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Sydney Theatre Company and Ebsworth & Ebsworth present

The Vertical Hour

by David Hare

Teacher's Resource Kit
written and compiled by Jeffrey Dawson

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following for their invaluable material for these Teachers' Notes: Laura Scrivano, Publications Editor, STC; Judith Seeff, Archivist STC

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The Vertical Hour

Important Information Schools Day Performance

Suitability	Years 10-12
Date	Wednesday 5 March 2008
Venue	Drama Theatre, Sydney Opera House
Pre-performance forum	10.30am
Lunch Break	11.15am
Performance commences	12.15pm
Performance concludes	2.45 pm
Post performance Q+A concludes	3.00pm

There will be one interval of 20 minutes

We respectfully ask that you discuss theatre etiquette with your students prior to coming to the performance.

Booking Queries

Please contact Barbara Vickery on 02 9250 1778 or bvickery@sydneytheatre.com.au

General Education Queries

Please contact Helen Hristofski, Education Manager, on 02 9250 1726 or hristofski@sydneytheatre.com.au

Sydney Theatre Company

Artistic Directors Cate Blanchett & Andrew Upton

Patron Giorgio Armani

Sydney Theatre Company (STC) produces theatre of the highest standard that consistently illuminates, entertains and challenges. It is committed to the engagement between the imagination of its artists and its audiences, to the development of the artform of theatre and to excellence in all its endeavours.

Sydney Theatre Company, as the premier theatre company in Australia, has been a major force in Australian drama since its establishment in 1978. The company presents an annual twelve-play program at its home base The Wharf, on Sydney's harbour at Walsh Bay, the nearby new Sydney Theatre, which STC also manages, and as the resident theatre company of the Sydney Opera House. Current Artistic Directors Cate Blanchett and Andrew Upton joined the Company at the beginning of 2008.

Sydney Theatre Company offers Sydney audiences an eclectic program of Australian plays, lively interpretations of the classic repertoire and the best of new international writing. As the state theatre company of NSW, it also produces a significant schools program and in its studio space produces work devised by, and for, developing artists, originating in 1987 with Baz Lurhmann's *Six Years Old*, and in its current identity, as *Wharf 2Loud*. The company reaches beyond its home state, touring productions throughout Australia, playing annually to audiences in excess of 300,000.

To access detailed information on Sydney Theatre Company, its history and productions please contact our Archivist Judith Seeff at jseeff@sydneytheatre.com.au

Sydney Theatre Company Education

Sydney Theatre Company is committed to education by programming original productions and workshops that enthuse and engage the next generation of theatre-goers. Within the education programme Sydney Theatre Company produces its own season of plays as well as collaborates with leading theatre-for-young-people companies across Australia.

Often a young person's first experience of theatre is facilitated by teachers. STC ensures access to all of its mainstage productions through the Schools Day programme as well as produces and tours theatre specifically crafted to resonate with young people.

STC works to support educators in their Drama and English-teaching practices. Every year dynamic workshops are held by leading theatre practitioners to support curriculum content, detailed resources are provided for all productions and an extensive work-experience programme is available to students from across the state.

The annual Sydney Morning Herald and Sydney Theatre Company Young Playwright's Award continues to develop and encourage young writers. The winning students receive a cash prize and a two-day workshop with a professional director, dramaturg and cast – an invaluable opportunity and experience.

Sydney Theatre Company has an extensive on-line resource for teachers and students.

Visit www.sydneytheatre.com.au/education.

Cast and Production Team

Sydney Theatre Company and Ebsworth and Ebsworth present

The Vertical Hour

by David Hare

Oliver Lucas
Nadia Blye
Philip Lucas
Dennis Dutton
Terri Scholes

Pip Miller
Victoria Longley
Christopher Stollery
Ryan Hayward
Zindzi Okenyo

Director
Designer
Lighting Designer
Sound Designer/Composer
Assistant Director
Voice Coach
Production Manager
Stage Manager
Assistant Stage Manager
Head Mechanist
Hair, Wig and Wardrobe
Supervisor
Production Photographer

Julian Meyrick
Stephen Curtis
Peter Neufeld
Max Lyandvert
Brendan O'Connell
Jenny Kent
Janet Eades
Maree Kanowski
Louise Cable
Stephen Crossley
Lauren A Proietti
Tracey Schramm

This production opened 14 February 2008 at the Sydney Opera House Drama Theatre.
There will be one interval.

David Hare, Playwright

David Hare is one of Britain's most internationally performed playwrights. Born in Sussex in 1947 and was educated at Lancing College and at Jesus College, Cambridge. His first play, *Slag*, was produced in 1970. In 1973, he was appointed resident dramatist to the Nottingham Playhouse, a major provincial theatre

Hare worked with the Portable Theatre Company from 1968 - 1971. Hare was Resident Dramatist at the Royal Court Theatre, London, from 1970-1971, and in 1973 became resident dramatist at the Nottingham Playhouse. Hare co-founded the Joint Stock Company with David Aukin and Max Stafford-Clark in 1975. Hare began writing for the National Theatre and in 1978 his play *Plenty* was produced at the National Theatre, followed by *A Map of the World* in 1983, and *Pravda* in 1985 co-written with Howard Brenton. He had a long association with the National which produced eleven of his plays successively between 1978 and 1997.

David Hare became the Associate Director of the National Theatre in 1984, and has since seen many of his plays produced, such as his trilogy of plays *Racing Demon*, *Murmuring Judges*, and *The Absence of War*, presented in repertory in 1993. Nine of his best known plays including *The Secret Rapture*, *Skylight*, *The Blue Room*, *Amy's View*, *The Judas Kiss*, *The Breath of Life*, *My Zinc Bed*, *Stuff Happens* and *Via Dolorosa* in which he performed, have also been produced on Broadway and in Australia.

