curtains and hangings in a ballroom" – in other words, inconsequential and trivial.

Between 1900 and 1920, 20 million immigrants arrived in the United States – Irish, Jewish, German, Greek, Russian, Estonian, Hungarian, Romanian, Italian. Jewish immigrants had a strong influence on American culture and theatre, and Yiddish theatre became extremely popular in New York. The Yiddish 'shund' was a form of popular entertainment with songs, dance, music and spectacle. Although there was some sense of moral purpose inherent in these works, they were, above all else, shows. Gradually, however, a new generation of Jewish playwrights began to deal with more serious and weighty subject-matter – subjects like loss of faith, persecution, and how to integrate into new cultures and societies (such as America). This happened alongside experimentation with performance styles, of the kind happening in Europe at this time. The plays and musicals that were now being produced had more of a moral purpose to them, rather than being inconsequential and trivial. In their book, *Changing Stages*, Nicholas Wright and Richard Eyre suggest that Arthur Miller, who was himself Jewish and the son of Polish

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Jewish immigrants, was a product of this new form of serious Jewish theatre, which reached its peak in his work.

A theatrical climate had evolved that nurtured writers like Eugene O'Neill (1888-1953), Sophie Treadwell (1885-1970), Clifford Odets (1906-1963) and Lillian Hellman (1906-1984) and would, in turn, nurture Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams. These playwrights created a theatre that, rather than trying to escape from what was happening around them, faced it head-on, and dealt with the great social and political issues facing people at that time. For Stella Adler, the actress and acclaimed acting teacher, the power of these great American plays is their expression of "what we were: nothing is fixed. No religion is fixed, no family is fixed, no property is fixed – nothing gets rooted long enough for it to hold on".



From left to right:

Eugene O'Neill, Sophie Treadwell, Clifford Odets, Lillian Hellman, Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams

Arthur Miller - "The Moral Voice of the American Stage"

One of the major aspects of Miller's work is its moral purpose. Stella Adler described Miller as "the moral voice of the American stage". Miller's first play, *No Villain*, written whilst a student in 1937, was inspired by a workers' strike at a General Motors factory, which he covered for the Michigan Daily student newspaper. The firsthand experience of a workers' strike, which was bound up in issues of race and power, ignited a passionate interest in politics and the plight of the ordinary person. He became interested in how the ordinary person, and the private tension between family members, connects with big public social and political issues, and this interest is reflected in all his work. *No Villain* was about a man who owns a business whose workers are on strike, and his son, who is torn between his father's interests and his own sense of justice. The seeds of Miller's first successful, well-known play, *All My Sons*, seen first in 1947, can be seen in *No Villain* ten years earlier: *All My Sons* is a tragedy about a manufacturer who sells faulty parts to the military in order to save his business - even the play's title brings home the personal aspect of the issue, and it is not high-rank politicians at question in the play, but an ordinary man. Miller is interested in the complex psychology of women and men, and, specifically, how this might be affected by, and have an effect on, social and political issues.

Even in Britain we are familiar with the idea of the American Dream, perhaps because it is such an innately human idea, not necessarily specific to a time and place. The idea of the American Dream is that, through hard work, you can be the person you want to be and achieve success and social status. However, the reality, as Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, Eugene O'Neill and other playwrights realised, could be very different. In *Timebends*, Miller criticises Capitalism, describing it metaphorically as "this pseudo life that thought to touch the clouds by standing on top of a refrigerator, waving a paid-up mortgage at the moon, victorious at last". Miller's quote suggests that material wealth and ownership will not fulfill you or buy you happiness, and he hoped to expose this in his play *Death of a Salesman*.

The Ordinary Man as Hero

Nowadays we are accustomed to seeing characters onstage who have lives like our own, and struggles like our own. But in the '40s and '50s when Arthur Miller's work was emerging, this was a radical idea. Traditionally, tragedy was reserved for kings and princes and, later, for wealthy, aristocratic characters whose lives were set against the backdrop of living rooms. The plays of Chekhov and Ibsen, radical as they were at the time, tended to focus on the aristocracy and wealthy upper classes. For Miller, however, the tragic hero could be the ordinary man or woman in the street. He believed that the strongest fear presented in tragedy, and which people identified with most, was the fear of not being able to be the person we want or believe ourselves to be, the "fear of being displaced, the disaster inherent in being torn away from our chosen image of what and who we are in this world". He believed that ordinary people "knew this fear best". Hence, the characters which populate Miller's plays are not nobility, but Willy Loman, the door-to-door salesman in *Death of a Salesman*; Eddie Carbone, an Italian American longshoreman, in *A View From the Bridge*; Joe Keller, a self-made businessman, in *All My Sons*. Miller is interested in the behaviour, thoughts and feelings of ordinary women and men, their everyday lives and the choices they make. He opens up the houses of dockside Brooklyn and suburban America and holds a magnifying glass up to the things going on inside. He exalts the importance of normal human passions and emotions.

Impact on British Theatre

The new generation of American playwrights also had an impact on British theatre which, during the 1930s, '40s and '50s, was generally as lacklustre and as inconsequential as its American counter-part had been. There was also the problem of censorship: under the 1843 Theatre's Act, the Lord Chamberlain could ban plays from being performed if it was "fitting for the preservation of good manners, decorum or of the public peace so to do". In his autobiography *Timebends*, Arthur Miller recalls how *A View From the Bridge* "could not play in a British theatre because Eddie Carbone accuses his wife's cousin Rodolpho of homosexuality and to prove it grabs him and kisses him on the lips". However, the play's producers got round this by presenting the play at a private theatre club, which was allowed under the law. It is generally held that modern British drama began in 1956, with the premiere of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*. This new generation of British playwrights were arguably deeply influenced by the bold innovations on the other side of the Atlantic, which "had demonstrated to the British theatre something that was buried from the time of Shaw and Granville-Barker to the '50s: that theatre, the medium that deals best with social relationships, might also bear the conscience of the society".

Points for Discussion

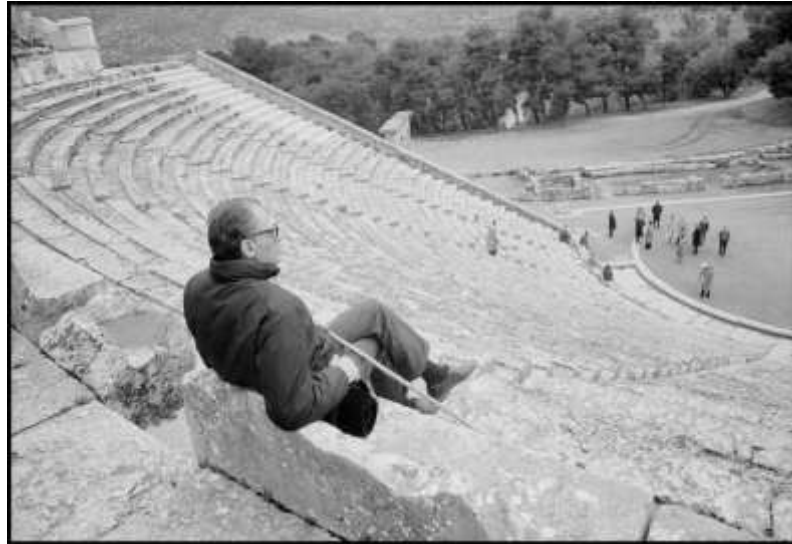
In what way might any of the characters in *A View From the Bridge* be described as "faded and frightened", "difficult", "odd" or "lonely"?

Should theatre have a moral purpose?

Part 1: The Playwright and the Play

Arthur Miller, Tragedy and Greek Theatre

Three weeks after *Death of a Salesman* opened in 1949, Arthur Miller published an essay entitled 'Tragedy and the Common Man', in which he discusses his idea that tragedy is not the realm merely of high rank and nobility, but can also be about ordinary, everyday lives. He had an intense interest in the dramatic form, suggesting that all plays were either an attempt at tragedy, or an escape from it, and he was passionate about its function in society to teach moral lessons.



Arthur Miller in the ancient theatre of Epidaurus, 1969.

Miller famously stated that "the tragic feeling is evoked in us when we're in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life, if need be, to secure one thing—his sense of personal dignity". He saw tragedy as a form that could teach society important lessons via the misfortunes of its heroes; and as something perhaps difficult, but necessary, to watch, in order to learn these lessons.

Miller talked a great deal of the influence on him of Greek theatre, from where the tragic form originates. His ideas about the form changed over time, but he admired the symmetry of Greek plays, the idea that a moral order is reasserted at the end of the play and that those who have gone against moral law are punished. Despite their depiction of painful emotions and events, he saw the plays as having a therapeutic effect, an outlet for extreme feeling and emotion, and appears to have relished their head-on "confrontation with catastrophe". For Miller, tragedy "has to do with the community sacrificing some man whom they both adore and despise in order to reach its basic and fundamental laws and, therefore, justify its existence and feel safe".

Although Greek tragedy is a complex tradition, there are certain general points which are helpful to know in light of Miller's work. Greek tragedy depicts an individual's refusal to accept life as it is, a tragic hero's protest against conditions, in a manner that goes against the accepted 'normal' order. The form is said to be derived from religious rites performed for the Greek god Dionysus, and Miller himself seems to be referring to this idea when he talks of tragic heroes being sacrificed for the good of the community. Aristotle, who was writing in 353 BC, suggested that 'catharsis' (a Greek word meaning 'purification' or 'cleansing') was central to the point of tragedy. Through experiencing the re-enactment of deeds and emotions as part of an audience – as opposed to experiencing them in real life – people would experience 'catharsis' or relief, resulting in renewal and restoration, as if

cleansed. This also relates back to the importance Arthur Miller saw in the restoration of a moral order in a play.

Other important attributes of Greek tragedy include what Aristotle described as the Unities of Time and Place, suggesting that a play should contain one main action, or story; that all the action should take place in one location, and that it should take place over no more than twenty-four hours. Plays would also include a chorus, a group of actors who would comment on the dramatic action.

Arthur Miller said of A View From the Bridge, "I wanted to write a play that had the cleanliness ... the clear line of some of the Greek tragedies. Meaning that we would be confronted with a situation and we would be told in effect what the ending was. The question was not what was going to happen, but how it was going to happen."

Points for Discussion

Look again at Miller's famous quote about tragedy:

"the tragic feeling is evoked in us when we're in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life, if need be, to secure one thing—his sense of **personal dignity"**

How do you think these words could be applied to Eddie Carbone in A View From the Bridge?

Look again at Miller's comment on A View From the Bridge in the last paragraph above. What other aspects of Greek theatre can you identify in the play?

