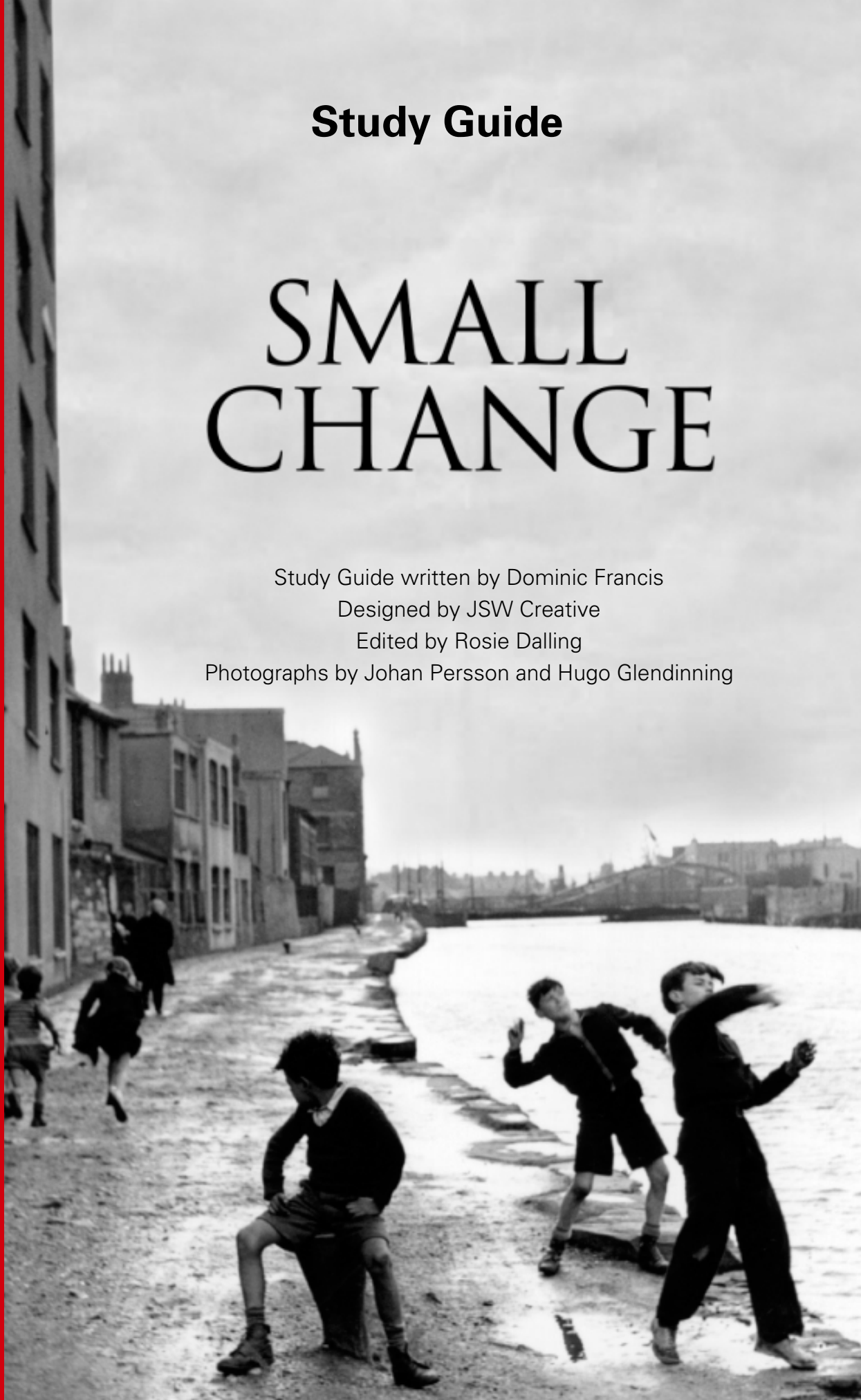
DONMAR

Study Guide

SMALL CHANGE

Study Guide written by Dominic Francis
Designed by JSW Creative
Edited by Rosie Dalling
Photographs by Johan Persson and Hugo Glendinning



This programme has been made possible by the generous support of Kenneth Cohen, The Bay Foundation, Sir John Cass's Foundation, Nöel Coward Foundation, John Lyon's Charity and Universal Consolidated Group

Contents

Section 1 **Cast and Creative Team**

Section 2 **An introduction to Peter Gill and his work**
Biography
The writer-director
Prevailing ideas and themes in his plays

Section 3 **SMALL CHANGE – The play**
An introduction to the play and its original production
Timeline

Section 4 **SMALL CHANGE in rehearsal**
Inside the rehearsal room – 2008
Inside the rehearsal room – 1968
The writer-director – An interview with Peter Gill
An interview with Assistant Director, Abbey Wright

Section 5 **SMALL CHANGE in performance**
Practical and written exercises based on an extract from the play
Questions on the production and further practical work

Section 6 **Ideas for further study**
Reading and research
Bibliography
Endnotes

Preface by Michael Grandage,

Artistic Director of the Donmar Warehouse

In 1980 I worked for a year in the ICA box office while auditioning for drama schools. During that time I made enough contacts with other box offices to get around the London theatre scene without too much financial strain. I would regularly see about five or six shows a week. This swiftly introduced me to the curious power of theatre. It seemed possible that at any one performance someone sitting in seat G13 could be having their life changed and the person in G14 could be losing the will to live.

Early in 1983, on a Saturday afternoon, I sat down in the Cottesloe Theatre to watch a play called *Small Change*, written and directed by Peter Gill. I'd already had a few years of excited theatre-going, but that afternoon I was the person in seat G13 having my life changed.

For the first time, I was so absorbed by character that I became unaware of the actor. Direction, design and lighting all appeared to inhabit the same world. That afternoon, I watched a story about the friendship and heartaches between mothers and sons that seemed, through its poetic language, to be speaking directly to me.

This is a common and interesting occurrence in Gill's work. I have heard people in foyers after his plays say, 'But this was my life.' There are certain recurring themes throughout his work but you clearly don't have to be Welsh, working class, Catholic or gay to experience the exciting phenomenon of watching a little part of yourself come to life on stage. It's the mark of a great writer. His tough and exquisite use of language has the ability to tap into something beneath the surface in all of us.[1]

section 1

Cast and Creative Team

Cast (in order of speaking)

Matt Ryan

Gerard, a young man who struggles to escape his past and the grim surroundings of his childhood on the east side of Cardiff.

Sue Johnston

Mrs Harte, Gerard's mother, she has a strong connection with her son and likewise longs to be free but she remains resigned to her fate.

Luke Evans

Vincent, Gerard's childhood friend, later an apprentice down at the docks, he's also trying to make sense of his past.

Lindsey Coulson

Mrs Driscoll, Vincent's mother, a hard working woman. She struggles to cope with a big family and feelings of extreme isolation.