For 35 years, Hare has written plays that capture the flavour of our times, and address the interconnection between our secret motives and our public politics. In *The Vertical Hour* Hare continues his sharp investigation of the morality of international intervention, and of how the war in Iraq impacts the lives of British and American citizens.

Theatre's Theatrical Knight

Jacqueline Maley, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Weekend Edition, 2-3 February 2008

There is a moment in David Hare's new play, *The Vertical Hour*, when one of the characters breaks through the haze of opinion and counter-opinion being traded by the cast - about psychology, modern medicine and the Iraq War - and proclaims that people "aren't their views, you know. They aren't just what they say. They aren't the stuff that comes out of their mouths!"

It seems a heretical opinion for Britain's most committed left-wing playwright to venture. Hare's stock-in-trade is opinion, as expressed by the characters he writes, and his great strength is dialogue - the stuff that comes out of people's mouths.

In person, he offers views on everything, from American political culture and Palestine to knighthoods and microwave dinners. He gesticulates to underline points. He talks rapidly and loquaciously and leans forward for emphasis. Does Hare really believe that opinions are not the measure of a man?

"In my own life, certainly what I believe bears little correspondence to the way I behave," he breezily admits. "We are sort of living in a blogosphere of opinion in which everybody is incredibly opinionated about what they claim to believe and yet what they claim to believe is very, very rarely tested."

Hare's opinion on opinion, as it were, is especially interesting because he is notoriously sensitive to the opinions of others about his work. His fits of pique are well known in theatre circles. He once took out a full-page advertisement in *The New York Times* to deliver a public riposte to a theatre critic who had criticised one of his plays. He is described by arts writers as "no stranger to the hissy fit" and as having "the thinnest skin of anyone in theatre".

When his 1978 play *Plenty* was poorly reviewed in London, he left in a huff for New York. He didn't come back for four years. His famed sensitivity is reportedly the reason *The Vertical Hour* is only now being shown in London. Hare is associate director at the National Theatre, on London's South Bank, but he chose to premiere *The Vertical Hour* on Broadway in December 2006. He was angry with the National, the story goes, because he believed it had given his last play, *Stuff Happens*, too short a run.

When we meet in one of the warren-like back rooms of the Royal Court Theatre in Chelsea, where *The Vertical Hour* recently opened,

Hare's insecurities and their corollary, his reportedly large ego, are at the forefront of my mind. The man I meet is tall and handsome, a floppy-haired and young-looking 60 with an easy stride. He wears a faded black jacket and vest and looks slightly more dishevelled than you would expect of a man married to a fashion designer (the Algerian designer Nicole Farhi).

Hare says he is tired. He looks it but his fatigue never threatens to dampen his conversation, which is energetic, or his manner, which is warm. He admits straight out that he is "morbidly over-sensitive" to criticism. "That's why in many ways I'm totally unsuited to being a playwright," he laughs.

He no longer reads reviews and he finds it excruciating to listen to audience reaction to his plays. Yet he forces himself to do it, so that he might learn something. For the London preview of *The Vertical Hour*, he sat in the centre of the stalls, furiously eavesdropping, torturing himself every time someone yawned or fidgeted.

"It is an absolute law of theatre that a playwright will only overhear insults," he laments. "You'll never, ever overhear a word of praise. And when you hear the insults, your spirits, at least mine, just absolutely tumble. I am a very, very sensitive flower."

When he was awarded a knighthood by the Labour government in 1998, Hare saw it as a fitting accolade from the country that had previously rejected him. But as a socialist, anti-establishment writer, his acceptance of the honour was criticised by some.

"I heard someone on the radio the other day saying it's interesting that since I got the knighthood I have become more radical, not less. And at last it was a pleasure to hear someone say something pleasant about the knighthood," he says. "I regard it as an artistic honour."

There is no doubting Hare's talent and success. He rightfully occupies one point of the golden trinity of British theatre, with Tom Stoppard and Harold Pinter, and he has received numerous awards, including a BAFTA and a prestigious New York Drama Critics' Circle award.

He has written some chamber dramas (including *The Blue Room*, in which Nicole Kidman made her semi-nude turn as "theatrical Viagra") but his plays are almost always political. They deal with subjects including the state of the Labour Party, the privatisation of the British railways and the shadowy influence of press barons.

At the moment he is working on his 25th play, entitled *Gesthemane*, and the film adaptation of Bernard Schlink's novel *The Reader*. Kidman was to star "but we lost her to pregnancy", so Kate Winslet has stepped in.

Hare fell into writing by accident when he was running a small theatre company at university. One week the company needed a play to perform, so he sat down and bashed out a one-act.

"The minute I did it I discovered a facility I didn't know I had. I could write dialogue," he recalls. "It was quite extraordinary. It was like hitting a golf ball and not knowing that you are going to be able to whack it straight down the fairway every time."

His scripts are like musical scores, he says. "Once you've mastered the score, you will be free. But if you don't learn the score, you won't ever find it by searching around in your emotions and approximating the line."

"That kind of classical discipline is very demanding and it requires experienced theatre actors. By and large it has not been a great success when non-theatre actors have played in my work. You need a theatre grounding to play it."

If *The Vertical Hour* is a score, then humming away in the bass clef is the Iraq invasion, or "intervention" as one of the characters prefers to call it. The private regrets and resentments of the characters are all filtered through the lens of arguments over Iraq. They are the kinds of impassioned disputes with which dinner party-going intellectuals - the sorts of people who tend to see David Hare plays - will be very familiar: the decadence and narcissism of the West, the role of personal responsibility, how it is easier to do nothing than something. Hare believes that since the September 11 terrorist attacks, the West has developed a chronic self-consciousness about its way of life. In the play he uses two main characters, an American and an Englishman, to explore what it is Westerners hold dear.

"Because the West feels its own way of life to be under attack, it's asking itself rather profound questions about what that way of life is," he says. "I think if you ask people what they're fighting for sometimes, it's quite hard to answer."