What evidence of Greek theatre can you identify in Ivo Von Hove's staging of A View from the Bridge?

Part 1: The Playwright and the Play

The Evolution of *A View From the Bridge*

A View From the Bridge went through many forms before crystallising into the two act drama that is now so well-known and highly regarded. What is striking and important about this is Miller's aim, which he continued to pursue in order to find the best possible form: to tell a story that he had heard as simply as possible, with nothing extraneous to the action. Influenced by Greek drama, this repeated paring down of his form emphasises the importance of this approach for him.



New York skyline and Brooklyn Bridge, 1948

A View From the Bridge is based on a true story, told to Arthur Miller by his friend, a lawyer called Vincent Longhi, in 1948. Miller lived in Brooklyn Heights, an affluent and beautiful red-brick area of Brooklyn, across the bay from Manhattan, close to the water and not far from the docks in Red Hook, where *A View From the Bridge* is set; and in the shadow of the Brooklyn Bridge, the bridge referred to in the play's title. Miller used to wander every day around the dockside area, where ships' cargoes were loaded and unloaded, finding it fascinating and atmospheric. In *Timebends*

he describes how he would "love to find some way of writing about this sealed-off area of the city...a dangerous and mysterious world at the water's edge that drama and literature had never touched". Vincent Longhi was able to show Miller around this area and Miller listened to, and observed, the Italian Americans there. He was particularly drawn to their uninhibited expression of emotion. In the course of time Longhi told Miller the story that was to form the basis of his play. It was a story Longhi had himself recently heard about a longshoreman who had informed the Immigration Bureau about two brothers, his own relatives, who were illegal immigrants and living in his home. He had informed on the brothers "to break an engagement between one of them and his niece". The longshoreman who had informed was disgraced and had disappeared, and there were rumours that he had been killed by one of the brothers.

At the time, Miller did not realise that he had the story for *A View From the Bridge*. Later, he wrote a screenplay based on it, *The Hook*, with the director Elia Kazan. However, Miller withdrew this when the Hollywood studio complained that it was un-American. In 1955, Miller's play opened on Broadway. However, at this stage it was a one act play, much of it written in verse, and it was not well-received. The play was expanded to two acts, the verse dropped and rewritten as prose. Miller said in his introduction to this revised version of the play that "Eddie Carbone is still not a man to weep over...But it is more possible now to relate his actions to our own and thus to understand ourselves a little better, not only as isolated psychological entities, but as we connect to our fellows and our long past together." This version of the play opened in London in 1956 and was immediately well-received.

Part 1: The Playwright and the Play

Synopsis of *A View From the Bridge*

Although the final version of the play is divided into two acts, Miller has provided no explicit, labelled scene divisions, so the scenes within acts seem to run into each other. This is also reflected in the brevity of the play (and production, which runs at only 2 hours).

Character List

In this production some characters have been combined with other characters, and so do not appear in the production by name. These characters are marked *.

Eddie Carbone – A Longshoreman

Beatrice Carbone – Eddie's Wife

Catherine – niece of Beatrice and Eddie (daughter of Beatrice's sister)

Rodolpho – cousin of Beatrice

Marco – cousin of Beatrice

Alfieri – a Lawyer consulted by Eddie

Louie – a Longshoreman and friend of Eddie

Mike – a Longshoreman and friend of Eddie*

First Immigration Officer – employee of the Immigration Bureau who comes to arrest Rodolpho and Marco

Second Immigration Officer – as above*

Act One

The story of the play is told by Alfieri, a lawyer.

Eddie is an Italian American longshoreman (dock worker whose job is to load and unload ships) who lives with his wife Beatrice and niece, Catherine, in Brooklyn, New York. Beatrice and Eddie have brought Catherine up. She is now seventeen years old.

Eddie and Catherine have a very intimate relationship. Although this is innocent from Catherine's point of view, Eddie is obsessed with his niece, and his wife has begun to notice this obsession.

At the start of the play, Beatrice learns that her two cousins, Rodolpho and Marco, have landed from Italy. She has been expecting them – they are coming to America to work because work is so readily available there, whereas in Italy there is no work and no money. Marco has a wife and three children in Italy, who are all starving, and he plans to send money back to them regularly. Rodolpho hopes to start a whole new life in America. Beatrice and Eddie have agreed (before the play begins) that Rodolpho and Marco can stay with them until they are settled.

Marco and Rodolpho are, however, illegal immigrants (described metaphorically as 'submarines' in the play because they have entered the country secretly). They have no 'papers' (passports) and legally are not allowed to work as they are not American citizens.

The attraction between Catherine and Rodolpho is immediately apparent, as is Eddie's extreme, but unspoken, jealousy.

Rodolpho and Marco start working. Rodolpho seems to be particularly well-liked within the community. He attracts attention because of his blonde hair and the fact that he sings, cooks, is able to make dresses and makes everyone laugh.

Catherine and Rodolpho start a relationship, which quickly becomes serious, and it becomes clear that Eddie does not like this. He tells Catherine that Rodolpho would only want to marry her to get an American passport and, thus, get American citizenship. Beatrice is concerned about the relationship between Eddie and Catherine. She tries to warn Catherine about this, telling her she needs to act differently around Eddie. She also encourages Catherine's burgeoning relationship with Rodolpho.

Eddie goes to see Alfieri to see if he can bring a legal case against Rodolpho for (as Eddie describes it) courting Catherine simply so that he can get a passport once they are married. Eddie also uses the fact that Rodolpho can sing, cook and sew to question his sexuality and undermine his relationship with Catherine. Alfieri tries to advise Eddie to leave the situation alone.

Tensions mount within the household as Eddie teaches Rodolpho to box and hurts him more than the 'lesson' demands. In the same scene, Marco asks Eddie if he can lift a chair from the bottom of one of its legs. When Eddie fails to do so, Marco lifts the chair himself, raising it over his head.

Act Two

Catherine and Rodolpho are alone in the house. It is the first time they have been alone. Catherine challenges Rodolpho about his reasons for wanting to be with her, and he convinces her that he is genuinely in love with her.

Eddie comes home early to find Catherine and Rodolpho emerging from the bedrooms. He is furious and tells Rodolpho to pack his bags and leave. The situation escalates and Eddie kisses, first Catherine, and then Rodolpho, full on the mouth.

Eddie goes again to see Alfieri and seek his help. Again, Alfieri advises Eddie to let the situation go. However, Eddie rings the Immigration Bureau to report Marco and Rodolpho as illegal immigrants. Meanwhile, Beatrice has arranged for Marco and Rodolpho to move into a rented room in the apartment above them; and Catherine and Rodolpho have arranged to get married the following week.

The immigration officers arrive to take Marco and Rodolpho away. Marco spits in Eddie's face. It is clear that Eddie has informed on them, and other members of the community shun Eddie as a result.

Marco and Rodolpho are put in prison, but are allowed out on bail until their hearing, and Rodolpho and Catherine plan to get married immediately so that Rodolpho can remain in the country.

Back at home, Eddie refuses to go to the wedding. Rodolpho arrives and tries to apologise to Eddie, but Eddie will not accept this. The situation escalates and Beatrice confronts Eddie about his love for Catherine. Marco arrives and Eddie challenges him to apologise, in front of the community, for spitting at him. A fight ensues between them, during which Eddie grabs a knife and tries to stab Marco. Marco manages to turn the blade towards Eddie and kills him.

The play ends, as it begins, with Alfieri's words.

Part 1: The Playwright and the Play

Group Activities

Points for Discussion

How does the production deal with the transition between scenes in the play? How **does this contribute to the effect of Eddie's story?**

Why do you think true stories held such an appeal for Arthur Miller as a starting point for his work?

Exercise

Choose a true story from the newspaper, or one that you have heard.

Try and re-write it from the point of view of one of the people in it, imagining their thoughts and feelings in response to what happened.

Try telling the story through still-images. Once you have your still-images, try adding dialogue, making them into scenes.

Extension

Now you have a short play, experiment with the pace with which you tell the story – what effect does it have? If you have not already done so, try setting the whole play in one place and see what effect this has compared to changing the setting in each scene.

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Part 2: The Production



A View From the Bridge company. Photo by Jan Versweyeld

Part 2: The Production

Programming *A View From The Bridge* At The Young Vic

The Young Vic produces its own work, as well as inviting theatre artists and companies from around the world to create work there. The Artistic Director, David Lan, programmes the theatre, meaning he decides what plays will go on, when, and who will direct them. I asked him about the decision to programme *A View From the Bridge* this year.

What made you decide to programme this particular play at this particular time?

I never really know the answer to questions like that; it's always a number of different things. I've thought about the play for a long time – I had an idea of how to realise the play about six or seven years ago with a particular actor playing the part of Eddie Carbone but at that stage I couldn't get the rights to the play. They were owned by a commercial producer who happens to be a friend of mine, she wanted to do the play so I suggested that we did it together and told her what I wanted to do but she said that it wouldn't work commercially in the West End. But I like the play very much and it's just kind of stuck around with me as an interesting thing. I'm not that terribly interested in any of his other plays for us to produce here, but this is an interesting curious thing.

Then when I was talking to Ivo Van Hove about directing something for us here - I'd seen a lot of Ivo's work in various countries and cities, you know this is the first time he's actually directed here in London, he's brought shows here but he's never directed here. I've seen his work in Amsterdam and Paris and Berlin and Vienna, I've not seen his American work, and I wanted him to do a show with us because I think he's very good and I'm very interested in what he does. We had a conversation over quite a long period about what it should be and I suggested this play.

I thought it would enable him to do what he does very very well, better than anyone else perhaps, which is reveal something very deep and complex: he's very good at selecting actors and then working with them to reveal something very contradictory and deep about how people change when they're with other people in extreme circumstances or extreme moments in their lives. We talked about various things, Ivo read the play and liked it very much, he could see the potential in it for him.

We talked about some other plays as well which he also liked and was interested in, this was over a long time, six months, nine months, a year, I can't remember. But in the end he said to me 'You decide...' which was very scary [laughs] and I did decide on *A View from the Bridge*, because I felt if he directed a play for us that people didn't know, or didn't know the assumptions made by the playwright about how the play would be done, it would be hard to see what Ivo does. Whereas if you see this play people expect it to be done naturalistically, whatever that means. Many people come to see the play and have never heard of the play, don't know who Arthur Miller is, and that's great too - they just take it as something that Ivo has created with the actors, with the designer, and that's fine. But many people will see something that they've never seen before and will see what Ivo's doing - because it's the relationship between the play, and the writer's mind, the actors' minds and the director's mind that I'm really interested in. I guessed if people saw this they would get a sense of something powerful and unexpected and I thought that would be good.