Creative Team

Peter Gill, Author and Director

Plays: *The York Realist* (English Touring Theatre at Royal Court, 2002), *The Look Across the Eyes, Lovely Evening* (BBC Radio 4, 2001), *Certain Young Men* (Almeida, 1999), *Friendly Fire* (NT, 1998-99), *Cardiff East* (NT, 1997), *Mean Tears* (NT, 1987), *In the Blue* (NT, 1985), *Kick for Touch* (NT, 1983), *Small Change* (Royal Court, 1976), *The Sleeper's Den, Over Gardens Out* (Royal Court, 1969).

Adaptations and versions: *A Provincial Life, The Cherry Orchard, The Seagull* (Chekhov), *The Merry-Go-Round, Touch and Go* (D.H. Lawrence), *As I Lay Dying* (Faulkner), *Original Sin* (after Wedekind).

Productions include: For the Donmar he has directed *Days of Wine and Roses* (2005). Classical plays directed include: *The Importance of Being Earnest* (Vaudeville, 2008), *Gaslight* (Old Vic, 2007), *Look Back in Anger* (Theatre Royal Bath, 2006), *The Voysey Inheritance* (NT, 2006), *Romeo and Juliet* (RSC, 2004-05), *Uncle Vanya* (Field Day tour, 1995), *The Way of the World* (Lyric Hammersmith, 1992), *The Cherry Orchard* (Riverside Studios, 1978), *The Changeling* (Riverside Studios, 1978), *Twelfth Night* (RSC, 1974 and Aldwych, 1975).

New plays directed include: *Epitaph for George Dillon* (ATG, 2005), *Scenes from the Big Picture* (NT, 2003), *Speed-the-Plow* (ATG, 2000), *Tongue of a Bird* (Almeida, 1997), *New England* (RSC, 1994), *Mrs. Klein* (NT, 1988), *Venice Preserv'd or a Plot Discovered* (NT, 1984), *Tales from Hollywood* (NT, 1983), *Danton's Death* (NT, 1982), *Much Ado About Nothing* (NT, 1981), *Twelfth Night* (RSC, 1974).

Plays directed for the Royal Court include: *A Collier's Friday Night, The Local Stigmatic, A Provincial Life, The Soldier's Fortune, Crimes of Passion, The Daughter-in-Law, The Widowing of Mrs Holroyd, Life Price, Over Gardens Out, The Sleeper's Den, The Duchess of Malfi, Crete and Sergeant Pepper, The Merry-Go-Round, The Fool, Small Change*.

Peter Gill became an Assistant Director of the Royal Court in 1964 and then an Associate Director in 1970. He was the founding Director of Riverside Studios in 1976, became Associate Director of the NT (1980-97) and founding Director of the NT Studio (1984-90).

Anthony Ward, Designer

For the Donmar: *Mary Stuart* (also at the Apollo), *Uncle Vanya, Twelfth Night* (also at the Brooklyn Academy of Music), *Assassins, Nine, To the Green Fields Beyond*.

Theatre: Anthony has worked extensively at the NT and the RSC. Other productions include: *Marianne Dreams, The Rehearsal* (Almeida), *Glengarry Glen Ross* (Apollo), *Rhinoceros, The Arsonist* (Royal Court), *Macbeth* – Olivier and Evening Standard Award nomination 2007 (Gielgud, Chichester Festival Theatre and Brooklyn Academy of Music), *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* (London Palladium and Broadway), *Gypsy* (Broadway), *Oliver!* (London Palladium), *Oklahoma!* – Olivier Award winner for Set Design 1999 (NT), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – Olivier Award winner for Costume Design 1996, *King Lear, The Tempest, The Winter's Tale* (RSC).

Opera includes: *Peter Grimes, Gloriana* (Opera North), *Macbeth* (ROH), *The Magic Flute* (Glyndebourne), *The Carmelites* (ENO and WNO).

Dance includes: *Masquerade, Les Rendez-vous, Dance Variations* (Royal Ballet), *Matthew Bourne's Nutcracker!* (Sadler's Wells and UK tour).

Hugh Vanstone, Lighting Designer

For the Donmar: *Mary Stuart, Grand Hotel, Pacific Overtures* – Olivier Award winner 1994, *Twelfth Night, Uncle Vanya, Orpheus Descending, Juno and the Paycock, The Blue Room* – Olivier Award winner 1999, *The Front Page, Insignificance*.

Theatre includes: *God of Carnage* (Gielgud), *Boeing Boeing* (Comedy and Broadway), *Spamalot* (Australia, Las Vegas, Broadway, US and London), *The Three Musketeers* (Boston, USA), *Present Laughter, Rafta, Rafta..., Market Boy, The Cherry Orchard* – Olivier Award winner 2000 (NT), *The Pain and the Itch* (Royal Court), *Epitaph for George Dillon* (Comedy), *The Graduate* – Olivier Award winner 2000 (Gielgud), *The Unexpected Man* – Olivier Award winner 1999 (RSC).

Opera: *The Carmelites* (ENO), *Carmen* (Opera North), *The Bartered Bride (Glyndebourne)*.

section 2

An introduction to Peter Gill and his work

Biography

In his introduction to the first volume of Peter Gill's plays, the director John Burgess describes the author and his work as 'one of the best kept secrets of the British theatre.'[2] Despite having worked as a successful writer and director for over forty years, Gill lacks the notoriety of many of his contemporaries, but within the theatre industry itself he is widely admired and respected.

'In the theatre community he has always been a key figure,' explains Michael Grandage. 'Whenever I've met writers it's been very noticeable to me that they often say he was one of their influences. In any field there are specialised influences that don't necessarily get heard about by a wider public. Among theatre goers he is generally known but he has never had the prominence of Pinter or Stoppard, partly because his [writing] output is not large.'[3]

Others testify to this viewpoint, the theatre critic Michael Coveney commenting that the situation reflects a 'peculiarly British aspect of philistinism.'[4] Director Dominic Dromgoole is equally critical, suggesting that Gill has eschewed popularity in pursuit of his artistic ideals:

'Peter Gill is a fine proof of the pusillanimity of large parts of the contemporary theatre scene. Without doubt one of the finest directors in the country... He is also one of our most original and particular writers. Yet for long periods he has been excluded from the centre of our theatre culture simply because he believes in intrinsic value rather than surface glitter.'[5]

Looking over Gill's extensive CV his status is apparent, the resume documenting a long and distinguished career. In addition to his work as a writer, directing credits include over eighty productions in the UK (at the National Theatre, RSC and Royal Court Theatre among others), Europe and North America. He has also held Associate Director positions at the Royal Court and the National. In 1976 he became the founding director of the Riverside Studios and several years later, in 1984, the NT Studio. (For more details see Section 1, 'Cast and Creative Team'.)