That internal crisis is personified in the play by Nadia Blye, a former war correspondent in her mid-30s, who has retired to the political science

department of Yale University. An expert on terrorism, she supported the war on humanitarian grounds and was even called to the White House to brief President George Bush before the American invasion.

But her self-assurance and her resolute opinions are shaken when she meets Oliver Lucas, the estranged father of her English boyfriend. Oliver, a doctor with a regret-infused past, now lives quietly and alone on the English-Welsh border. He is a passionate anti-war Brit, who is equal parts cynical and charming. Oliver tells Nadia he was always against the war: "Let's just say I knew who the surgeon was, so I had a pretty good idea how the operation would turn out."

Hare has already written about Iraq in *Stuff Happens*, a documentary-style play that takes its name from Donald Rumsfeld's shrugging response to the widespread looting that broke out in Baghdad after the ousting of Saddam Hussein. Why did he want to revisit the subject?

"*Stuff Happens* was a play of the imagination about the diplomatic process leading up to the invasion of Iraq, but that was real people and real events," Hare says. "[*The Vertical Hour*] is about what effect the invasion has had on individuals' lives and how it affects how we now live."

"It's that question which I suppose all fiction writers are interested in, which is how people's lives change and in what way have they changed. For me it's like the frame has been changed on the painting and we see our lives differently."

Early on, Nadia and Oliver acknowledge the inevitability of talking about Iraq. It is as though they must get it out of the way. The war is obviously a preoccupation for Hare, although he says he still doesn't understand it.

"[The Americans] have just announced that they are staying for the next 20 years and they will control the oil supply. So if you believe the whole thing was about oil in the first place, then far from being this disaster or fiasco, it may be a triumph for the Americans. On the other hand, that answer rather disappoints me." Hare has also toyed with the idea that the war was purely an exercise in power "but that doesn't explain everything either".

Overall, he concludes, he doesn't have a firm opinion on the reasons behind the invasion. Not yet.

Critical Perspective

David Hare, who arrived on the playwriting scene in the watershed year of 1968, is a dedicated social commentator. His plays, in spite of occasional excursions into the Third World, offer a richly comprehensive portrait of contemporary Britain and its institutions. His range may be wider than that of John Osborne, but like his mentor, he seems to view his native land with a mixture of critical exasperation and baffled affection: he is one of those writers who feels constantly obliged to take Britain's moral temperature through the chosen medium of drama.

Like most of his generation, Hare began by writing for the Fringe: indeed he co-founded Portable Theatre specifically to take plays to theatreless zones. But he made individual mark, first at Hampstead Theatre and then at the Royal Court, with *Slag* (1970): a coruscating satire in which three women set up an all-female boarding-school and, having rejected the traditional 'womanly' roles imposed by society, find themselves equally trapped in the opposite ones. While possessing a distinctive solo voice Hare was, however, happy to engage in collaborative or joint-authored ventures. England's Ireland (1972) was a group effort in which several writers joined forces to examine the history of British involvement in Northern Ireland. *Brassneck* (1973), co-written with Howard Brenton, was a much more successful venture that used three-generation family-saga to attack insidious provincial corruption and the naked hypocrisies of capitalism.

One of Hare's great gifts has always been to use popular forms for a political purpose. *Knuckle* (1974) explored the amorality of profit in the setting of ultra-respectable Guildford: the chosen vehicle, however, was that of the Chandleresque private-eye novel and boasted dialogue on the lines of 'That's a very nice leg' - 'I got another one just like it.' That was a fine example of Hare the stylist with a dazzling gift for pastiche. The other side of Hare, the self-denying collaborator simply concerned with telling a story, emerged in his adaptation for Joint Stock of William Hinton's book, *Fanshen*: an engrossing account of a group of Chinese peasants adjusting to change during the revolution from 1945 to 1949 and educating themselves in the transition from private to public ownership.

But increasingly Hare's work, both for stage, film and television, has been concerned with modern Britain and with society's apparent failure to live up to the idealism of the post-war period. *Plenty* (1978), the first of Hare's many plays written for the National Theatre, explored this theme through a heroine, Susan Traherne, who had experienced a 'good' war fighting with the French Resistance but whose life disintegrated in the ensuing peace. The play never fully resolves the question of how much Susan's breakdown is attributable to inherent instability and how much to social and political factors. But Hare creates a magnificent role - one of a long gallery of dominant female characters - and delineates post-war British life, from the high hopes of the Attlee government in 1945 to the national trauma of Suez in 1956, with great skill.

Hare's preoccupation with the state of the nation has informed much of his subsequent work. *Pravda* (1985), again co-written with Howard Brenton, was a big noisy public satire not simply on monopolistic media tycoons of the Rupert Murdoch variety but on the apparent collusion between the right-wing press and the Conservative government of Mrs Thatcher: hence the title's ironic allusion to the Soviet belief in the press as an organ of official 'truth'. In *The Secret Rapture* (1988) Hare tackled the phenomenon of Thatcherism itself through a calculated contrast between a self-seeking, emotionally insulated junior government minister and her patient, caring long-suffering sister: what was little noticed, however, was Hare's suggestion that the traditional British virtues of tolerance and consideration will

ultimately triumph. But easily Hare's most ambitious project was a trilogy examining the crumbling state of Britain's institutions apparently sustained only by individual dedication. *Racing Demon* (1990) was much the best and dealt with the Church of England's gradual transformation into a branch of social welfare. But *Murmuring Judges* (1991) looked intelligently at the legal system and *The Absence of War* (1993) very sympathetically at the reasons for the Labour party's fourth consecutive electoral defeat. When played together, the trilogy offered a coherent vision of a society filled with ancient tribal rituals but lacking any core beliefs.