That's really interesting, that it was the idea of the combination of the director with a particular play, and doing something very different with a text that people already know. Do you think that it's important that people are seeing a very different approach to theatre, which can be quite controversial in this country?

Funny, as you were saying that, see that old chap walking along the road there, do you know who that is? He's a theatre director and I don't know what he'd make of this, he is a director of a very particular school and, I don't know, people might find it controversial. But so far people haven't found that at all, they just receive it and connect with it, they understand what it is. It's very hard to say because we've been moving in a very particular direction with the work we've been doing here for quite a long time now - to some extent people come here expecting something slightly unusual and that's fine. But I'm more interested by the ease with which the audience accept that work - I think that the audience is actually ahead of us. We think we're leading; actually the audience are already there and for me that's really important and something to think about.

There is an assumption that there is a particular way to do shows which is standard, that's the way you do them, and then people like me ask people to do things that are unconventional. But actually that's complete rubbish; the way that people produce shows is the product of a particular moment, a particular time. When Arthur Miller wrote the play the way he imagined the stage was innovative, he was saying 'I want people to see something they've never seen', and that's not shocking any more, it's not even interesting. The work that we produce is continuous to people's lives, not separate. The game is how you get that to happen and it's partly through surprise, I mean if you walk down the street you don't know what's coming round the corner and that's part of the reason you walk down the street because your brain wants to, it's processing endlessly, it's scanning, taking things in, is there something new, is there something interesting, has something changed, and if you set up the theatre as a very particular kind of experience, people pay money for it they arrive at a particular time, so there's a powerfully ritualised experience, you're supposed to behave in a particular kind of way, you have a drink first and meet your friends, you take your ticket and hand it to someone, someone tells you to turn off your phone, it's going to last 90 minutes, whatever, you go through this curious almost infantilising process of pacifying you, and then if what you see on the stage is totally familiar as well - well if people want to do that I'm not in a position to say they can or they can't, and I don't wish to be, but I know what I'd want. It's a kind of drug, pacifying people almost asleep, convinced it's the only way their life can be and the best way their life can be... boring. And what I love about Ivo's work and what I loved from the first moment I saw it, is that he only works in the present tense, the play is set now, and there's nothing in the play that couldn't be now actually.

An idea that I'm strongly interested in, which is not really answering your question but sort of is; is that people might come into a generation brought up to think that things are getting better, that inevitably progress happens. And in some ways it does - obviously it does in medicine and science, but the way I think about it is that every bad thing that's ever happened is happening now, every good thing that's ever happened is happening now, but we can't connect to them. Ok, so what's one of the worst things that's ever happened... the holocaust in the second world war, a really bad thing that's now over, but it isn't over because if you look at the Central African Republic now it is as bad for those people now at this minute, as it was then... but we can't connect with that. I think that everything is continuous with everything else and if we get better at things, we get better at connecting, finding new people, places - situations that we didn't think we could connect to, which we can connect to, and we can only do that by waking up, by being more awake. That's why when I see Ivo's work, I go 'I want that', or Benedict Andrews or Joe Hill-Gibbons or whoever we work with here. Because somehow their work is about the world now, and if a play is worth doing then it can only be worth doing because it's alive now.

The curious thing is, if you do this thing long enough, you might read a play and find it dated, you think it might have been really interesting in the past and you put it back on the shelf. Then you come back to it five or ten years later and you go, 'this is an extraordinary thing, this is completely wow', how could it have been dated. **We're going to do a play next year that I thought I knew quite well but had thought you wouldn't do that now, and I can't remember why I went back to it but I did and just thought this is incredible.** Somehow that is what art does – art and time are kind of opposites of each other, time passes but art doesn't, it's somehow such a concentration of meaning and understanding that it lives in a curious blinking way, sometimes it has life and sometimes it doesn't. So that's why.

I remember discovering Arthur Miller when I was still at school and thinking that although **it deals with all of the political and social issues of its time, it doesn't feel like it's refined to that particular world. What I love about Ivo's production** is that because everything else has been stripped away the text just speaks much more clearly and all of the things that are timeless about it just come out.

I also write plays, and I think playwrights are incredibly important. There's often an assumption that the writer is the best expert on that play, but they're not. Almost by definition they don't know what they've written, if the thing is any good they don't know what it is. It's like there's something that won't go away, there's some contradiction or thought or experience that won't go away. There's something that sticks around and the only way that it can be resolved is by writing about it. By getting it out into the world you find it is something else, but you can't explain it. Sometimes it illuminates something and you just have to trust what they've written. If it's good, whatever 'good' means, it's dealing with truths which can only be expressed in that way. An audience will take what you give them if you give it to them confidently I think, but there's no absolutes. It's interesting; the audience is very very smart, they'll take anything providing it somehow plugs in. The question is where do you go next... and I don't know that yet.

I wanted to ask you about Streetcar opening soon after A View from the Bridge, which is another of the classic American texts. What were your reasons for programming them together?

Just chance. It was the right people at the right time. It really doesn't matter that we're doing A View from the Bridge too. Streetcar will be a particularly adventurous production as well.

A Streetcar Named Desire opens at the Young Vic on 23rd July 2014

A Young Vic Production

Inside: A View From The Bridge

By Arthur Miller

Young
Vic

Part 2: The Production

The Director – Ivo Van Hove

The Young Vic invites directors, not only from the UK, but from all over the world, to direct work in its spaces. Ivo van Hove is a fascinating and exciting choice of director for *A View From the Bridge*, a classic American text. The award-winning Belgian-born director is best known for reworking classic texts on stage, bringing them to life in a radical, non-traditional way that makes you think about the play differently. Looking at images of his work, you might assume that they are of very modern, experimental texts. In fact, they are often of classic plays such as Shakespeare's *Othello*, Marlowe's *Edward II* or Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*. In 2007, Ivo van Hove created *Roman Tragedies*, a five-and-a-half-hour production which combined Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, *Anthony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus*. Amongst other things, the production encouraged audience members to wander amongst the actors onstage, watch the action on televisions dotted throughout the set, and provided flashing on-screen countdowns to the plays' 'big' scenes. In 2007, Ivo created a production of *Angels In America* on a bare stage. Its writer, Tony Kushner, commented on how the non-traditional staging of the play enabled both himself and the audience to learn new things about the play that might have been less clear in a more conventional production. He described the production as "the most literal version of anti-space I've seen in the conventional theatre".



A selection of Ivo Van Hove's previous work with Toneelgroep Amsterdam. www.tga.nl

Tony Kushner felt that Ivo's production of *Angels in America* "threw the entire event on the actors and their performances". Amidst the radical staging, the unreal, unfamiliar or empty settings, for Ivo, the focus is nonetheless on finding the reality of the characters in a play, their emotions, beliefs and behaviour, and this is given rigorous attention. In a production of Molière's *Misanthrope* in 2007, video cameras surrounded the stage. For Ivo, these cameras enhance the sense of truth and realism he is pursuing, describing them as being "like masks in Greek drama, they give huge expression to small things onstage". Ivo van Hove's approach to the acting in his productions has been described as "naked-soul acting", turning each play into a "laboratory of human behaviour". He is interested in the psychological richness and complexity of plays and their characters, fascinated by people's behaviour and what causes it. Ivo himself has spoken of how he aims "to make an X-ray of a character, to bring the subtext out where it can be seen". He is "fascinated by human behavior and relationships in the context of great social upheaval".

Ivo van Hove has worked across Europe, directing companies from Hamburg's Deutsches Schauspielhaus and Stuttgart's Staatstheater. As well as staging both classic and contemporary texts, he has directed operas, including *Lulu* and the complete Ring Cycle by Richard Wagner; and the world premiere of an opera version of *Brokeback Mountain*, which opened in Madrid in January this year. In addition to his work in Europe, Ivo has directed a number of productions for the New York Theatre Workshop, including several plays that, like *A View From the Bridge*, are American classics – amongst them, Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey Into the Night*, and Lillian Hellman's *The Little Foxes*. Ivo has also worked with screenplays, adapting them for stage, including John Cassavetes' 1977 film, *Opening Night* and Ingmar Bergman's 1973 film, *Scenes From a Marriage*, which was at London's The Barbican last year. Since 2001, Ivo van Hove has been General Director of Holland's Toneelgroep Amsterdam, the country's prime theatre company, and the official municipal theatre company of Amsterdam.

Points for discussion:

How is Ivo van Hove's work different from other directors' work you have seen in the theatre?

How did this production of *A View From the Bridge* meet with and/or defy your expectations?

What do you think is meant by the terms "anti-space" and "naked-soul acting"? Can you see any evidence of these ideas in this production of *A View From the Bridge*?

Exercises

Choose an extract from a play with more than one character, and gather together appropriate props, set and costume. Try staging the play in two different ways: firstly with the props, set and costume; and then without.

What effect does each approach have on you, both as a performer and as an audience member? Is there anything in the text that becomes highlighted, or does it make anything less clear?

A Young Vic Production

Inside: A View From The Bridge

By Arthur Miller



Part 2: The Production

The Designer – Jan Versweyveld

Often directors will find themselves working with a new designer on each production they direct. Sometimes, however, directors and designers create an ongoing working relationship. This is the case with Ivo van Hove and the designer of A View From the Bridge, Jan Versweyveld, who also designs Ivo's productions for Toneelgroep Amsterdam. The following description of their working relationship is an extract from the Toneelgroep Amsterdam website:

Jan Versweyveld offers Van Hove the space needed for exploring the interior landscapes of the characters and needed for -what you may call- his a-moral **approach. Van Hove doesn't judge his characters and presents** their good and bad qualities with the same amount of attention; in their full potency. At the same time the scenery articulates a vision on our contemporary culture. We live in an individualistic, self- absorbed and liquid society. Van Hove and Versweyveld show the mechanisms of this society but also make clear that we **can't live in isolation. A different notion of collectivity has to be found and** theatre is the ultimate place to experiment with this, since according to Van Hove, it is both a place to celebrate the irrational and a place to ask questions. Without fears and without restraint.

Part 2: The Production

The Company - Toneelgroep Amsterdam

The creative team for this production of A View From the Bridge is made up of freelance artists, artists from The Young Vic, and members of Toneelgroep Amsterdam Theatre Company, which is led by Ivo van Hove.

Taken from Toneelgroep Amsterdam's website, www.tga.nl

At Toneelgroep Amsterdam, tradition and innovation go hand in hand. They are the pillars of a company that is constantly in motion and presents itself explicitly at the heart of Amsterdam, the Stadsschouwburg¹ at Leidseplein. TA is the largest theatre company in the Netherlands and is led by director Ivo van Hove. Since he was appointed in 2001, he has paved the way for an urban company with international allure by creating a series of sensational shows and by attracting different directors from the Netherlands, as well as from other countries. The core of the company consists of 22 quality actors, making it possible to keep shows in their repertoire.