Born in 1939 in a working-class area of Cardiff, Wales, Gill's first contact with the theatre came as an eleven-year-old boy. 'The first play I saw was at school,' he recollects. 'There was a big assembly hall, with a stage, and a friend of mine found out that if you put the chairs out for the caretaker, then you could see the play… I remember the first play I saw was Moliere's *Tartuffe*. I thought it was the funniest thing I'd ever seen… After that we always put the chairs, so we saw *Much Ado About Nothing*, and various strange kinds of plays that had been done in London and then used to be done by the amateurs. And that's how I got interested.'[6]

Gill then attended a local drama school, Cardiff Castle (now the Welsh College of Music and Drama), where Anthony Hopkins was in the year above. He left after a year to take up a position as Assistant Stage Manager on an Arts Council tour round South Wales and the north-east. Having been an ASM at Nottingham Playhouse for a while, Gill then auditioned to appear in a play at the Royal Court, where he first worked as an understudy and appeared in some of the now famous Sunday night productions 'without décor' (including Arnold Wesker's *The Kitchen*). Meanwhile he had begun to explore in private his own writing and was beginning to move away from acting towards directing, becoming an Assistant Director at the Court in 1964.

'At that time I decided to stop acting, because I'd been in a film, and I didn't feel that I was a good enough actor, or that I was a natural enough actor in my head.'[7] He expands upon his thinking in another interview. 'At the age of 24 I recognised I was not going to be the sort of actor I wanted to be. I was interested in theatre, not just acting. I always wanted to go to the other rehearsals. I'd realised I was interested in this thing of the director, the holder of the interpretative idea.'[8]

In 1965 Desmond O'Donovan directed a Sunday night production of Gill's first play *The Sleepers Den* at the Court, which Gill himself revived four years later. During this time he also accomplished one of his greatest achievements. In 1968 he directed a triple-bill – *A Collier's Friday Night, The Daughter-in-Law* and *The Widowing of Mrs Holroyd* – thereby introducing DH Lawrence's plays to the theatre. A critical and box office success, Gill went on to direct several more productions at the Court, including *The Duchess of Malfi* (1971), *The Merry-Go-Round* (1973) and *The Fool* (1975).

At this stage Gill still considered himself primarily a director although he continued to explore his own writing. 'I was directing, which is a time-consuming thing. I was writing, but it was a kind of private thing to me… a secret activity. Because I've never been very good at getting up and doing a fixed number of words… Then it really was a sort of accruing of notes, or forays into an area that seemed to keep recurring.'[9] This resulted in *Over Gardens Out* (1968) and SMALL CHANGE (1976), both directed by Gill himself.

Over the past thirty years he has continued to direct for all the leading theatres and companies, including: *Twelfth Night* (RSC, 1974), *Much Ado About Nothing* (NT, 1981), *The Way of the World* (Lyric Hammersmith, 1992), *Speed the Plow* (ATG, 2000), *Romeo and Juliet* (RSC, 2004) and *The Voysey Inheritance* (NT, 2006). Throughout this time, in addition to producing adaptations and new versions of

old plays, Gill has continued to write original material, directing the premieres of each new play: *Kick for Touch* (NT, 1983), *In the Blue* (NT, 1985), *Mean Tears* (NT, 1987), *Cardiff East* (NT, 1995), *Certain Young Men* (Almeida Theatre, 1999), *The York Realist* (English Touring Theatre, 2000) and *Original Sin* (Crucible Theatre, Sheffield, 2002).

'If he's so brilliant, and as his plays delight their audiences, why isn't he famous?' asked fellow writer and collaborator Nicholas Wright during his opening lecture for the Peter Gill Festival at the Crucible Theatre, Sheffield in 2002. 'It is a fact that the media and the public, very reasonably, like a certain clearcutness about the people they celebrate. And Peter Gill is a mass of contradictions.'[10]

But there's no doubting his legacy. 'In his plays, Peter Gill has inspired many of us over the years with his rich use of language and his strong poetic voice,' wrote Michael Grandage in the festival's programme. 'His contribution to theatre in this country is immeasurable. As a director he has inspired an entire generation of actors and theatre practitioners to develop their craft.'[11]

The writer-director

The interplay and occasional tension between the roles of writer and director is something Gill has had to negotiate throughout his career, preferring to separate the two. This duality, or lack of 'clearcutness' as Wright puts it, has hampered his public recognition, although Gill concedes, 'People are now more forgiving of writers who also direct.'[12] The issue is one of categorisation: 'I think there's a problem if you direct your own plays – not that you necessarily don't direct them well, but people start thinking you're one thing rather than another, people want to compartmentalise.'[13]

The legendary director Tyrone Guthrie once commented: 'It is not wise for authors to direct their own work. An interpreter with a fresh eye and ear, and without an author's overtenderness towards his own brain child, is a valuable intermediary between a script and an audience.'[14]

But Gill's experience as a writer informs his direction, whether of his own or other's work. He insists on serving the text. 'I've always believed that you work from the author… I'm not really interested in great directorial theories: I want to bring out the meaning of plays as best I can, in the interest first of the author and then of the actors.'[15]

The journalist John Barber observed Gill in rehearsal for the first production of SMALL CHANGE in 1976: 'When Gill reads a play, he forms a strong relationship with the text, and may be unable to form one with the author when they meet. Gill quotes [DH] Lawrence: "Don't trust the singer, trust the song"… But Gill found that handling his own work was not much different, except that he relied more on advice and support. He found that he was not able to respond freshly to the script until quite late on, when the actors were in rehearsal and he was suddenly forced into an objective position. In the early stages he was embarrassed to know whether, if something seemed wrong, it was the actors who were at fault or the lines he had given them to say.'[16]

Gill's attitude to directing is straightforward: 'Directing is mainly a matter of someone taking the responsibility – saying "I will do it." The art of directing is directing the actors in *the play*, making the performance live, and yet remaining

true to the style that the play is written in. I don't block the play formally – the only method I know is to read the play a lot.'[17]

Later he expanded upon his directorial approach: 'I have no gift for extrapolating the whole meaning of a play from a few key phrases… I do not have an "interpretative" approach. I get to know the play very well and then work with the actors and while I don't want to sound mystical, I don't really know how we arrive at the production we get.

'Initially we spend a lot of time working out a text on which we finally are all agreed. It is rare then that I am in direct conflict with an actor's interpretation. When I do it is appalling. I am not terribly manipulative. I can't spend days deviously trying to get someone to do something. When there is a clash it is unresolved.

'The first person I work with is the designer. The designer helps me learn about the play. It is better to start as soon as possible with the designer since your mind begins to become full of images which you should work on straight away. Ideally we should all start together. But the economics of British theatre, which does not allow anywhere near as much rehearsal time as you get abroad, make it impossible to be in from the start.