Part of Hare's achievement, however, has been to write plays that balance the personal with the political: one of the paradoxes that make him such a compelling writer is that he combines acerbic criticism with romantic optimism. The two sides of his personality successfully came together in *Skylight* (1995). The framework is an encounter between two former lovers: a rich and thriving Eighties restaurant owner and an idealistic woman teacher working in a disadvantaged East End school. Their reunion is a potent metaphor for two different, oppositional strands in British life; but the play's final gesture warmly endorses the resilience and faith of the idealistic teacher. Something similar happens in the equally popular *Amy's View* (1997) where Hare's heroine, a well-known English actress, overcomes the loss of both her wealth and her daughter through sheer professional determination: the play is a tribute both to the power of theatre and the survival of moral integrity in a deeply hostile environment. But, while preoccupied by Britain, Hare is anything but parochial. He has not only written successful adaptations of early Chekhov plays such as *Ivanov* and *Platonov*. In *Via Dolorosa* (1998) he came up with a meditative and moving play, written to be performed by himself, based on a trip he made to Israel and the Palestinian territory. As an account of the confrontation of two intransigent communities and value-systems, the play was honest and fair. It transcended documentary theatre, however, by recording the impact on a peculiarly English liberal sensibility of a visit to a world where people were prepared to die for a cause in which they believed.

Over a period of over thirty years Hare's plays naturally reveal changes of tone and style. What is utterly consistent, however, is his belief in the power of theatre as a medium and his unshakeable conviction that part of a writer's duty is to interpret the society in which he lives. Hare's plays naturally offer a portrait of his own divided temperament in which the romantic and the rebel are often at war. But collectively they also provide an authentic and remarkably well-sustained picture of the convulsions that have taken place in British life over the past half-century.

Written by Michael Billington
Eminent British theatre critic

David Hare's plays in Australia

Sydney Theatre Company first produced a play by David Hare – *A Map of the World* – in 1982. In over 20 years since, STC has gone on to produce a number of Hare's key plays, including *Racing Demon* (1990); *Skylight* (1995); *Amy's View* (1997); *The Breath of Life* (2002) and *The Permanent Way* (2003), the story of a political dream turned sour, explored the privatisation of British Rail.

Company B at Belvoir Street Theatre has also produced *The Judas Kiss* (1998), *My Zinc Bed*, first staged at the Royal Court Theatre, London, in September 2000, and *Stuff Happens* (2006). Hare also performed his own play, *Via Dolorosa*, a monologue about a visit he made to Israel and the Palestinian Territories for Belvoir St.

His experiences of acting and writing the play are further explored in a diary, *Acting Up: A Diary*, published in 1999. His book, *Obedience, Struggle and Revolt* (2005), is a collection of lectures about politics and art.

The role that twists of fate play in our lives is a recurring theme for Hare: the reunion of the characters in *The Breath of Life*, the meeting of Nadia and Oliver in *The Vertical Hour*. Hare stated in Judy Lee Olivia's book, *David Hare: Theatricalizing Politics* – "I believe in circumstance, chance and coincidence. It's a romantic view of life. I don't think everything is determined by psychology. Things happen in the universe and there's no predicting. It just happens you turn down the street. You meet the girl. It changes everything. And this, it seems to me, is something to celebrate... coincidence is something that writers fight shy of, because they think it's clichéd or hackneyed. Coincidence is, to most people what's interesting about their lives!"

Background Information

For excellent contextual information on Hare's play, see the following articles which appeared in the STC programme for this production, edited by Laura Scrivano, Publications Editor

1. David Hare interviewed by Renee Montagne,
2. National Public Radio, USA, 30 November 2006; Neo Conservatism; War Correspondents; Bosnia—Herzegovina; Iraq; Anglo-American Relations and Border Country.

Director Julian Meyrick

After reading the playwright's script, the director decides on an overall vision for the production. The director meets with the creative team to achieve a unified look for the sets, costumes, lighting, sound and other elements. The director oversees the actors in rehearsal, often with the help of an assistant director and always with stage managers.

Personal Politics

Reference: Elena Lonergan, "Personal Politics," Interview with Julian Meyrick in *Currents*, STC's Subscriber Magazine, Vol.25, No.1, January 2008

"In combat medicine, there's this moment, you know, you've probably heard of it - after a disaster, after a shooting - there's this moment, the vertical hour, when you can actually be of some use."

Nadia, *The Vertical Hour*

Sydney Theatre Company's 2008 season kicks off with a new play by celebrated British playwright David Hare. *The Vertical Hour* is a complex and contemporary play; a thrilling cocktail of sexual tensions, global politics and a clash of ideologies. *Currents* spoke to director Julian Meyrick about exploring the layers of *The Vertical Hour*.

What attracted you to the play, and how did you come to be involved with the production?

I know David Hare's work quite well, in the sense that I grew up with it. I grew up in London, although I'm Australian, so my idea of what theatre is has always been strongly conditioned by the kind of play that he writes. When I read the play my first impression of it was its vitality. I do feel, unfortunately, that with many pieces of theatre at the moment there is a tendency to flee from the world. The world is full of very difficult things at the moment, and I think people come to the theatre, or imagine they come to the theatre, to escape from those problems rather than coming to terms with them. But that's not why I do theatre. I'm interested in plays that have something to say about the world and do it with skill. *The Vertical Hour* does that, and so registered my strong interest.

One thing that struck me about the play was the complexity of the three main characters. We have Oliver, the British father, Philip, the son who has moved to America, and Philip's partner Nadia, the poised, eloquent American academic who used to be a war correspondent and now lectures in international relations. Despite the fact that all three are professionally successful, no-one is in a happy relationship. Is David Hare drawing the portrait of the modern person as unhappy by definition?