History

TA was founded in 1987. It is a merger between two companies from the capital city; the Publiektheater and Toneelgroep Centrum. Gerardjan Rijnders, who was the artistic leader at that time, was the first to remove experimental theatre from the margins and place avant-garde on the country's primary stage: Stadsschouwburg Amsterdam. His successor Ivo van Hove continues along this line. Together with designer Jan Versweyveld², he breaks through the restrictions of the large theatre, and steps out of the frame if the performance calls for it. The playhouse as a location where the natural distance between actor and audience is removed and the relationship between fiction and reality is defined in a new way.

Urban Theatre Company

TA has developed into an urban theatre company performing in the already existing theatre and the new Rabozaal theatre at the Stadsschouwburg since 2009. It is a base for meeting artists from the Netherlands as well as from other countries. Amsterdam becomes the core of a global village where both local and global changes continue to fuel people's ideas about art and theatre. TA produces performances that are up-to-date without explicitly reacting to political and social developments. Theatre becomes a sanctuary for being confronted with the unknown: the unknown in ourselves, in others, in society. But above all, theatre needs to be a party in honour of chaos, where the irrational and the illogical are celebrated.

¹ This is the building the company inhabit in Amsterdam

² Jan Versweyveld is the designer for Ivo's production of A View From the Bridge at The Young Vic. He and Ivo have are long-standing collaborators

A Young Vic Production

Inside: A View From The Bridge

By Arthur Miller



Multitude of Stage Languages

TA produces reinterpretations of classic repertoire, new texts and crossovers with music, design and dance. By frequently teaming up with other companies, such as NTGent and Toneelhuis, artistic cross connections are created. Apart from Ivo van Hove, TA also works with prominent guest directors from various countries, such as Thomas Ostermeier, Grzegorz Jarzyna, Johan Simons, Luk Perceval, Krzysztof Warlikowski and Christoph Marthaler. During the coming years, nine visionary and distinctive directors will be making their own special creations. What connects these new and internationally renowned directors is their belief that theatre is essential within a society that is more disparate and diverse than ever. They all share a concern about the place of man in this continually changing society.

Part 2: The Production

European Theatre

Ivo van Hove's work is part of a larger European tradition of making theatre, which is generally seen to be different from the British tradition. So what are the differences between these two traditions? In very general terms, British theatre has tended to be more conservative and less experimental than its European counterpart. The differences are seen both in the production of plays, and the writing itself.

The play text

In Britain the play text has traditionally been seen as the most important aspect of any production, placing it above any visual, physical and spatial elements that might be brought into play: in other words, the production serves the text. It has been suggested that, alongside this idea, traditionally a director's job was simply to 'explain' the text and tell the actors how to deliver their lines in the way that best served the play. In Europe, however, there is a longer tradition of more radical interpretation, such as is seen in Ivo van Hove's work. This was born of early modernist experiments in style in Central and Eastern Europe in the early 20th Century. Although, as we have seen, British theatre was influenced by the American stage, in terms of the subject-matter and content of its plays, European innovations in performance styles and theatrical form were not reflected in British theatre until the 1960s, when theatre artists started to challenge the foregrounding of the play text over everything else. Well-known British directors like Peter Brook, Katie Mitchell, Simon McBurney, and Deborah Warner were strongly influenced by this movement.



From left to right: Peter Brook, Katie Mitchell, Simon McBurney, Deborah Warner

Though interpretation is still (usually) rooted in the text, this trend for more radical interpretation takes the play text as the starting point, or 'blueprint', and uses all the means of theatre at its disposal to create a 'new' piece of art, aiming to do something that words on a page alone cannot do. The actors might still say the playwright's words exactly as written, but sometimes things might be added or left out, or the structure of the text experimented with. Either way, however, arguably more theatrical and less literary methods are used to illuminate meaning – for example, visual patterns and motifs through movement, lighting, multi-media, design and use of space; or soundscapes created through abstract rather than realistic sound. Although light, sound and design etc always play some part in a theatre production, they become less literal and more atmospheric in these more 'experimental' productions. A useful analogy is the difference between poetry and prose – as in poetry, ideas are not explicitly 'spelt out', but suggested. Perhaps the stage is filled with television sets playing footage that does not obviously relate to the action onstage, creating a collage effect; perhaps set and props are dispensed with altogether, so that the movement of bodies in space and light make a visual impact. There are, of course, a myriad of ways to experiment with staging even the most traditional play. This can feel to some like taking liberties with the text. To others it is an exciting way to express new truths and ideas about that text. There are more and more theatre directors and companies working in this way in

the UK, but audiences in Europe are much more familiar with this style of production because the tradition is longer-standing.

The Director as 'Auteur'

The word 'auteur' is borrowed from film criticism to describe a theatre director whose personal vision is expressed through a piece of work. Usually this will mean a clear signature 'look' or style that is unmistakably the work of that person. Often, in the UK, the term 'auteur' is used negatively to describe a director, as if it is not appropriate for him or her to put their own creative mark to a piece of work. Again, this suggests the importance placed on the written text above all else in the theatre in this country. Whilst no one is suggesting that the text is not important, in European theatre it is much more widely accepted that the direction of a theatre production is a creative act in itself, inspired by the text rather than a slavish rendition of it. This may well mean adding things to the production that are not explicit in the text, or, conversely, taking away something that is carefully detailed in the text. These things are done not for the sake of it, but to illuminate meaning in a different way or to afford a different interpretation. The subject of the director as 'auteur' is divisive, in Britain at least. There are numerous arguments for and against the role – for example, some would argue that the trend for 'auteurs' risks good writing taking a back seat; whereas some would argue that it is essential to breathe new life into older plays that have been seen time and time again on the stage. Again, it is the issue of the written word that seems to be at the centre of the argument.

Non-Realism

Generally speaking, the prevailing style of play in the UK has been realism. In other words, plays have recognisable characters with recognisable names and backgrounds that we learn something about; recognisable settings; dialogue that seeks to replicate normal speech; a clear, linear storyline, from which we can pick out with some certainty what happens. There is often a sense of causality – in other words we can get a sense of why things are happening, or why characters behave the way they do. Though British theatre saw a radical development in the subject-matter of its plays in the 1950s, as with performance styles, the prevailing writing style did not change radically at this point. Realistic plays are often, of course, exciting, complex and interesting pieces of work, and there is much possible variation within the style.

Obviously there are exceptions in British theatre to the prevailing style of realism. An important example is Harold Pinter's plays, which can be difficult to interpret because, though there are clear characters and recognisable dialogue, we often learn little about the characters' backgrounds, and their motivations and feelings are not made explicit. There are other British writers who have experimented wildly with form and structure so that you have to untangle the plot to be clear what has happened when – if there is a plot at all; as well as writers who have dispensed with dialogue altogether so that their plays read more like fragments of poetry. Of course, Shakespeare, though he used clear storylines and characters, wrote in verse (i.e. not how people would speak in real life) and included fairies and magic in his plays. However, non-realism in British theatre has tended to be an exception to the rule, and what is striking is that when innovation has occurred it has often met with confusion, sometimes even anger!

In Europe, on the other hand, deviation from realism has been much more common, and the longstanding tradition of experimentation in performance is also reflected in playwriting. Therefore, audiences and critics tend to be less surprised by it. It is not unusual to see a play in which there are no named characters as such, but 'voices' instead; or a lack of

storyline or setting. It is telling that British writers whose work has deviated from tradition and been overlooked here have been widely produced in Europe.

Still Shocking

Even despite the massive changes in the theatrical landscape of 1960's Britain, audiences have still been shocked by things that would be far less likely to shock in Europe. In 1995, Sarah Kane's *Blasted* opened at The Royal Court, and prompted such outrage amongst audiences and critics alike, that she had to go into hiding. Despite the controversy of the play's content, much of the criticism of the play appeared to be levelled at the lack of realism in the writing – the implication was that, if a play is unrealistic, it is unsuccessful. At The Young Vic three years ago, in 2011, the French director Patrice Chereau directed *I Am the Wind*, by Norwegian playwright Jon Fosse. In a review of this production, Michael Billington asks if Britain has a problem with European theatre. Although the review is favourable, it takes for granted that British audiences will find it strange that the play has characters without proper names or recognisable backgrounds, and no obvious, 'neat' message.

Likewise, productions in which the director has taken a more unusual approach to staging have been criticised in Britain but well-received on the Continent. Katie Mitchell cites her own 1994 production of *Henry IV Part 3* as an example of this 'trend', suggesting that "there is a literalness in audiences in the United Kingdom that you don't get on the continent". In a recent interview with Mark Strong about Ivo van Hove's production of *A View From the Bridge* at The Young Vic, the interviewer says Mark "warns" her "to expect something very different from the norm". The word "warns" suggests that Ivo's work is, perhaps, something audiences in Britain are not used to and, moreover, might be afraid of! Of course, experimentation in and of itself might not always be successful, but it seems strange to reject something just because it is different.

Collaboration

Another distinction between British and European practice is the collaborative approach that often underpins European theatre-making. For example, Ivo van Hove has a long-standing working relationship with his designer Jan Versweyveld, and dramaturg Bart Van den Eynde, with whom he works on all productions. Although these long-standing relationships between director and designer do exist in Britain, they are more unusual. Until relatively recently, little had been written about the process of directing theatre in this country, whereas European artists tend to have documented this process with attention and interest. Perhaps this means that a culture has emerged which is continually analysing and commenting on the process of making theatre, and this has allowed more experimentation.

Points for discussion

Why might it be important for directors to create new 'versions' of classic or traditional plays?

What are the pros and cons of this approach?

Exercise

Choose a well-known classic text and create a non-realistic design for it.

Part 2: The Production

Reimagining a classic

As we have seen, Ivo van Hove is known for his radical interpretations of classic texts. In this production of *A View From the Bridge*, Ivo has made a number of exciting decisions about staging which break from convention.