'Authors like to come out of their study and be at rehearsals. But some have the problem that they cannot rewrite… But I am not in the business of restructuring plays. I am a writer myself and my sympathies are totally with the author. But in the end the play is the thing.'[18]

One of Gill's great influences is the early twentieth-century writer-director Harley Granville-Barker (author of *The Voysey Inheritance*), whom he describes as 'the father of modern British theatre.'[19] His impact upon the role of the director was significant. 'Barker led a movement in which the director was seen as the person best placed to animate the play,' explains Gill, 'to bring together in an imaginative form the various elements that make up a production.'[20]

In his review of the original production of *The Voysey Inheritance* at the Royal Court in 1905, Max Beerbohm commented on the precision of the direction: 'the mimes at the Court are very carefully stage managed [directed], every one of them being kept in such relation to his fellows as that demanded by the relation in which the various parts stand to one another – no mime getting more, or less, of a chance than the playwright intended him to have.'[21]

This could equally apply to Gill's approach as director. 'Peter stands out as someone who positively revels in unilateral commandment,' says Nicholas Wright, 'sculpting the time, the space, the rhythm of the event into an expressive whole: "directing", as it used to be called.'[22]

Prevailing ideas and themes in his plays

Admirers of Gill's writing usually comment upon his use of language, his ability to find the poetic resonance of everyday speech. It is quiet, understated. Nicholas Wright refers to 'the grace and simplicity of the dialogue… the beating heart… Peter's writing had a transparency which led me into his characters' inner lives.'[23] Theatre critic David Benedict describes the work as, 'Unfashionably quiet, beautifully composed and emotionally acute', remembering the plays for 'their remarkable compassion and linguistic finesse.'[24]

Musical analogies abound with reference to Gill's work, fellow writer Christopher Hampton insists that the plays be 'acted with musical precision.'[25] Dominic Dromgoole agrees: 'The prime virtue of Peter's writing is his dialogue. It is quite extraordinary. It is the definition of the word buoyant. Although studiedly naturalistic, and frequently fastidiously demotic, it has the most wonderful internal rhythm. Scraps of speech, phrases, non-sequiturs, repetitions combine to form a music that is both utterly real and strangely operatic. It is the verbal equivalent of a sprung dance floor.'[26]

'Good actors feast upon his theatrically generous writing but not because of traditionally juicy, grandstanding lead roles,' says David Benedict. 'Gill's almost musical prose is pared right down – all the better to act upon – and narratives are shared, every part balanced to create an emotional whole.'[27]

Parallels have been drawn with a number of other writers, Steven Unwin, Artistic Director of English Touring Theatre, likens Gill to 'a kind of English Chekhov, with all the heart.'[28] Journalist Kate Joyner saw the perhaps inevitable influence of DH Lawrence: '[Gill's] own writing encompasses the same complex, interwoven family relationships and working-class emotions.'[29] Gill himself concedes the possibility, 'You're always influenced by things you like yourself.'[30]

Certainly Gill's childhood growing up in a poor working-class part of Cardiff has had a lasting impact upon his work. He almost always writes about the community he comes from – the landscape of Gill's plays is a forgotten Wales: 'It is always underpinned with a profound sense of melancholy,' reflects Nicholas Wright. 'Peter cannot depict the home of his youth without a sense of sadness and loss. These houses will be pulled down, perhaps already have been.'[31] It is a poor world of back-to-back grates, outside lavatories and keeping quiet when the club man calls.

Then there are the recurring characters, such as the gifted son (Gerard in SMALL CHANGE, Dennis in *Over Gardens Out*): '[He] will leave home, will cut the ties, will be forever unable to convey to the people who are closest to him, the enjoyment he gets from success, from books, from foreign films, from smart food,' says Wright.[32] Closely linked to this character is the often distressed or ill mother (Mrs Harte and Mrs Driscoll in SMALL CHANGE, Mrs Shannon in *The Sleepers Den*): 'Their lives are the ordinary ones of marriages, deaths, neighbourly support.'[33] However much Gerard may beg his mother to run away with him they both know it's impossible:

Gerard Come back with me.
Mrs Harte I wouldn't fit in up there.
Gerard Come back with me. I'll find a place.
Mrs Harte I'd love to, but it's not to be.
Gerard Why?
Mrs Harte Don't ask me, son. That's how it is.[34]

All this is underpinned by an all pervading Catholicism – strong, dignified, riven with neurosis – which is at odds with the nature and boundaries of love, both gay and straight, to which Gill consistently returns. Reflecting on his work, he comments, 'I don't know what their common themes are, to be honest. Two of them are set in Cardiff. You can't come from Cardiff and not be influenced by it. There are mothers, significantly, in two of the plays but women don't play much of a part in the others.'[35]

But Nicholas Wright is clear what Gill was doing in bringing these various elements together: 'He was transforming the dead tradition of kitchen-sink naturalism into a poetic form, one which gave a classic nobility to working-class life.'[36]

section 3

SMALL CHANGE – The play

An introduction to the play and its original production

SMALL CHANGE is set on the east side of Cardiff in the 1950s and tells the story of the friendship between two boys, Gerard and Vincent, and their relationship with their mothers, Mrs Harte and Mrs Driscoll. We witness the various loyalties and betrayals between them and the sons' endeavours to come to terms with their past and make sense of their complicated emotional inheritance. Written and first produced at the Royal Court Theatre in 1976, the play is widely regarded as Peter Gill's masterpiece. It deals evocatively with the everyday pain of childhood, adolescence, growing up and growing apart. It is a tragedy about the things that go unsaid and are forever unresolved.

'I've rarely read a play so dense and full of colour, so full of the unsaid as *Small Change*,' says director Rufus Norris, who directed a revival of the play at the Peter Gill Festival in 2002. 'It is a poetic torrent of yearning, fury and regret at missed opportunities: to express love, to break away, to prevent tragedy. The world of the play – its atmosphere, smell, music – is intoxicating, and the detail clearly full to the brim with honesty and depth.'[37]

Reviews of the original production describe the play as 'austerely passionate', the product of a 'puritan imagination'.[38] Writing in the Observer, theatre critic Michael Coveny suggests, 'The play… amounted almost to a poetic treatise on how people of limited vocabulary struggle to articulate complex emotions.'[39] And while recognising the truth and luminosity of the writing, all the reviews recognised the challenges of staging such a piece.

'Life as Mr Gill wishes to show it is quite incompatible with any storytelling convention,' commented Irving Wardle in his review for the Times. 'It consists of a thousand evocative details… of a continual interplay of past and present, so that whatever the characters are doing or saying at any given moment, the memories of what they did and said last time drag behind them like a lengthening string of tin cans.'[40]

Even reading the play requires extreme amounts of concentration. Most scripts are divided into acts and scenes, like chapters in a book, but not SMALL CHANGE. Apart from the division into two halves the play's individual scenes aren't numbered, the only delineation in the published text being indicated by extra spaces between lines of dialogue. The Samuel French acting edition suggests, 'Scene breaks in the action, indicating changes of mood and the repositioning of characters, are shown in the text by large spaces between speeches.'[41] This creates a script uncluttered by stage directions, the emphasis being placed wholly on the dialogue and therefore the interaction between the characters. However, even these spaces must be interpreted carefully. In the notes at the beginning of his 1987 play *Mean Tears*, Gill states, 'Scene divisions are not intended to stem the flow of action.'[42]

For some, trying to interpret Gill's intentions can be a confusing and ultimately frustrating experience. Nicholas Wright recalls, 'A very good director who I think would quite like to have directed the Peter Gill script he'd just read, complained that since the action was all over the place, and neither exits, entrances nor stage directions had been provided, nobody other than Peter could direct it anyway.'[43]

SMALL CHANGE contains numerous temporal shifts, the action moving backwards and forwards in time. A pattern of recurring motifs is established early on to which the play continually returns, building upon them each time so we learn more on every occasion. Scenes are structured around the habitual domestic routines of the two women, as twenty years of life are compressed into a couple of hours, thereby dissolving the boundaries between past and present.