It would be true to say that his view of the human condition in a domestic sense or personal sense is essentially a tragic one, whereas his view of the human being in a social sense or a political one is essentially optimistic. And it is that combination of qualities that defines his writing. When I say 'tragic' I mean it in the meaningful sense, that we might ultimately all be alone. That love, or at least the kind of romantic love that tends to come from pop songs may not necessarily be on the shelf in the quantities that we imagine. You could call the play an intellectual play for non-intellectuals. You don't really have to have read a lot of books to understand it

because the language is so accessible and so clear. It has this one real strength, which is that it makes complex ideas very accessible. One of the cleverest things about it is that it doesn't really look like a clever play. It appears very simple. Although from a dramaturgical point of view, it's incredibly complicated.

It is really intriguing that there seems to be a whole spectrum of ways in which we can view Oliver. At one extreme, we can see him as a kind of intelligent, civilised but unhappy individual who has withdrawn from society after a tragic event in his life. At the other extreme, we can see him as a cynical, manipulative, tyrannical father who wants his son and Nadia to break up, who really wants to mess things up for Philip. How do you negotiate such a character?

Between the avuncular man who doesn't want to do anything, and Richard the Third who's just dying to plunge in his knife, there is the third view, that Oliver does think that the relationship is inappropriate, and that by trying to break them up, he is actually trying to protect Philip. To me, that is the heart of the play. We are often confronted with situations which to some extent are not good. We don't often have the freedom of action that we would like within those situations. But nevertheless we need to act. Although I think that that comes at a terrible cost, and the cost is that Philip will not thank him for it. But again, we know that that is true for life. We know that there are many, many times that we act in people's best interests, and they are not grateful until many years later, if ever. So that's why I say that the heart of the play is tragic. Because the heart of tragedy is loss, and the acceptance of the reality of loss when faced with the need to do the right thing.

What do you see as the significance of the title, 'The Vertical Hour'?

It's a metaphor that seems to apply all the way down to the different layers of the drama. I think if you were to look into Oliver's head, Nadia is the last person he's thinking about and her relationship with Philip. I think you've got at least two people who are at delicate stages of their lives. Vertical hours, if you like. Where some kind of intervention can be efficacious. And that's interesting it also has a political analogy, that if you're going to intervene in the world, then you've got to catch things at the right moment.

One of the themes in the play is the contrast between Britain and America. Oliver says: 'In the United States, you're building an empire. Remember, we've dismantled one.' Do you think the author paints them as empires in different stages of development?

When you come across arguments in plays, they are essentially metaphors. They're there as poetic images. So you will find no concrete answers as such. Because metaphors have no answers. They're just thrown up into the air to catch the light of the minds that perceive them. So I think what you find in Oliver's statement is somebody drawing your attention to something, raising a relationship to be contemplated.

Without reducing the suspense for readers who will be coming to see the production, can I ask you what you thought of the ending of the play?

For me, one thing that comes up is that the world is full of good and bad things. And you put your hand up for some things that look on the surface to be quite bad. You had better be sure that you want and need them. You had better be sure that they are for you. Because knowing who you are is the foundation stone for wanting things, whatever they are. I have often thought about this in terms of actors, that to be actor

is a very hard road. They're very vulnerable, the money's very poor, and so forth. If you want to be an actor, then you had better need to be an actor. Just having a vague sort of relationship with acting will not be good enough. So perhaps the end of the play, I would say, it references that truth for me.

Designer, Stephen Curtis

The play is mostly set on the Welsh border in the present day at Oliver's reclusive property at Shrewsbury in the U.K. The play is topped and tailed by scenes set in Nadia's book-lined office at Yale University in the U.S.A. Direct address monologues by the characters are given in a narrow gap between blue panels between the scenes. Oliver's garden is not seen as the audience looks in on the raised wooden patio, backed by reflective surfaces which give the relationships represented on stage a distorted atmosphere. The spirited debate and game-like atmosphere (Nadia tells Oliver in Act 2 that "everything's a trick to you. You use that word all the time.") between the characters is emphasised in the second act of the play by the use of a stage revolve which gives the scene a cinematic feeling as the audience focuses on each character.

Setting, Border Country

The border country between England and Wales boasts some of the most beautiful countryside in the United Kingdom and today is a frequent spot for holiday-makers. However, historically the counties on the border have been the site of many battles and bloodshed. Many castles, forts and battlements that still stand today, in various dates of preservation, were constructed to create a buffer zone between England and Wales. After his conquest of England in 1066, William the Conqueror decided to grant land along the Welsh border to his fellow Normans. The Welsh would not submit to any attempt to subdue them so these Normans became 'Marcher Lords' and built castles and forts along the border to protect themselves and England. It was not an easy life as the Welsh continued to wage war against the English for the next 300 years. The medieval ruins that remain in their strategic positions are a testament to the blood that was shed in this historically turbulent landscape.

<p>See the definitive text on stage design in this country, Kristen Anderson and Imogen Ross' <i>Performance Design in Australia</i>, Craftsman House Sydney 2001 which includes references to Stephen Curtis. This invaluable reference also includes an extensive bibliography on set and costume design.</p>

Plot Synopsis

To familiarise yourself with the story, read through the play synopsis below. Write down your initial response to the story, which you can reflect back on, after you have seen the play.

Philip: People aren't their views, you know. They aren't their opinions. They aren't just what they say. They aren't the stuff that comes out their mouths.

Nadia: I know that.

Philip: Urbane. Civilised. It's a trick. Anyone can do that. It bears no relation to who he is. All that High-Mindedness. All that Principle. The love of literature. And apart from anything else – I know you won't believe it because it's unbelievable – but he's trying to seduce you.

David Hare has written over 20 plays which often examine the contradictions between our personal and public philosophies and our public politics. *The Vertical Hour* is Hare's most recent play, an elegant and eloquent thriller of culpability, charged with sexual tension and the clash of ideologies. It is also a finely tuned emotional examination of an estranged father and son.