Design

Arthur Miller's stage directions describe in some detail a realistic setting for the play, most of which takes place in Eddie and Beatrice's home. The set for this production does not seek to be representational or realistic. Instead, it has been built like a long box with a lid that is able to open and shut, much of it painted black. The stage is thrust (meaning the audience sit on three sides of the stage, rather than only in front of it), and quite long, so that it comes quite far into the auditorium. Around the three sides along which the audience sit, are low walls with glass panels built into them. There is no other set to suggest the play's location – no kitchen table or rocker, for example – even though some of these things are specified in the text. The character Alfieri does not have a desk or designated space for his office, but, instead, speaks from amongst the audience, sitting or standing on the steps of the auditorium and walking around the perimeters of the stage; or drifting, 'unseen', through the action onstage. Essentially the actors are acting in an empty space, though in fact this space has been painstakingly calculated, delineated and designed. There are none of the props suggested by the text, except for two: the chair that Marco lifts at the end of Act One and a cigar that Catherine brings to Eddie, also in Act One. An important non-realistic effect is used towards the end of the play when blood starts rains onto the set from the ceiling.

Adaptation

Ivo has made several radical adaptations or additions to the production, both of which create a powerful impact. The first example is a small detail at the beginning of the performance. Although it is not in the text, the characters of Eddie and Louie come onstage before the play begins, wash beneath a stream of water, and change their clothes. The second example concerns the use of stage directions, and dramatically affects the scene near the end of the play where the Immigration Officer arrives to take Marco and Rodolpho away. The following description details the initial process of finding and making this decision:

The scene in *A View From the Bridge* where the Immigration Officer arrives to take Marco and Rodolpho away is particularly dramatic and potentially very chaotic. It is a climactic moment, and the sheer number of actors in the scene makes this very complicated to stage. Because there is a lot going on, moment by moment, in rehearsals Ivo unpicks the scene carefully with the actors and several 'versions' are tried out. Ivo's initial instinct is for a 'chaos version', where the action of the scene is fast-moving, emotion is high and the characters are extremely confrontational. This is experimented with, and it feels like an exciting eruption of energy, but is not what Ivo is looking for. He talks about the fact that, in this version, there is a lot of energy that doesn't get anywhere. Ultimately he decides that the scene needs slowing down. He is driving towards a version of the scene that is atmospheric and taut with tension, rather than realistic, and works with the actors on slowing down the action. Ivo suggests that the Officer is simply trying to do his job and can remain efficient and focused in the scene, rather than becoming confrontational or

being provoked by Catherine. He suggests that to retain a sense of authority, the Officer should not shout, or, perhaps, not even come too far down the stage; that once the Officer enters, everyone knows how the scene will end.

In a radical move away from what is conventionally done, Ivo decides to experiment with Alfieri (Michael Gould) reading some of Arthur Miller's stage directions whilst walking around the stage, starting from the moment the knock on the door comes, and removing the actual sound of the knock at the door. The actors continue to act the scene around him, as if he is not there. This immediately makes the scene much more atmospheric. It is as if Alfieri is creating the action and Eddie somehow appears much more isolated. The text becomes much more animated because the many actions Miller has skilfully tangled into it suddenly leap out more forcefully through Ivo's staging idea. Following this experiment, the actors sit with Bart Van den Eynde, the Dramaturg, to clarify which stage directions will be spoken. Once this is done, the 'new' version of the scene is read through to clarify and consolidate it, with a view to rehearsing it again the next day, although the these changes to the text could still go through several other versions before it reaches performance.

Points for discussion

What effect does the minimalistic design create? How does it affect the play's impact in performance?

Why do you think the designer and director chose to keep in the chair and cigar when all the other props have been eliminated?

Part 2: The Production

The Rehearsals

Working with actors

When approaching a play traditionally, actors, and how they animate the playwright's words, are a major part of communicating the director's interpretation of a play, and a large portion of the preparation for a production is the rehearsal process itself. Many of the choices about the production will usually be decided before rehearsals start so that during the rehearsal period the director can work with the actors to decide how best to tell the story amongst those other elements. Each rehearsal process is unique, depending on the needs of that particular play and production. Every director will take a different approach to rehearsals, and each director will have a reason for his or her approach. For example, some directors will do a great deal of character exercises with the actors to help them engage with their own role, and their relationships with other characters in the play. Conversely, some directors feel strongly that this is not a helpful approach! Either way, traditionally much of the rehearsal process will focus on the text and how to bring that to life on stage – this may include exercises and/or discussions to draw out the meaning of the text; focusing on the character's motivation or objective; and how the text might best be delivered to communicate this meaning. Every scene in a play is obviously part of a whole – it is part of a network of small stories which fit together to make up the bigger story of the whole play – so each scene has to be carefully deconstructed to tell that part of the story as clearly as possible. For this reason every scene has an 'architecture' or journey of its own – it starts somewhere, and things happen to make it end somewhere different. Many directors will break each scene into sections to make this journey clear on the page. These sections will normally correspond with where changes occur in the scene – for example a change in mood or atmosphere, a change in the relationship between the characters, or a change in subject. It is then the director's job to help the actors draw this out and communicate it through their voices and the movement of their bodies in the space.

Due to the unconventional nature of Ivo's work, some theatre critics have been surprised that his rehearsal process, his work with actors, is relatively traditional. However, as we have seen, Ivo is interested in the psychological aspects of a play³ the thoughts and feelings of the characters and how these influence their actions; and his rehearsal process reflects this. His approach with the actors also seamlessly encompasses the atmosphere of Miller's writing. The scenes of *A View From the Bridge* seem to almost melt into one another, and Ivo's direction is constantly mindful of the cumulative effect of the tension and atmosphere that needs building, gaining its momentum from the previous scene and building into the next. One of the ways he describes the play to the actors is that it "is short, but it's a slow-cooker".



Ivo van Hove in rehearsal with Mark Strong.
Photo by Simon Annand

³ See section on Ivo Van Hove



The company in rehearsal with Ivo van Hove (near right), Photo by Simon Annand

In rehearsals for *A View From The Bridge*, Ivo worked through each scene with the actors in meticulous detail from the start, with a firm focus on the psychology behind the characters' words and actions. The actors were off-book for Day 1 of rehearsals, which means that they had already learnt their lines (not all directors require this of their actors). Work on each scene started with a line-run so that the actors were really confident about what they were saying and could focus instead on how they were saying it, and therefore communicate clearly what is happening between the characters. The actors then worked with Ivo on the set, getting the scene on its feet – working out what is going on in the scene on a deeper level, and trying to find blocking⁴ that best expressed this. Arthur Miller writes a lot of detailed stage directions that can be quite directive about blocking and emotion, and, though Ivo (like many directors) does not bind himself to these, they are often referred to as clues. What was interesting was the delicate balance between the actors' instinctive decisions about movement combined with Ivo's. With each scene several versions were tried and tested with different blocking so that the playing of the scene evolved quite naturally and organically. At the same time there was intensive discussion to crystallise the essential point of the scene.

When working on a scene Ivo will also often focus in on specific lines or moments which change or clarify the action of the scene or dynamic between the characters. Ideas are layered through repetition of the scene, trying different things each time – sometimes very subtly different. Miller's writing is so skilfully nuanced and psychologically complex that every apparently tiny moment is important. The actors are incredibly skilled in reflecting and trying out these different nuances, where the slightest change can make all the difference to how we perceive the scene and/or the character. Several hours might be spent on two or three pages of text, lingering over one, or several, moments. To give some sense of this, and how rehearsals worked, below are some of the key decisions and points of discussion that emerged from specific scenes the first time they were rehearsed, though obviously these may have evolved into something completely different by the end of the rehearsal process.

⁴ movement around the space/set

Blocking and Working on the set

A great deal of the rehearsal process involves working out how the actors will move around the set, where and when. This process is known as blocking and, again, different directors approach it in different ways. Some directors do not block plays at all, allowing the actors freedom to move as instinct dictates and change it every night. Some directors take an entirely opposite approach and might be said almost to choreograph their productions. Others still might adopt a balance somewhere between these two. Final decisions about blocking are recorded by the Deputy Stage Manager (DSM) in her Book⁵. In Ivo's rehearsals for A View From the Bridge there was a clear balance between the actors' choices and Ivo's.

As the space the actors move around is defined by the set, it is important that the set design is delineated in the rehearsal room so that they can start to locate themselves clearly within this space. Sometimes this is done simply through a mark-up on the floor using tape to illustrate where entrances and exits are etc. For A View From the Bridge, there was a mock-up of the set in rehearsals from Day 1. This allowed the actors to get a clear sense of the space they would inhabit in each performance, and meant that decisions about movement were etched into the fabric of their performance immediately.

Scene Work

First rehearsals for scene between Eddie and Louis, Act One, page 36-38⁶

After a quick line run the actors worked on the mock-up of the set, immediately getting the scene on its feet. In approaching this scene, in which Eddie is waiting for Catherine and Rodolpho to come back from the cinema and Louis comes to invite Eddie bowling, Ivo talked about how Louis' role is almost like that of a Chorus in a Greek play because he is bringing an objective reality in: Eddie dislikes Rodolpho because of his relationship with Catherine, so his viewpoint is purely subjective and personal. Louis, on the other hand, has no particular motivation to talk highly of Rodolpho. This potentially emphasises to the audience Eddie's emotional and psychological isolation, and the idea that his view of Rodolpho is completely coloured by his own interests.

Mark Strong, who plays Eddie, talked about how Eddie has just rowed with Beatrice and refused to engage with her, and is now further isolating himself from his friend. This was beautifully reflected in Mark's positioning, seated on the downstage 'wall' at the end of the thrust stage. Mark and Richard Hansell, who plays Louis, worked on showing vocally and physically the contrast between Eddie lost in his own thoughts, and Louis' spell-bound adulation of Rodolpho and his sense of humour. Amongst many other points, there was discussion over where the scene shifts towards the end, on Eddie's line "Yeah. (Troubled). He's got a sense of humour", where the atmosphere changes and Louis realises that he should leave his friend to his thoughts; and the subtext in the line "If you wanna come bowlin' later we're goin' Flatbush Avenue", and how what Louis is really trying to communicate here is that he sees his friend is troubled and is telling him that he is there for him should he want to talk.

⁵ A script held by the stage management team recording everything about the production.

⁶ All page numbers refer to Penguin Classics edition of A View From the Bridge/All My Sons, 2000

First Rehearsals for scene between Catherine and Eddie, Act One, page 31-35

In this scene Catherine and Rodolpho have just arrived back from the cinema to find Eddie waiting for them. Phoebe Fox, who plays Catherine, talked about how Catherine tries here to mediate between Eddie and Rodolpho – she wants Eddie to like Rodolpho and engage with him. In blocking the scene, she experimented with finding moments to touch both men to suggest this objective and communicate their respective importance to Catherine. To go along with this idea, Phoebe also found a way of saying Catherine’s lines about the lack of fountains in Brooklyn compared with the fountains in Italy



Phoebe Fox with Mark Strong in rehearsals. Photo by Simon Annand

that communicated the bridge she is trying to build between the two men. Another interesting aspect of the work on this scene was the attempt to find a physical language between Mark and Phoebe that would communicate the ambiguity and complexity of their relationship – Ivo wanted the actors to find moments in their proximity and body language that would visually suggest lovers rather than Uncle and Niece. Ideas they tried out included Phoebe jumping into Eddie’s arms after Rodolpho has gone into the house; and Phoebe standing behind Mark and wrapping her arms around him. These decisions beautifully reflected the characters’ intimacy. Mark talked about the fact that Eddie is essentially playing the role of rejected lover in this scene, and he found a way of delivering his lines that tied in with Ivo’s own ideas about he and Catherine looking like lovers.