'The scenario is cavalier in its use of time sequences,' says Coveny, 'the whole effect one of a Proustian working-class mosaic.'[44] But this aesthetic goes beyond naturalism to a different kind of reality, at once heightened and more real. 'Gill's fragmentary writing brings his characters into closer focus than any conventional narrative,' suggests critic Victoria Radin. 'It is a vividness which relies on the brevity and understatement of the writing.'[45]

Like the play, Gill's previous productions of SMALL CHANGE have been similarly sparse. A note at the beginning of the Samuel French acting edition reads: 'When Peter Gill's production opened at the Royal Court it was played on a 24-foot square, steeply raked… The stage was constructed of plywood shattering board which came from a building site and was cantilevered so that, when lit, it appeared to be floating. In order to avoid being overly austere the surface of the floor was painted with a collage of images suggestive of the atmosphere of the play.'[46] For the Donmar revival the design has largely recreated this look. The only furniture on stage are four chairs, so that every element of both play and production is focused upon the characters and the performances the actors give.

'There are no kitchen sinks or French windows to cling to,' says Rufus Norris. 'The time-frame and location change so frequently that it is clear the play can only exist in the words, intentions, and physical relationships of one body to another… The acting demands of this play are considerable. All the parts are big, some massive; the accent is specific and common to all of them; they never leave the stage, so the levels of commitment and stamina required are terrific.'[47]

Referring to these challenges within the original production, Irving Wardle observes, 'Mr Gill's method is partly one of musical organization, implicit as much in his cast's stylised attitudes, frozen into mute postures of appeal or defeat, as in the repetitions and long-range echoes of his dialogue.'[48] Nicholas Wright comments upon the physicality of the actors and their careful choreography in relation to one another, 'The figures in space look like the single still which some great photographer has chosen among the thousand he's thrown away.'

Some have criticised Gill for the austerity of his work, suggesting it is too bleak. 'Simplicity is certainly a Gill hallmark, but it is often argued that his work carries no emotional punch. Quite the reverse,' argues Michael Coveny. 'There is a sort of puritanical holding back until the production can bear it no longer and the floodgates open.'[49] The plays, suggests Irving Wardle, 'take aesthetic purity to an extreme that can barely support human life. But where they succeed, they tell the truth about the experience of getting through one day after another in a way beyond the reach of linear storytelling.'[50]

This purity means any director has to focus on the reality of staging SMALL CHANGE, as Rufus Norris puts it, to 'Capture the bitter truth of it, the raw humanity, or fail. There is nowhere to hide.' Nicholas Wright neatly sums up the coming together of Gill the writer and director:

'The fabric of the plays… is made up of moments of intense reality, knitted together by association or by train of thought, rather than by the dictates of a linear plot. Gill the director matches this with an expressionist use of the stage: figures from the past exist side-by-side with characters from the present, different spaces coalesce into one, memory nudges its way into actual time, just as it does in life.'[51]

In performance, SMALL CHANGE offers an audience a very different experience to most plays. Theatre critic Harold Hobson, in his review for the Sunday Times, has some useful advice: 'This beautiful play is as much a challenge as [Samuel Beckett's] *Waiting for Godot…* and if you just let it happen to you, you will find it a rich and rare experience.'[52]

Timeline

As the action of the play moves back and forth over a period of approximately thirty years, from the late 1930s to the mid 1970s, the following is an attempt to establish when each scene takes place and give some indication of the age of the male characters. Individual lines which punctuate scenes – essentially echoes from the past – have not been included as separate scenes. The timeline is based upon the SMALL CHANGE 'Chronology' prepared by Assistant Director Abbey Wright. This was referred to in rehearsals by the cast and creative team.

NB – The first line of each scene is given as a reference. All page references refer to the edition of SMALL CHANGE in *Peter Gill*: Plays 1 (Faber and Faber 2002).

Act One

Scene One (pp.113-115)
Gerard It was clean. I make that up. But it was…
1961/1965 Gerard in his 20s (27)

Scene Two (pp.116-121)
Mrs Driscoll Your legs get cold just nipping across the back like that…
1950/1954

Scene Three (p.121)
Vincent She used to sit rubbing her ankles…
1952/1956 Vincent is 18

Mrs Driscoll I have been in worse states…
1951/1955 Vincent is 17

Scene Four (pp.121-122)
Gerard Over the tide-field…
1962/1966 Gerard in his 20s (28)

Scene Five (p.122)
Mrs Harte Where have you been?
1948/1952 Gerard is 14

Scene Six (pp.122-123)
Vincent It's all right, it's me.
1948/1952 Vincent is 14

Scene Seven (p.123)
Mrs Harte Where have you been?
1948/1952 Gerard is 14

Scene Eight (pp.123-124)
Mrs Driscoll Have you been swimming?
1948/1952 Vincent is 14

Scene Nine (pp.124-125)
Gerard Where you going?
1944/1948 Gerard and Vincent are 9/10

Scene Ten (p.126)
Mrs Harte Come here, let me look at you…
1941/1945 Gerard is 6

Scene Eleven (pp.127-128)
Vincent Gerard.
1946/1950 Gerard and Vincent are 12

Scene Twelve (p.128)
Gerard Or earlier…
1939/1943 Gerard is 4/5

Scene Thirteen (p.128)
Vincent You coming over the field, Ger?
1944/1948 Gerard and Vincent are 9/10

Scene Fourteen (pp.128-129)
Gerard Perhaps I'd been over the park…
1962/1966 Gerard in his 20s (28)

Scene Fifteen (pp.129-132)
Vincent Do you want a lift, Gerard?
1947/1951 Gerard and Vincent are 13/14

Scene Sixteen (pp.132-133)
Gerard Or perhaps I'd been over the park…
1962/1966 Gerard in his 20s (28)

Scene Seventeen (pp.133-136)
Mrs Driscoll Aren't you going out, Vincent?
1947/1951 Gerard and Vincent are 13/14

Scene Eighteen (pp.136-137)
Gerard The afternoon was…
1956/1960 Gerard in his early 20s (22)

Scene Nineteen (pp.137-138)
Mrs Harte I could lend you ten bob.
1956/1960 Gerard in his early 20s (22)