Philip has brought his American fiancée, Nadia, to meet his reclusive father, Oliver. She is an ex-war correspondent turned academic, notorious among liberals for her public support of the war in Iraq. Oliver is an urbane doctor and serial philanderer, living in rural seclusion on the Welsh border.

As day bleeds into night, Nadia and Oliver engage in heated discussions about love, death, marriage, family and politics. These emotional confrontations force Nadia to reassess not only her long-held beliefs but also her relationship with Philip. He is the linch-pin to their separate troubles and their shared despair.

Character Summaries

Oliver Lucas - English, undemonstrative, casually dressed, in his late fifties – “For so many years you haven’t made a mistake. Then you make one. And you pay the price.”

Famous British doctor, lives alone on a hillside on the Welsh border; “repelling male boarders.” An habitual womaniser opposed to the war in Iraq. He has his past to reckon with. The challenge of his guest Nadia’s encounter with Oliver forces decisions on her that will affect her for the rest of her life. He believes that “the people who need me so obviously need me.” Says to Nadia regarding America: “It’s something that happens over there. It’s in the culture. You find yourself working every day of the year.”

He has lived at Shrewsbury on the Welsh border for 10 years. Thinks there’s a difference between U.S. and U.K. politics: “No doubt you feel that if your president calls, you have to answer that call. If my prime minister called, I’d let it ring. That’s the difference.....He wouldn’t call me in the first place.” Later on in the play, Oliver admits “Like most people, I do have a button marked ‘patriotism.’ But let’s say, I’m choosy about who I allow to press it. Certainly not politicians. And certainly not the Queen.” But by poets such as the war poet Wilfred Owen. Says in Act 2, “Politicians don’t speak words, they use them. How can you take people seriously who use language as an instrument?.... Politicians only speak to please. Or to pre-empt an argument. Or to fill an uncomfortable silence.”

Oliver has read on the internet that Nadia is known as “the professor of terror ” and thinks she’s as clever as he is. He advises his son not to show his weaknesses to Nadia, as “strategically it wouldn’t be very clever when in Nadia’s company to show self-doubt.” Philip replies that he feels confident in America where he feels hopeful, glad to be away from his parents.

Oliver feels that his son’s visit was never “a visit of reconciliation. It’s a visit of farewell,” and he predicts he won’t be seeing much of Nadia in the future. Nadia later tells Oliver she admired Philip’s self assurance when she met him. Oliver thinks his son “has wonderfully high self-confidence and very modest self-esteem. It’s a combination you find in all the most winning people... He’s hard-wired.... I think you could say he’s drawn to difficult women.”

Oliver tells Nadia in Act 2, “Philip defined his life in opposition to mine. England. America. Many partners. One. Pleasure in discourse. Pleasure in silence. like early Dylan. He prefers late. That’s who he is. See it as a kind of strength. He’s an interesting chap.”

Nadia tells Oliver in Act 2 that “everything’s a trick to you. You use that word all the time.” Later he tells her, “I see life for what it is: fragile. Every moment for what it is: potentially disastrous. And, at all time, I try to take care.”

Nadia Blye – American, pale, poised, in her mid-thirties; casual style, comes from a liberal background “Public service, public ethics.” - a feminist American war correspondent turned academic who now teaches Political Studies at Yale in the area of international relations. Tells Oliver that teaching politics is what she always wanted to do. Was starting to think she had some stupid students before she left Yale. Yet she barely teaches, mostly she writes. Likes her privacy.

A brief holiday with her boyfriend on the Welsh/English border brings her into contact with a kind of Englishman (Oliver) whose culture and beliefs are a surprise and a challenge, both to her and to her relationship. A proponent of the 2003 invasion of Iraq (she calls it “the liberation of Iraq”), and her British fiancé’s father, Oliver, who is opposed to it. He disapproves that she has visited the White House when requested by the President. She feels she acts self-righteous around Oliver. Philip thinks Oliver thinks that Nadia is an opportunist for supporting the war in Iraq.

Nadia’s faith in academia has begun to erode at the start of the play and memories from her time in the Balkans and the Middle East haunt her.

She has thought that, even from her own education, that important issues were neglected: “Why so many people live in such poverty. And so few live well. And what can we do about it? These huge facts, these enormous facts not up for study. Ignored. You’d think that to be alive would mean to want to find out.”

In their last class together she tells her student Dutton, “We know for a fact that human life by its nature tends towards unfairness... So: checks and balances have to be introduced. By human agency. The state, in any system yet proposed by man – be it communism, capitalism – has to intervene to balance things out.”

Philip tells Oliver at the start of the play that Nadia “isn’t keen on the psychological.” She believes that the motivation behind terrorism, “the moment at which an individual picks up a gun, or straps on explosives – that moment is so deeply obscure I don’t understand it.” Has taken a lot of flak defending the war in Iraq “in liberal Connecticut” where it is not a popular position to take. She has “always supported humane intervention in countries where terrible things are happening.... I’ve been in these places. I’ve seen suffering at ground level. And I’ve been present in situations in which the West did nothing. I’ve seen the results of our indifference.’ Her great-grandparents escaped from Europe. Yet now “we’re more and more drawn into the world. Do you wonder so many Americans are in such a bad temper?”

Nadia’s anger at the world’s indifference is a drug to her: “Anger against the world, for standing by, for knowing and not intervening. Watching people die for no purpose, for no reason, except the world’s laziness, its fat spoiled sense of itself, its stupid fascination with handbags and losing body weight and who won the Open and who takes an iron to the green. Who cares? The first great war in Europe since 1945 and nobody’s able even to remember which country is which. 300,000 people killed in Europe.” As a war correspondent, she “went out a reporter (and) came back an analyst.” Philip calls her “the veteran of Sarajevo.” Nadia explains their relationship to Oliver in Act 2, “I thought: if I just live quietly with Philip, then I’ll get my private life out of the way....Philip’s always there. He’s there when you need him.”