Much discussion and experimentation centred around the following lines:

Ah, Eddie, sure I am. What’s the matter? You don’t like him?

Slight pause.

You like him, Katie?

Yeah I like him

You like him.

Yeah

This moment seemed to be a turning point in the scene, where Eddie decides that he is going to try and put Catherine off Rodolpho, and Ivo was keen that this was clear and precise. So, although the lines might seem on the surface to be very simple and repetitive, the actors had to find a way of using their voices to communicate this transition. Soon after this moment Eddie tells Catherine that Rodolpho would only want to marry her in order to become an American citizen. Ivo highlighted the link between the scene and Greek Tragedy in the idea of Eddie contaminating Catherine’s mind with negative thoughts about Rodolpho, planting a seed of doubt in her that Rodolpho’s intentions are not honest. At the end of this scene, where Catherine tries to escape from Eddie’s words, Ivo found expression for this in Phoebe crouching in the Upstage Right corner of the set, almost like an animal retreating into its shell.

First Rehearsal for scene between Beatrice and Eddie, Act Two, page 68-71

Although this is only a short exchange between these two characters, Ivo described it as a complicated scene that needed to be made “step-by-step clear”. Through intensive work a complex and painfully nuanced performance of it emerges that paves the way for the last moments of the play.

The striking thing about this scene is that it happens just before the play’s climactic moments, and Ivo highlighted how in the first section of the scene Beatrice is trying to smooth the situation over and making an attempt to start again with Eddie now that Rodolpho and Marco have moved to the apartment upstairs. Beatrice’s attempt does not last long, as Eddie’s mention of Rodolpho breaks the spell. A lot of time was spent on the first few lines of the scene, particularly Beatrice’s line “Look, I’m sick and tired of it! I’m sick and tired of it!” with the idea that this is where the change occurs. Nicola talked about the challenge of finding that change emotionally, “not showing [Beatrice’s emotion] then showing”. Slightly later in the scene, discussion focuses on Nicola’s delivery of her lines to show how Beatrice sticks with her intention to move on, challenging Eddie to tell her what more she can do about the situation. Ivo and Nicola talk about the fact that Beatrice is not afraid of Eddie, and Nicola experiments with “taking the emotion out of it and asking the questions”.

Exercises

Choose a scene from the play and divide it into sections. Is there a clear turning point in the scene? How would you block this scene if you were directing it, based on what is going on between the characters at this moment?

Choose an extract from A View From the Bridge and look at the stage directions. What are the pros and cons of such detailed stage directions, for both actors and directors?

A Young Vic Production

Inside: A View From The Bridge

By Arthur Miller

Young
Vic

Part 3: Meet the Creative Team



Phoebe Fox (Catherine), Mark Strong (Eddie) and Nicola Walker (Beatrice) © Jan-Versweyeld

A Young Vic Production

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Part 3: Meet the Creative Team

Cast and Company Credits

Cast (alphabetical order)

Marco	Emun Elliott
Catherine	Phoebe Fox
Alfieri	Michael Gould
Louis	Richard Hansell
Rodolpho	Luke Norris
Officer	Jonah Russell
Eddie	Mark Strong
Beatrice	Nicola Walker

Creative Team

Direction	Ivo van Hove
Design and Light	Jan Versweyveld
Costumes	An D’Huys
Sound	Tom Gibbons
Dramaturg	Bart Van den Eynde
UK Casting	Julia Horan CDG
US Casting	Jim Carnahan CSA
Associate Designer	James Turner
Associate Lighting Designer	Nicki Brown
Assistant Director	Jeff James
Boris Karloff Trainee Assistant Director	Tamara Camacho
Production Manager	Anthony Newton
SM	Rupert Carlile
DSM	Ruthie Philip-Smith
ASM	Sam Shuck
Rehearsal ASM	Lizzie Donaghy
Costume Supervisor	Catherine Kodicek
Stage Crew	Rob Foskett
Wardrobe Manager	Caroline McCall
Dresser	Serica Kavaz

Part 3: Meet the Creative Team

Interview with Jeff James, Assistant Director

Can you talk generally about the job of an Assistant Director?

I think it varies significantly from project to project. Obviously in its broadest terms it's helping the director do what they need to do. There's a lot of interaction with other members of the creative and production team, and with the actors. Occasionally an Assistant Director might be largely observing rehearsals. Other times they might be a core part of the creative team. On this job it's somewhere between those two. On *A View From the Bridge* there's certainly been a need to understand what the different needs are of the actors and the people at The Young Vic, and the creative team from Amsterdam, because obviously they're coming from a different theatre culture, both in aesthetic terms but also in terms of practical issues – things like how do rehearsals work here, how does a tech work, what are previews, these very basic questions.



Jeff James

What is your role inside and outside the rehearsal room on this production?

Inside the rehearsal room I sit next to Ivo all the time and I'm always following the script because when he's watching [the actors] he wants to be able to find where he is in the script. Then we'll also be talking a lot about the action of the scene as it's being played out and talking about how it's evolved, what's not working in it and how we can change that. Outside the rehearsal room there's a lot of liaising with the production team and with the office upstairs about how the production's going to work.

Working with Ivo and other members of TGA, have you noticed any differences between British and European rehearsal processes?

On a practical level, we're working shorter days [11am-4pm] and there is more of an attempt [for the actors] to be acting at a hundred per cent for a larger proportion of the rehearsal day. So there's less talking and more doing. That's usual in Europe, but normally that would be determined by the fact that actors would [also] be performing in plays in the evening because they'd be in an ensemble. When I worked in Germany, you do a three or four hour day during the day and sometimes come back for an evening rehearsal if the actors don't have a performance. In terms of aesthetic or understanding about how to rehearse, it's interesting how much Ivo is perhaps less interested in a Stanislavskian intention-based way of understanding how the play works. He is always talking about intention, and about situation and about character, but it's perhaps less systematic than actors are often used to. It's interesting how direct the things Ivo says to the actors often are; for example he might tell them that a scene is too realistic. I know many directors who, if they happened to think a scene was too realistic, would find lots of ways of trying to change what the actors are doing without directly telling them. In a way, this process is more honest.

A Young Vic Production

Inside: A View From The Bridge

By Arthur Miller

Young
Vic



Jeff James (far right) in rehearsal with Ivo Vane Hove and the company.
Photo by Simon Annand

Do you think there's more of a culture in Europe about talking about, and exploring, the actual process of making art?

There's a basic cultural difference in Europe where theatre is seen as an intellectual art form primarily, rather than primarily a form of entertainment. Obviously there are lots of very clever people working in theatre in London, but I think on the Continent there is less embarrassment about talking about theatre in intellectual terms.

Ivo works with a Dramaturg, Bart Van den Eynde, a role which is not always part of a **British creative process. Can you talk about Bart's role on this production?**

Bart is in rehearsals about two days a week and he also works with Ivo a lot outside of the room. The role of dramaturg is to understand the production not just on a textual level but to understand it on a more structural level so Bart will often intervene if Ivo is struggling with the exact purpose of a line or a scene or a moment in the play and offer a different interpretation.

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Part 3: Meet the Creative Team

Interview with James Turner, Associate Designer

How does a designer approach designing for a production?

Obviously the first thing you do is read the play. And then, I think people work differently, but what I do is then story-board. After reading it two or three times, just sitting down and just taking it in and nothing else, I then sit and read it and just pick out the stage directions or the action, so not so much what's being said as what's being done and I do a little story-board with stick men, mapping out where people might be, how many people are on stage, what they're doing, if they've got to sit or stand, spatial relationships, and that's just a great way of reading the play to see how it might look. Then I start looking at images. If it's a period thing and we're doing it in the period, then doing research on that, but also just any kind of images that capture how I might feel



James Turner, Associate Designer

about the play, or mood or colour, and you just gather a mass of stuff and then go back through and edit it down. And then I would go into a model quite quickly, maybe do a drawing of what you might think, a technical one, and then make that, a 'white card model'⁷, which is more just structure and how the space is being used – not the colours or finishes. At that point then, after several meetings with the director, that's the point that you would take it into the theatre and get their input.

How much discussion would you have had at this stage with the director?

Usually three or four meetings. It varies. Some people want to go through the story-board with you and stage the whole thing. Others are happier to leave it to you. It varies wildly each time. Some directors come with a firm idea about design and other directors leave that to you. Or they say I want to do it in this kind of layout – they think it should be in the round, or end-on, or they think it should be really minimal, for example. Often it [the idea] comes from conversations and you can't pin an idea down to one person [i.e. the director or the designer]. It depends what stage you're brought into the project. Sometimes the director's concept comes from the designer. It depends.

Can you talk about your role on this production?

I'm the Associate Designer, which is an Assistant Designer with a bit more responsibility and input. So I started early on, with the first 'white card model', so I went to Brussels where Ivo and Jan were working, and at that point they had the concept and an idea of what the stage would be like, and layout. So I then drew that up and made the model. Then we looked at it and changed it a bit, did it again and spent about three days there getting it to a point where there was a 'white card model' that was ready to come in and show The Young Vic. Nothing really then changed in a big way – it was all little details, heights of things,

⁷ This is the technical term for an initial model of the set from the designer. It is a simple, unadorned, sketch model which focuses on space, structure and form (not necessarily made with white card)

materials we were going to use. I think it was pretty much in their heads right from the start. In Jan's mind the whole design was already there, he knew the layout already that he wanted to do in the auditorium and he knew that it was going to be really stripped back, no furniture, no props. That was already very clear right from the start. So we did the 'white card model', then we did another few days in London a month later for the final model where we re-made it having talked to The Young Vic, and having talked through all the practicalities of it, how we might do it, getting their input on the space, how things would be constructed, how things would work. We re-made the model ready to present as a final model box. With this production there was a pause because we did that quite early because that was back in October. Then you start work on constructing and then rehearsals start and often - certainly in this country - the set's being built before, or as, rehearsals are starting so it's very much fixed, which I think is slightly different to how they do it in Europe. And things have changed during our rehearsal process on this, because rehearsing on set things are discovered so there have been a few little changes. The set has been built quite early - we've been rehearsing on set for about two weeks before the technical rehearsals begin which is really unusual. Normally you don't get on stage and on the set until a week before the tech⁸.