Scene Twenty (pp.138-143)
Vincent Where is he?
1951/1955 Vincent is 17

Scene Twenty-One (p.143)
Mrs Driscoll He's grieving…
1951/1955 Vincent is 17

Scene Twenty-Two (pp.143-147)
Gerard The sun's blinding me…
1949/1953 Gerard and Vincent are 15

Scene Twenty-Three (pp.148-150)
Mrs Driscoll Oh, Mrs Harte, I felt as if I didn't exist…
1951/1955 Vincent is 17

Scene Twenty-Four (p.150)
Mrs Harte She was a strange girl…
1952/1956 Gerard and Vincent are 18

Scene Twenty-Five (pp.150-151)
Gerard Rattling through my dry mind…
1957/1961 Gerard in his early 20s (23)

Scene Twenty-Six (pp.151-153)
Mrs Harte I wish I could come up when you're ill like that…
1958/1962 Gerard in his early 20s (24)

Scene Twenty-Seven (pp.153-154)
Gerard The trees closed like fir-cones…
1959/1963 Gerard in his mid 20s (25)

Scene Twenty-Eight (pp.154-155)
Mrs Harte I couldn't get you out of my sight…
1959/1963 Gerard in his mid 20s (25)

Scene Twenty-Nine (p.155)
Mrs Harte I watched it…
1959/1963 Gerard in his mid 20s (25)

Scene Thirty (pp.156-158)
Mrs Harte When you ran away.
1959/1963 Gerard in his mid 20s (25)

Scene Thirty-One (p.158)
Gerard Look out the back…
1960/1964 Gerard in his 20s (26)

Scene Thirty-Two (pp.158-162)
Vincent Mrs Harte?
1951/1955 Gerard and Vincent are 17

Scene Thirty-Three (p.162-163)
Vincent Eileen went to live away…
1952/1956 Gerard and Vincent are 18

Act Two

Scene One (pp.164-165)
Gerard He was sitting opposite me…
1961/1965 Gerard in his 20s (27)

Scene Two (pp.165-166)
Vincent Did you…
1960/1964 Gerard in his 20s (26)

Scene Three (pp.166-168)
Mrs Harte I got your magazine…
1963/1967 Gerard in his 20s (29)

6

Scene Four (pp.168-171)
Mrs Driscoll How are you then?
1949/1953

Scene Five (pp.171-172)
Gerard I'm exhausted looking out of train windows…
1968/1972 Gerard and Vincent are 34

Scene Six (pp.172-179)
Vincent What, you home then for a couple of days…
1968/1972 Gerard and Vincent are 34

Scene Seven (pp.179-180)
Mrs Driscoll Vincent.
1948/1952 Gerard and Vincent are 14

Scene Eight (p.181)
Gerard In my hospital…
1957/1961 Gerard in his early 20s (23)

Scene Nine (pp.181-182)
Gerard In her hospital ward…
1963/1967 Gerard in his 20s (29)

Scene Ten (pp.182-183)
Gerard I know.
1968/1972 Gerard and Vincent are 34

Scene Eleven (pp.183-184)
Mrs Harte I'm going to the shop.
1952/1956 Gerard and Vincent are 18

Scene Twelve (pp.185-195)
Vincent You did, you know.
1968/1972 Gerard and Vincent are 34

Scene Thirteen (pp.195-197)
Mrs Harte He was a lovely boy…
1961/1965 Gerard in his 20s (27)

Scene Fourteen (p.197)
Gerard Try but can't…
1968/1972 Gerard is 34

section 4

SMALL CHANGE in rehearsal

Inside the rehearsal room – 2008

The first day of rehearsals at the Donmar Warehouse always starts with a 'Meet and Greet'. This is an opportunity for everyone who works at the theatre to meet the Cast and Creative Team of the next production. Everyone assembles at the venue for the four-week rehearsal period of SMALL CHANGE, the elegant Petyt House in Chelsea (where forty years before Peter Gill directed the trilogy of plays by DH Lawrence which helped establish his reputation). On arrival, a crew are transforming the space into a small studio theatre, black tabs suspended from scaffolding bars hide the oil paintings, which cover the walls.

As there is no model box of the set to be unveiled, the meet and greet is relatively short. Peter is keen to get on and the cast of four, understandably nervous, look a little overwhelmed by all the people surrounding them. Having made a brief speech about his feelings towards the play, and how thrilled he is that it's being staged at the Donmar, Artistic Director Michael Grandage begins to usher people out of the room to allow the real work to begin.

I visit rehearsals for the first time at the end of the second week. On a side table is the model box showing the Donmar's performance space subtly transformed by a cantilevered stage, its maroon colouring contrasted by the blue brick wall at the back. Running the length of this is a single shelf decorated with various props – books, bottles, a flask – referred to in the play but never actually used. On stage are four wooden chairs.

Next to the model box are piles of books, CDs and DVDs, and also background material for the play (see Section 6, 'Ideas for further study'). Side-by-side are copies of Plato's Symposium and the Complete Works of Shakespeare, along with a tape of 'Comedy Greats' (Max Miller, Arthur Askey, etc.) Copies of Peter's other plays are nearby for reference.

Classical music is playing before rehearsals begin helping to create a calm ambience. It feels relaxed yet focused. One gets a sense that this is where rigorous, detailed work takes place. According to Assistant Director Abbey Wright, a lot of the first week of rehearsals was spent discussing the play; its story and characters. This is common practice and according to director Josie Rourke, who assisted Peter on his production of John Osbourne's *Luther* at the NT in 2001, part of his usual process: 'I know from assisting Peter that he spends a great deal of time sitting around a table, talking around the play and working on the text. I suspect this is the bit he most enjoys.'[53]

All four actors are called today. They're currently fifteen pages into a third runthrough. The first looked at basic blocking, the second was more detailed and the third concentrates on text. While they wait for the day's work to begin the actors look at their scripts, run lines. Once they start running the scene (Act One, Scene Fourteen, **Gerard** Perhaps I'd been over the park… p.128), Peter immediately starts pacing the room listening intently. He asks the actors to repeat phrases, focusing on pronunciation, stresses. 'Can you hear the music in it?' he asks and I'm reminded of the comments made by various writers and directors that Peter's plays need to be acted with, as Christopher Hampton put it, 'musical precision'. He's a conductor working on a movement within a symphony.