Philip Lucas - English, in his early thirties, notably handsome, a practising physical therapist – “it’s not strict medical practice. It’s not orthodox medicine.” – also concerned with fitness in America with 3 clinics – thinks his partner Nadia is “formidable, committed, articulate, passionate, full of strong feeling.” He is estranged from his dad, has thought the meeting of his partner Nadia and his father Oliver necessary; but he comes to suspect he made a mistake when he senses his womanising father isn’t above putting the moves on Nadia. Worse, he thinks that Nadia, whose pro-Iraq invasion stance clashes with Oliver’s anti-war view, isn’t above responding to Oliver’s gruff charm.

Philip was officially brought up by his mother. His father Oliver says that “Philip’s one of those people who’s always been at peace with silence.” Philip thinks people only talk because they’re nervous. He hardly talks to his father and thinks destroyed his mother’s life. Philip looked after his mother when Oliver walked out on them.

Philip believes that neither he nor his father “has too much experience of conventional family life.” He tells Nadia about his father: “He sits there so fucking reasonable, as if he were the most reasonable man in the world. He drove my mother nuts. Why do you think she was so unhappy? Anything in a skirt he fucks it. He’s fucked every woman from here to Akaba. And he killed one as well. Oh by accident.... He’s trying to seduce you.... It’s Casanova Page One.” “My whole childhood a trail of women fucked over and spat out while my mother sat alone.” His mother Pauline, also a doctor, still lives alone in London in the old family home.

In Act 2, Philip calls Nadia “an innocent... It’s odd. You’ve travelled more than I have. You’ve seen much more. But you still believe the world’s all about argument and reason. You’re power-blind. It’s so obvious: he’s trying to exert power over you.... He wants to split us up.” Later Oliver defends himself: “Philip, I am not Lucifer. I don’t wish you ill.” Oliver believes Nadia has “what Americans call issues. She has unresolved issues... You can’t have everything.”

Dennis Dutton – American, in his early twenties; he is unusually formally dressed for a university student of his age. He is a wealthy, right-wing business major student of Nadia’s whose questions nudge Nadia toward self-awareness. He has fallen in love with her yet he has a fiancée. Dennis sees Nadia as “a woman in the world,” as she’s been a television war correspondent etc and thinks she’s a brilliant teacher.

In their last class together she tells him, “People want different things. The things they want can’t be reconciled. Not everyone can have what they want. So the mediation between the groups, between the interest groups, the groups who want different things, to that process we give the name “politics.” For Dutton, “politics is about the protection of property and of liberty.... It’s about peoples’ rights to live their own lives. It’s about absolutes.” He believes in liberal democracy. And that “America wins. It always wins. You can do all that historical perspective stuff, you can say it’s an empire and like any empire it’s going to fall. But not yet it isn’t.... Other countries are going to prosper. They’ll prosper by imitating America.”

Thinks Freud “has a theory that we aren’t who we claim to be... Freud says we’re all somebody else. Underneath.” Nadia repeats this notion throughout the play.

Terri Scholes - a young African-American student of Nadia’s. Terri’s questions nudge Nadia toward self-awareness. Terri is a little teary, vulnerable. Terri’s romantic depression infects her view of global conditions.

Glossary

Here is a glossary of colloquial expressions, war torn areas and other unusual expressions used in *The Vertical Hour*.

War Correspondents - War correspondents report conflicts first-hand by placing themselves in a war zone and attempting to reach the 'hot spots' of the fighting. There is a high risk of injury and death, exacerbated by the fact that many reporters, camera operators and photographers go to great and often dangerous lengths to get their headlines for the next day.

Neo-Conservatism - a political movement that emerged from the United States in the 1960s. The term was originally used to describe ex-liberals disillusioned with liberalism and leftist counter-culture. They felt that the liberalism of the 1960s was espousing anti-Americanism (symbolised by the anti-Vietnam movement) and undermined many of the values that made America great. As the neo-cons saw it, in a world created by liberals civic order took a back seat to individual rights and as order vanished so did the urban middle class.

Madrassa – teaching more than one belief system

Ethnic Cleansing – the mass expulsion or extermination of people from opposing ethnic or religious groups within a certain area

Modernity – Nadia explains it thus: “usually it means that human beings feel themselves discontent, they feel lost in the world – and they imagine that materialism must therefore be a fault.”

Looped – drunk

Soft Bkins – unarmoured cars

Sarajevo – capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina; the city suffered severely from the ethnic conflicts that followed the break up of Yugoslavia in 1991, and was besieged by Bosnian Serb forces in the surrounding mountains from 1992 to 1994.

Croatia – country in SE Europe; formerly a constituent republic of Yugoslavia

Bosnia – region in the Balkans

Milosovic – Yugoslavian statesman, leader of Serbian Communist party in 1986 and Serbian President in 1989; elected President of Yugoslavia in 1997

Ignoble – dishonourable, mean, base

Panoply – complete or splendid array

Casanova – 1725-98; Italian adventurer, famous for his memoirs which detail his sexual encounters in Europe.

Blowhard – boastful person

Anglo-American Relations - Anglo-American relations describes the relationship between the United Kingdom and the United States of America. After American independence was achieved the relationship between the two nations remained rocky with various conflicts and wars throughout the 1800s. Relations became more cordial during World War I when Britain was successful in securing a cotton trade deal with America to compensate for its loss of trade with Germany and Central Europe. However it was during the Second World War that a close relationship of co-operation was formed between the two countries. After the attack on Pearl Harbour, the Americans went from offering limited support to Britain and France to becoming heavily involved in the war. At the end of World War II the two countries became the founding members of the United Nations and two of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council.