You had a mock-up of the set in rehearsals. Is that unusual?

Yes, a really thorough mock-up of it. To have that much detail, so nicely done. It was beautiful.

How important is it to have that? Often in rehearsals you would just have a mark-up.

I think it's great, especially for this because it's all there is. There's no furniture, no props really, there's just the set and it can be used in interesting ways so it was really important to have it there. There's a glass bench that goes around the edge which is used a lot for sitting because there's no chairs, so to have that was essential really. In the usual way of doing a rehearsal room you'd have a mark-up⁹ but you'd then have chairs or furniture, but we didn't have any of this so if we didn't have a mock-up of the set we'd have literally nothing!

How important is the rehearsal process for a designer? You and Jan are in the room all the time for this process.

Yes, which is unusual for me - normally for financial reasons, I guess. And, as a designer you're normally working on the next thing. We're there for when you're needed if Ivo or one of the actors has a question. I think because it's such a bold design decision that's led to a very bold way of doing it, and very different for the actors, there have been lots of questions. Props is the big thing. We're not doing any props, but it's quite a prop-heavy show in the text so every time a prop is mentioned it's then a question of, do we need it? No we don't need it. How do we solve it? There is a chair, but that's an iconic moment in the play. There is a chair that's brought on¹⁰. It's brought on by Alfieri so the whole thing is kind of taking place in his mind. It's such an iconic moment so we are doing the chair. But no one sits on the chair. It comes on just in time for it to be lifted up and then it's gone again. So it is a chair, but it's not a chair in that it's not being used as a chair - no one sits in it.

So how was the right chair chosen? Was it especially made?

We wanted it to look like a chair but at the same time not at all specific because, as with the costumes, nothing is specific - it's kind of hinting at the Fifties but also could be modern,

⁸ Technical rehearsals - these come at the end of the rehearsal period, before the dress rehearsals, and focus on co-ordinating all the technical aspects of the production such as lighting, sound etc.

⁹ The mark-up is an outline of the stage and set done in tape by the Deputy Stage Manager (DSM)

¹⁰ The text implies the chair is furniture in Eddie's apartment, i.e. part of the set. In this production the chair is brought on by Alfieri

[its] timeless. The same with the chair, because a chair could tell you so much about where you are, so we wanted it to be as neutral as possible but at the same time real. Because its being lifted up there was talk of all these tricks we could do to make it lighter. It's been adapted slightly, but Jan's really big on authenticity and not doing any kind of normal theatre tricks, faking things or making things artificially. It's all real. So it is a real chair that's really being lifted. Because it was the one prop there has been a big journey. We found a chair, and then we took a bit off it, added a bit on it, sanded it, changed the colour a bit. I think we've finished it now but it might change again. There is a cigar as well. Two props. The cigar is another iconic moment. There was a lot of talk how big it should be, how it's going to be lit. When you've only got one or two things on stage they become massively important because they give you loads of information – is it matches, is it an old lighter, is it a modern lighter?

All designs obviously have to have a practical element as well as being artistic. Have there been any particular practical considerations for this set and the actors working with it? There's one massive practical thing at the end. Because of what happens, which I don't necessarily want to reveal, the floor becomes massively important, the surface of it – it's got to not become too slippery. Because there's not much to the set, it's quite simple, each thing becomes massively important. Everything's the best quality. Because we're not doing much, what we are doing we can do beautifully. It doesn't look like a set, it looks like an installation. Everything's real and finished just beautifully and really well done. It's really striking, particularly because it's so simple. The detail of it is incredible.

Have there been any particular challenges to the design or building of the set for this production?

The blood. That's the big thing. That's what we've been working on the most. It needs to look real and be the right colour and consistency but not clog up the pipes it goes through. It has to be rinsed through every day. There's a lot of talk about whether it can be recycled or not because it's something like two wheelie bins for every show so it can get massively expensive over a thirteen week run. But when you clean it out you dilute it by rinsing it so it loses its colour and consistency. We're still tinkering with the recipe – it's gone through endless recipes; it's got to not stain any of the costumes; it's got to not be harmful to the actors on their skin or in their eyes; it's got to look like blood; it's got soap in it for the washing but it bubbles when it's fallen from a great height. This has been made especially.

Part 3: Meet the Creative Team

Interview with Tom Gibbons, Sound Designer

What is the role of a Sound Designer?

I am part of the creative team and work with everything from music, to sound effects, to doing speaker plots, microphones, programming the sound desk, programming the music and/or playback sound on the computer during the tech; and I generally advise on all the creative decisions especially to do with sound. There are different types of sound. For example, in this show there's a lot of underscore and a lot of specific music choices. There's no actual atmospheric sound, actual recordings, or naturalistic sounds - for example, at a basic level, birdsong, or a train going past. I like using naturalistic sound in a non-naturalistic way, like looping the sound of a train and using that as a musical track rather than just "there's a train". Another aspect of being a Sound Designer - though not on this production - is writing music specific for the show, which is a different process. I was in rehearsals nearly every day and the process on AVFTB has been very immediate.

What is your starting point for creating sound for a production?

There's a brief, and conversations pre-rehearsals which normally are quite numerous, and it's rare to work with a director who's completely new to me. That's really useful because we've got references - we can reference shows we've done together or films we know we like, or with some directors we've got similar tastes in music. Another way in is if there's specific tracks in the script which means, obviously, we can use those tracks, but also gives me clues as to what kind of frame of mind the writer was in when he was writing that scene, what kind of feel it has, and that would inform the sound design as well - and the kind of conversations I would be having with the director. So if it was Seventies' Prog, we'd talk about strange meandering psychedelic stuff. Script is the best place, the location etc. In A View From the Bridge we're not using the location, we're not using the time, all those clues are taken away from us which broadens any preconceived idea you could have of this. For this particular process the only information I can get is from the director because it's such a specific process in his head, the show is essentially in his head.

What was your starting point for A View From the Bridge?

When you're working with a new director you have to start from 'Day One'. I knew what the set looked like and that there would be no bridge, no set. It wasn't going to be true Italian American. I knew the general, broad feel of the show. As you get to know the director it gets easier to make decisions. You just have to see how it [the sound] feels. Once you get information from a director you need to be really proactive, you need to do the research and look into something else that might be similar. For example, we've really concentrated on Gabriel Fauré, the French composer of the Requiem we've used, so we've taken that as a gateway, and he's got a very particular style. He's a really melodic composer for when he was writing, so we've used that as information to go forward as well as the idea of the stark set which comes from more modern composers like John Cage.

How do you work in the rehearsal room? Are you trying things out under scenes the actors are working on?

Exactly. We have a rehearsal computer, a scaled-down version. I'll have sourced hours of music, and for this, hours of sounds as well, and I would just feed stuff in under rehearsals because in the first couple of weeks it's less about where does the music start and stop and it's about what it feels like in the room when they're doing it and the actors will be listening to the music, obviously, so that will effect their performance. I remember we played something in the first scene with Catherine and Eddie, something quite bassy and electro, and it made Mark [playing Eddie] be a bit more sleezy in his relationship with Catherine,

and that certainly affected the way he did it the first couple of times. We didn't think that was the right way to go, but it does really have an effect on the actors the first couple of times they do a scene. You need to be quite careful because it can be quite prescriptive. The writing is there for a reason and I wouldn't want to put a blanket over a scene and say this scene is now scary or this scene is now moody and that leads directly into the fact that music isn't like light, it changes, it peaks and troughs.

This production of A View From the Bridge is very non-traditional. How does this affect your work? Does sound play a different role?

Massively. If it was a very traditional production I would imagine we would have had scene changes. Possibly we would've had some background stuff, maybe a radio, really naturalistic things trying to set the scene - we might've had the sound of ships going past in the North River, and then maybe something for the Italians when they come in, maybe try and bring a bit of Italy in through the sound, trying to be a bit subtle. Then we would've gone into a scene change with a bit of music, most likely an Italian Aria, which is traditional. As it was this is much more about feeling, about the story, the human story about Eddie. Because it's such a well-written story it could've been set anywhere. It's about the relationships between the characters and particularly Eddie's journey. There's so much more music than there would have ever been [in a traditional production] - I'd imagine because in a more naturalistic setting, in a practical way, there would have to be a source for the music onstage, otherwise it would be a bit odd - where does this music come from? Whereas in this production that's absolutely fine. We're not pretending we're not in a theatre which is really useful because otherwise there's limits from a sound point of view. Having sound coming from speakers is okay in this production whereas it would be a bit odd if there were theatre speakers hanging in Eddie's flat.

As well as music, you've used some more impressionistic sound in the production. Can you tell me more about this?

That drum beat follows a line of the development of Eddie's thoughts and mind during the show. On a basic level it adds some tension. There's that scene in the middle¹¹ when they're all sitting around and that drum just goes for about five minutes. The actors are naturally now acclimatising to when the hits are coming but we haven't set up a rule that they can't not speak on a drum beat. It's just the idea that we know that Eddie's mind is ticking over. The drum beat does speed up at some points and gets slower at some points and we're just finding out where that works. It works very well in relation to the bigger, melodic choral sections of the music, its such a stark sound. Its also very similar to the drips of blood. The fact that they're so regular make the whole thing completely inevitable - the characters are just swept along with it. And Eddie is just relentless. However many warnings he gets, however much good advice he gets given, you know he's just going to carry on. It's essentially a Greek Tragedy.

Can you talk in more detail about the decision-making process in rehearsals for the knock on the door near the end of the play when the Immigration Officer arrives?

The first ten times we did the scene we did have knocks at the door and it did seem a bit odd being the only naturalistic sound, because the knocks came from upstage, and there is a door upstage but we're not necessarily playing that as being outside the house. So we did have a knock and it helped Mark with noticing that. But it was the right decision to get rid of them. If you're going to make something stand out like that it has to be really important. For instance, the chair is one of the only props you have - I think that's a really good rule to break, but I think the knocks on the door, though useful to the actor, isn't a good enough rule to break. We then tried it replacing it with a non-naturalistic sound so that it was still

¹¹ At the end of Act One

interrupting, but that was a bit odd because that was the only time you had a specific cue that the actors would respond to. At the moment the cast do not hear any sound apart from the music when Catherine and Rodolpho dance, which we assume they can hear because Eddie asks if it's a new record. But it's great now because we've gone through that process of Mark having something to react to and then Michael who plays Alfieri says "a knock at the door". We've taken that playback knock away and there's something really great about us watching Eddie hear something that we can't hear. He stops dead and looks round and he's in the middle of a sentence and it provides something for the audience who wonder why he's stopped, almost to the point where, has Mark Strong the actor heard something off-stage and is the show about to stop? Which it almost does in a way because then you get this weird scene with Alfieri reading the stage directions which is brilliant. What's great is, after Eddie hears something, you wait for two seconds and wonder what's going on and then Alfieri says "a knock at the door", and for those two seconds the not knowing is almost putting yourself in Eddie's position. For us, it gives us that two seconds and prepares us for the oddness that now happens with Alfieri reading the stage directions. It was totally the right decision not to have any knocks there but we needed to go through that process of having knocks, realising it was incorrect, letting Mark Strong have that ability to be interrupted. It's important that we all went through it. We had a period where Eddie was interrupted by Alfieri saying "a knock at the door", but it wasn't enough of a definite, and it didn't give the audience that timed two seconds to wonder what is happening.