In his introduction to *Actors Speaking*, Peter refers to the idea of 'textual supremacy, of writing and acting being central to the theatrical form, in its concern with the importance of speaking, and its insistence on the musical needs of the text.'[54] This is fundamental to understanding his aesthetic and his approach. He later expands upon the theory:

'It seems to me that good speaking requires first of all the development of an ear. An ear for what the writer has written – its cadence, its tone – and a felt need to find the technical means to express this, so that it appears as if these are the speaker's own words. A feeling for the integrity of the language for its own sake is required, an identification and celebration of the word, and – most importantly – the word's place in the phrase. Phrasing is all, and

phrasing forward towards the stop. To be reliant on punctuation only as far as is necessary for clarity and musicality is important, acknowledging the stop and never overmarking the commas. Producing only the voice required by the writing and the situation – nothing more and nothing less; recognising that the same rules apply to writing of every period.'[55]

For Peter, acting and speaking are the same thing and are, or should be, intrinsically linked to the meaning of the text: 'The action is encoded in the way something has been written. Acting and speaking are bound together. Listening to the tone will unlock the intention, help to activate a line, as much as any method, and will be more accurate in discovering what the intention actually is.'[56]

Peter's insistence upon speaking, and particularly phrasing, was noted by director John Burgess with regard to his work on classic texts: 'One of the qualities Gill admires in the speaking of Shakespeare is fleetness, achieving a performance that is, as he puts it, "new minted but ahead of you". This style of playing corresponds to that springing, forward-leaning, quality in the writing which doesn't just carry the action forward but also catches up everything – feelings, memories, thoughts, reflections – in its movement.'[57]

Back in the rehearsal room Peter makes sure none of the actors run over their lines, that they say every single word. He warns Matt Ryan, who plays Gerard, about pre-empting his lines and emotions – 'Let it come out.' Other times Peter comments, 'Not so heady. Just say it.' It's exhausting work. Stopping and starting, going over the same line again and again. The other actors, on stage throughout in character, sit and listen. 'Hang on a minute,' Peter calls out, 'I just want to work this out.'

They then move on to the next scene (One/Fifteen **Vincent** Do you want a lift, Gerard? p.129), the exchange between Gerard and Mrs Harte at the end. Peter focuses on Gerard's line '*And* I'm bored' and his mother's exasperated response; 'Bored. What you bored with then? Eh? Eh?' (p.132). 'It's not a working-class word, "bored",' comments Peter. 'These people are denied any kind of grandeur. This is where Gerard doesn't like his mother, they can't talk about anything intellectual.'

He suggests that the scene itself is relatively simple. 'In the Brechtian sense it's called: "A mother tries to send her son to school". That's the action you've got to play. That's all it is. It's a little scene about how a mother gets her son to school.' Watching the scene again Peter says to Sue Johnston, who plays Mrs Harte, 'Don't feel a responsibility to push the scene forwards. Take your time for the audience to come to you.'

As the design is so sparse, the actors can feel a little exposed on stage. 'It's hard when there are no doors or things,' sympathises Peter. 'Because we haven't got any props there's no point in "business". You just have to *be*.'

He turns his attention to the characters' entrances and exits, insisting they be an integral part of the performance. 'It's not just getting into position to get the play moving, it's to do with the action.' He believes scene changes accompanied by music have encouraged actors to rush. 'There's no link with what came before and what comes after. If it were a film it'd be a cut.' Again Peter carefully orchestrates the action, almost conducting the movement. 'The thing with these kind of plays is not being too glib,' he explains. 'You just have to find it, it's felt. You've got to sense it. If it were music it'd be easier. Because the writing's light it's easy to let go. It's only when you've got a real grasp on it can you really let it go.'

In total they work through about five pages of text that morning (pp.128-136).

I re-visit rehearsals in the middle of the following week; week three of four. There are more CDs on the table, various music: Paul Robeson, Maria Callas and Janet Baker singing Handel. A collection of songs sung by Ruth Etting is of particular importance as Mrs Driscoll hums one (*Nevertheless*) in Act Two, Scene Four, (p.170) when she and Mrs Harte dance. Abbey tells me the actors have been asked to find music which resonates with their characters, the mood of the music matching the tone of the play. I notice a collection of duets from famous operas. Abbey tells me Peter has an idea that female opera singers can often unlock something in men, articulating different emotions.

Sue Johnston is dancing round the space to May Ellis' *Waltz of my Heart* when Peter continues

the rehearsal with Act One, Scene Twenty-Eight, (pp.154-155) between Gerard and Mrs Harte. He encourages both Sue and Matt Ryan to take their time, 'Don't jump into the scene, just listen to each other.' It's not long before he's on his feet again with the actors. At times it's like he's an unseen fifth character, marking beats with a 'Bumph!', echoing the actors' actions, encouraging them to go further. Peter urges Matt to push through Gerard's line, 'Because you're the only thing I have to show off with. You're the only thing that contents me. You're the only thing I have. That's all I have. It's all I have. You're all I have.' (pp.157-158) 'Exhaust yourself,' says Peter. 'You should be out of breath. This is his – Gerard's – Byronic thing, "Come back with me." He's daring to say what a little child would say, when children make the most extreme statements.' He says of Mrs Harte's line, 'I wouldn't fit in up there' (p.154) – 'It's grander.'

The actors work hard for Peter as they repeat scenes several times. At one point he stops the actors to allow them to run their lines, 'Just do it again for luck.' Then they continue, Peter calling out various instructions, encouraging them: 'Good, good. Go again… Just mark it again… Say what you say, just say it… That's a better tempo, Sue. Just let it happen… A lot of it's to do with just having faith in yourself – to do it. You can always put in speed later.' He stops Matt on Gerard's line, 'What do you mean, ran away? I never ran away.' (p.152) 'No,' says Peter, 'that's too reasonable. She's ridiculous!' He conducts the escalating tension and then they run the scene up to the end of Act One before breaking for tea.

Peter has a previous engagement in the afternoon so in his absence Abbey leads a runthrough from the beginning of Act One, Scene Twenty-Three (p.148) to the end of the first half. Luke Evans, who plays Vincent, comments how hard it is to start halfway through the play, in terms of getting a sense of the overall arc of the story.

Once Peter returns they push on into Act Two. All four characters resume their positions from the top of the play, sitting in the four chairs upstage. Gerard and Vincent lean back and forth as they talk to the audience. 'Just feel that pulse a bit better,' says Peter. The actors are relaxed with one another and wait patiently while Peter looks at the scene one more time. 'Let me just keep looking at this, it's nearly right.' At times like this Peter is on his feet, full of nervous energy. Journalist Victoria Radin once observed, 'He still seems peculiarly vulnerable – one of his best qualities as a director, according to those who've worked with him.'[58]

The actors keep working hard, keen to succeed. 'I don't know,' says Sue after running a scene, 'that wasn't right, was it?' Later, during Mrs Harte and Mrs Driscoll's dance, Peter encourages Sue and Lindsey Coulson to take their time, 'It's quite long till you speak again, girls. Enjoy yourselves.' Lindsey is curious, 'How long before we…?' Once more the reply from Peter comes – 'Just feel it.'

I return to rehearsals for the last time towards the end of the following week, week four, to watch the first of three runthroughs in front of Donmar staff. The cast look nervous and Peter asks the audience to appreciate this is the first time they're going all the way from one end of the play to the other and therefore to be supportive. Despite calling for a few lines the actors give a remarkably slick and assured performance. The transformation over four weeks is incredible and there are some genuinely moving moments within the production.

Although there's a lot of work left to do, the cast look relieved. They have a show. Everyone agrees that by the time they get to first preview and opening night they'll have something really special.