During the Cold War the relationship of co-operation continued including the formation of the North Atlantic treaty organisation, a mutual defence alliance. It was during this time that the UK was steadily dissolving the British Empire, whilst at the same time the United States was taking its place as a global superpower. Following the September 11 attacks in New York, in which a number of UK citizens were also killed, British Prime Minister Tony Blair became George W. Bush's strongest supporter in his 'war on terror'. British forces supported the US invasion of Afghanistan to unseat the Taliban and unlike many European nations they also supported the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Despite massive protests in London against the war in Iraq, the UK committed more troops to the invasion than any other nation outside the US. After the radicalisation of home-grown extremist Muslims, resulting in the July 7 2005 London bombings and the continuing problems in Iraq, support for the war rapidly declined. With Tony Blair's resignation and Gordon Brown's appointment as prime minister, Britain has sought to distant itself from the Bush administration stating that it supports an "international" and "multilateral" approach to foreign problems.

Before Seeing The Production, Explore These Questions:

1. *The Vertical Hour* concerns the relationship between a young female American professor at Yale University who was a proponent of the 2003 invasion of Iraq, and her British fiancé's father, a British surgeon and an habitual womaniser who is opposed to it. What interest do you think this plot line will have for an Australian audience?
2. Briefly research the ideologies of Capitalism and Communism.
3. What would you include in the program for a play about different perspectives on the war in Iraq? Remember, the play does not have a specific response to this issue; it is non-judgmental on the subject. Rather it deals with what you carry forward in your life.
4. A portrait of actor Victoria Longley taken in role as Nadia, dressed in austere black in a garden setting, features on the poster and print advertisement for *The Vertical Hour*. Clip this ad from the Amusement Section of *The Sydney Morning Herald*. What can you tell about the play from this STC poster image of the play? What does this ad tell you about the marketing strategy for this production? What alternative images would you choose to represent the play?
5. What does the title *The Vertical Hour* tell you about the play? What is its effect as a metaphor?

"The title of the play is a combat medicine term describing the period after a disaster or shooting when the injured can be helped most. There are many ways to interpret this, but for Longley one aspect is the simple power of communication, as shared by Nadia and Oliver over an evening. "Both find themselves saying things to each other they would never say to anyone else," she says. "These nights just happen with people and they are life-changing and it is an enormous luxury and a surprise."

Reference: Jacqui Taffel, "After love's wild ride comes the war," Interview with actor Victoria Longley in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Thurs., Feb 7 2008

After seeing the production, explore these questions:

1. One critic has said, "David Hare's new play, about the interconnection between our secret motives and our public politics, seeks to illustrate how life has subtly changed for so many people in the West in the new century." How does the playwright use characterisation to represent different values and attitudes, particularly regarding war in *The Vertical Hour*?

2. What expectations did you have before seeing this production? What changed for you after seeing it?

Some responders find the play too discursive, "lacking shape and a certain dynamism." As one character says, "We're just talking." Should Hare's characters be doing something other than talking?

"Watching David Hare's The Vertical Hour is an eye-opening experience... richly stimulating stuff." The Guardian, London. Do you agree with this critic?

3. Director Julian Meyrick has said of this play, "It has this one real strength, which is that it makes complex ideas very accessible." How does the playwright make such ideas palatable for the audience in *The Vertical Hour*? (e.g. discuss Oliver's view that the politicians dismantle communities, then complain that community no longer exists. They incubate the disease, then profess to be shocked when people catch it.) "It's the kind of conundrum Nadia addresses in her inevitable argument with Oliver about Iraq. "It's so much easier to do nothing than something," Nadia says finally.

4. Direction – What do you think was the vision of the director Julian Meyrick and his interpretation of the play? (The role of the director of a theatrical production not only includes finding the best actors for the play, creating truthful and believable performances, and building an effective ensemble, but also defining a particular vision for the text.)

5. Design - What mood does Stephen Curtis's set evoke from the out-set of the play? How does this alter at different times in the production? (e.g. Nadia's room at Yale, Oliver's fairly isolated family home in Shrewsbury with a lawn "looking over the Welsh and English countryside." Oliver says in I iii, "This is border country. That way, the sea. That way, the south.") Sketch Curtis's set and list all the (minimal) props; e.g. outdoor chairs, a dining table. Do you agree/disagree with the following statement: "Every so often, Oliver, Nadia or Philip step to the edge of the stage to make disclosures -- the point of which seems primarily to cover scenery changes."

6. How does lighting contribute to the mood of the scenes? (e.g. the Welsh dawn, the middle of the night) What effect do these lighting states achieve? List some others that were used. (Here's a starter: lighting states include darkness, scant light, sunrise etc)

7. How does music contribute to the production?

Bibliography

PLAY TEXT

The Vertical Hour – Faber and Faber, London 2008

CONTEXT

Richard Eyre and Nicholas Wright, *Changing Stages – A View of British Theatre in the 20th Century* - Bloomsbury London 2000

Christopher Innes, “Howard Brenton and David Hare – utopian perspectives on modern history” – Chapter 3.11 in *Modern British Drama The 20th Century 2nd Edition*, Cambridge University Press 2001

Dominic Dromgoole, *The Full Room – An A-Z OF Contemporary Playwriting*, Methuen London 2002

FILMOGRAPHY

FILMS DEALING WITH CURRENT POLITICS

Mike Nichols (dir.) *Charlie Wilson’s War* U.S.A. 2007 – Wilson , a one-time Texas congressman and his former socialite friend, the oil fortune heiress, Joanne Herring were first-class dealmakers on personal and political levels – starring Tom Hanks & Julia Roberts – see also Nichol’s 1998 film *Primary Colors*, also set in Washington.

Marc Forster (dir.) *The Kite Runner* 2007 – adapted from Khaled Hosseini’s novel - about the servant boy Hassan who is assaulted, and his best friend Amir, the scion of a wealthy family who witnesses the attack in the Kabul of the late 1970s, but is too afraid to intervene. The pair are divided by guilt.