Why is the technical rehearsal important for you?

Tech is the time for us to get the practicalities for cueing the sound done, and also [volume] levels. But less so levels in this production because we've had a week and a half on stage so I've been playing what I'd like to think are the correct levels anyway, so we're not having that, which is great. Because normally I'd have a few hours of quiet time before the tech started, but I've had that before we got onstage in rehearsals so I've been doing it live, which is really useful because you set levels in quiet time and then the cast come onstage and start speaking and the music is inevitably too loud if you're doing an underscore. But now what we're doing is giving the cueing over to Ruthie who's the DSM¹² who calls the show, and Andy, the Sound Operator, who actually presses the button for the sound. In rehearsals I've been cueing it, but now there's a more rigid structure, so we've got all the cue numbers in now and line cues and visual cues. It's time to be really specific about where the cues are going - on that head turn, or that line, or that syllable - we can go on syllables!

¹² Deputy Stage Manager

Part 3: Meet the Creative Team

Interview with Michael Gould, Alfieri

Alfieri is unique in *A View From the Bridge* in that he addresses the audience, and plays a narrator-like role, commenting on the action. He does not interact with any of the other characters until almost the end of Act One. What is that like for you as an actor, and what do you think it offers the audience?

Classically-speaking Alfieri is a narrator and I think for Arthur Miller that is rooted in a Greek drama tradition and, yes, he does comment on the action, he does introduce scenes. But what I think interests Ivo, and what interests me, is his personal relationship with the story. I've done a lot of Greek chorus work like the *Oresteia* and the *Theban Trilogy*, and in a more traditional format, it was very much choric, narrative, functional, whereas with this it's more personal. When I met Ivo for this, and read parts of Alfieri, his first comment was that it was good because it seemed so personal. So that's where we started - what is Alfieri's personal relationship to the story? And during the course



Michael Gould in rehearsal.
Photo by Simon Annand

of rehearsals I've been trying to develop that aspect of it. There's a thing developing now where Alfieri has a deep love, I think, for Eddie, and I think he sees within Eddie aspects of himself. The character is also defined in as much as we know he's a lawyer, that he's married, that he's got children - and we also know that he knows what's going to happen - so what does that do? How does that resonate in the character? And for me, now, and I think it was there early on in Ivo's mind, that to some extent he's been traumatised by the story and it's formed in him deep questions about the nature of his work, the value of law as an organising principle for humanity. So, sure, he's narrative, but it is a very deeply personal thing and in terms of delivery, when you put that onstage, Ivo's quite concerned that I don't 'oversell' it to the audience, so that it's not completely direct into the 'whites of the eyes' of the audience, it's more a streams-of-consciousness thing. He finds that more compelling, and as an actor, I find that more interesting too.

In a way it becomes his story more than we might normally assume?

I'd hesitate to say it's his story. It's the story of a community of which he is part, and he's struggling to rationalise what happens. His love for Eddie is so striking. So many times as a choric character, I find myself listening to scenes thinking, where could I interject? How could I stop this situation from developing? So it's like he's in a dream and he's trying to stop the dream.

Are there points you've identified where that happens?

Yes. Within scenes, particularly with Eddie. There are moments in scenes between other characters where I'm sat at the edge of the stage. I hear Catherine's deep love for Eddie, and part of me wants to get up and say, "Look, I share this, let's stop the whole thing now, let's do what we have to do to stop this inevitable thing happening". I came across two articles that became very inspirational in some way. One was an article which starts with a photograph taken from the International Space Station, of 9/11, and it goes on to talk

about powerlessness and I thought that's very interesting for Alfieri, the powerlessness. Eddie becomes loathed by the community. You see it in the Vinny Bolzano story¹³, about what happens to someone when they rat, when they betray. For Alfieri it's his love for him and his powerlessness to stop the loathing, to stop the hatred for him. Seeing in someone, a tragic figure like Eddie, and a fundamental humanity. He's a good person who does something terrible and in that axis is the tragic element.

I suppose that helps the audience keep perspective on Eddie because they continue to see what you feel?

Yes, his compassion for him. The second article was a foreword Philip Seymour Hoffman had written to one of the editions of the play. The thing that was puzzling me was right in his last speech, he [Alfieri] says he loves Eddie because "he allowed himself to be wholly known", and I've been wrangling with that line for quite a long time, thinking what does that mean? He just lived his life in a way that was very visible to others. The article talks about the possibility that we all live our lives hiding something but inevitably -"our hearts peek out" is the phrase he used, and that's what happens to Eddie, and he exposes who he is by his actions. Some of us are more able to conceal this. And I think that maybe partly Alfieri's questioning himself through Eddie's story, he's questioning his own concealment and asking himself if it's right to live that way. He says three times in the play "it is better to settle for half", but I think that's almost a question. Is it better to settle for half? Bart¹⁴ used the word the 'organising principle', law as an 'organising principle'. Without law you have justice, a bloodletting, a revenge cycle, like you get in the Oresteia, Athena brings in this structure of the Law which contains all this violence, revenge. Alfieri reaches a point where he's asking, does that make life better, because of the organising principle of Law? Even within these structures, especially in this community, the 'justice principle', the revenge principle, prevails. A friend of mine says it's almost like the conscious mind looking at the unconscious mind. The 'view from the bridge' is the conscious mind. I hope the audience go away with an improved sense of themselves and will be discussing exactly the issues we're discussing. How is it best to live in a humane society without compromising your human virtue?

In this production, you sit in the audience and you don't move onto the stage until almost the end of Act One. What is this like?

I think, functionally, what I hope happens, is that Alfieri comes out of the audience. In the very first moment you see Alfieri, he is on the steps in the audience and he goes more and more into himself into the dream state, and he reflects on the arrival of Rodolpho and Marco. He then watches that from the audience steps, and then he reflects on Eddie's fate or destiny. Then I start to get involved in the story. What I'm hoping is that my journey from the audience, around the arena, then onto and into the arena will be the audience's journey too. He gets sucked into the drama and that goes on and goes further, and there are discussions and decisions being made about how Alfieri's dressed and how he starts to become a little bit like Eddie in terms of costume. So you see that process. I'm hoping that functionally Alfieri takes the same journey as the audience. I think Alfieri's presence in the story reduces the possibility that the audience will simply condemn Eddie, and hopefully they'll reflect on what happened to him, and how that could happen to anybody, and how Eddie is just one example of people in their own lives, and ask the question how to be within that framework. We all have very strong personal emotional psychological drives that if we expressed them we'd be living in chaos. So how do we marry the chaos that's inside us with the organising principle of society?

¹³ Told by Beatrice in Act One of A View From the Bridge

¹⁴ Bart Van den Eynde, Dramaturg on A View From the Bridge

Have there been any particular challenges to playing this role?

Something I'm finding challenging today is how to allow an audience in to the streams of consciousness that's inside the character, without it being a very direct, linear address. And that's going to have to be to do with tone of voice. I was keeping my eyes down all the time and I thought that's too private, too insular. I've done work at The Globe Theatre where direct address is a lot of fun, just seeing the whites of the audience's eyes and teasing them and cajoling them and having a very direct impact on them, whereas Ivo is asking me to invite the audience in through a different way of being, a different type of delivery, and that's a challenge because I don't want people to feel alienated from Alfieri. I want them to feel like he's like them.

Does your role depend on the audience to any degree?

That'll be interesting as we go through the run whether the audience impact on me. Certainly that happens at The Globe – whereas in this it's such a spell that we cast, it will more likely be quite private for the audience, in the sense that it's personal for the character. I will really try to not woo them, but to encourage them to feel what I'm feeling. If you take this principle of the conscious looking at the unconscious, that's what I'm asking them to do, using their conscious mind to look at what is going on inside them. Audiences are very sophisticated. It would be very easy to talk to them very simply and directly, but I think that would be to let them off the hook a bit! We want them to be thinking very deeply.

In the scene near the end, when the Immigration Officer arrives, the decision was taken to **have you speaking Arthur Miller's stage directions. What is that like and what effect do you think it creates?**

Ivo said "your dream's become a nightmare now", and it's present rather than reflective or past tense. And so, weirdly, it actually feels very real now as opposed to functional. I'm now experimenting with not even looking at the scene so that I'm conjuring it or recalling it. It's going to surprise a few people, I think, but it brings another layer to it. Ivo's brilliance is his ability to layer. It comes very simply sometimes. Like Louie doesn't stand when he says "see ya"¹⁵ and so that line becomes about permission to leave, asking Eddie if he's okay, Louie's troubled relationship with Eddie at that point – it becomes many things from a simple thing of "don't stand when you say that line".

Have you noticed any differences in the European and British approaches to rehearsal?

One is that it starts later in the morning and finishes earlier in the afternoon, so it's a much shorter day! Which actually I like because it gives me an opportunity to collect my thoughts at the beginning of the day, it gives me the opportunity to reflect at the end of the day, so there's a process of gestation which sometimes you don't have time to do in a British context. Ivo's very clear about working through the play - I've worked with a lot of directors who scatter the scenes in rehearsal, so that you do Scene One on Tuesday, then Scene Twelve because it's got the same people in it, whereas with this it's the sequencing – what happens next depends on what happened just now. It means that late scenes don't happen until late on in the process. That's quite interesting. I've done a lot of work with Katie Mitchell, for whom structural analysis of the text is quite important, so working out where the beats are, where the events are, and intentions between them, and there's discussion about those things. I think Ivo is doing the same thing but it's on the floor so it's up on its feet, and he'll interject and you work with those things, but it's not formally analysed. It's not as explicit. But the result is a similar one. I've really enjoyed working with Ivo. On the floor he's completely open, listens to what you have to say, and it's been a joyous rehearsal process.

¹⁵ A View From the Bridge, Act One, page 38