Inside the rehearsal room – 1968

The following are edited highlights from Barry Hanson's rehearsal diary for the trilogy of plays by DH Lawrence (*A Collier's Friday Night, The Daughter-in-Law* and *The Widowing of Mrs Holroyd*) directed by Peter Gill and staged at the Royal Court Theatre in 1968. Hanson's notes provide another insight into some of Gill's rehearsal techniques and offer an interesting addendum to the SMALL CHANGE rehearsals, both of which took place in the same location – Petyt House – separated by a period of forty years.

(Barry Hanson was Production Assistant to Peter Gill on the three Lawrence plays.)

March 1967

For some months before the start of rehearsals, the director and his two assistants re-read all the plays, the usual books of criticism and a number of novels – *Sons and Lovers* especially.

8-13 January 1968

Quick, rough blocking.

Now the delicate synchronisation between action and word required by naturalism becomes apparent. The actors are told to *believe* in the physical world. Gill insists on bowls and baking tins being put down and picked up for their own value… We

are told when running the scenes, "They must not get away with anything"… Gill insists on the actors listening to their parts and giving words, sentences and actions their own value.

Instead of applying the accent and lessons learned from a dialect record it is decided to try to get the company to adopt a neutral stance, so that the accent emerges through listening to the author's cadences rather than through applied vowel sounds. Time after time during these rehearsals they are made to simply say the lines and listen to the rhythm of the scene.

22-27 January 1968

Victor Henry, Anne Dyson and John Barrett are remarkable in that they play emotion truthfully and immediately. Beware! The text is suffering. From now on the assistants are watching to see if any of the words are altered. The director will have every single word written by Lawrence spoken.

5-10 February 1968

His sense of humour has never deserted him… The director works nervously and with tremendous speed. There is very little wasted discussion in any of these rehearsals.

11-24 February 1968

A passing-the-object improvisation… The actors have to imagine an object and pass it on to the next person, who has to turn it into something else without thinking. They sit in a circle and the objects change round. The important thing about this exercise is to get the actors to naturally take what is given to them and use it, rather than any cleverness, as an occupational mime.

The second exercise is to play the whole of the first scene without words. No pig-mime is allowed, no beams or grimaces to substitute for absent speeches. Amazingly quickly, the actors are playing the scene very well, relating to each through their separate physical actions, easily preserving the flow of the scene through its different moods.

Gill constantly questions the actors about the sequence of the play. He regards it as important that they should be really aware of the *kind* of time they exist in.

Another almost daily piece of work is to turn on an actor and ask him to recreate the background of his character, answering questions from Gill quickly and fluently about the other characters.

Probably what is finally impressive about Peter Gill's work is its total commitment; he loves the writer whose work he is presenting and will not allow any short-changing: the experience of the plays has to have more than just a bare approximation in the lives of his actors, and he'll pursue, bully and inspire them with an intense and generous energy to this end. What he teaches about acting is physical, practical and immediate.[59]

An interview with Peter Gill, the writer-director of SMALL CHANGE

Q What's it like revisiting a play you wrote and first directed over thirty years ago?

PG It's quite difficult really, because though I've seen it a couple of times done by other people, I haven't read it since it was published in a collection. So it's quite hard because it's not quite what you thought it was. I wrote it, I realise with certain ideas of how to do it in mind, so you have to find out what those are – with minimum scenery and that kind of thing. You have to find out what that means in the context of a new production in a new theatre.

Q This is the third time you've revived SMALL CHANGE, isn't it?

PG I did it when it was at the Royal Court and then I revived that production at Riverside Studios when I opened it. Then a couple of years later I wrote another play and I did it with that in a season at the National. But then I used all the same actors except for one.

Q For this production you have a brand new cast?

PG It's all new. New designer, everything.

Q But do you have an abiding vision for the play which determines how you do it each time or do you treat it like a new text?

PG Well, you try and make it like a new text but, as I say, since it's written not to have an extravagant production – there are many scenes, it's all quick moving – there's only a relative number of ways you can do that. You have to try and see what solutions come to mind. You think, 'Oh, that's what happened before' and you have to fit that into what's new. So you have to do a new production but you can't be so silly in a play like this as to ignore what came before because a lot of what the production is, was imagined as I was writing it, or certain elements of it anyway.

Q And when you're in the rehearsal room how do you hold the dual role of the writer-director in your mind? Do you forget about the writer?

PG I forget the writer. The most wonderful situation is one in which the writer's not here! And I always have that relationship to plays. I don't ever cut anything. I just accept plays for what they are when I direct them so I do much the same with my own. I don't ask for rewrites or anything from writers.

Q Do you have a certain approach as a director? Obviously different texts make different demands.

PG Well, all texts are different but you can apply some of the same rules. Part of the opening period of the rehearsal process is getting to know who your actors actually are, as opposed to who you think they are. And your job is really getting the actors and the text to make this fusion, in which you try and encourage the actors to be more of themselves in a curious way than they want to be. Or to produce more of the qualities that seem in them right for the part. It's the meeting of the actor and the part that is the interpretation, I think.

Q And do you follow a certain pattern over a five-week rehearsal period?

PG With this, because it's only four weeks in the rehearsal room – which is I think what you have to think of as the rehearsal period – I didn't perhaps spend as much time at the beginning just getting into the piece in various ways. We did have some preparatory time but then we had to pitch into the work.

Q You would have liked more time?

PG A little bit more. Just doing things that ease you in, or looking at certain parts of the play. It depends on the play and the actors. If you're doing a Shakespeare play with young actors then the textual thing is big for them, so that will take more of the time.

Q If this were the first piece of theatre a young person came to see what would you hope they'd take away from the experience of SMALL CHANGE at the Donmar?

PG I think for a lot of kids it's a completely different generation and certain of the cultural things will be different, but the play should express something about life that they recognise in a poetic form and hopefully they'll begin to understand what all that means.

An interview with Abbey Wright, Assistant Director on SMALL CHANGE

Q Having observed Peter in rehearsals do you think he has an abiding vision for this play?

AW Peter is open to what the actors bring to the process. He's delighted with the cast and one of his notes, which he keeps saying, relates to the clash of the personal and the art. This is where the actor is moving towards the character, and that's the art working, but at the same time they're also bringing the character towards them. Peter said early on there should be no caricature. You don't need to play the characters, you're playing the simplicity and truth of the text very much from the actors' own centres. So he's very keen to use the actors as they are and to get to their most true self, to the most pure form that that actor can be in.

Q So potentially that's quite exposing for an actor as they're being asked to bring a lot of themselves to the character.

AW Well, yes it is, but I think that's what good acting should always be and what good directors should always be aiming for. And I think, in that sense, Peter is a purist and he's very pure about his art. I think that's what always should be happening on stage. That actors aren't allowed to fudge the issue. It's that uncompromising challenge to an actor to go down that road and to reveal themselves and just be there. It's that thing of just 'being' and the simplicity of that, but also the difficulty of removing all those layers.

Q But in a way the actors are already quite exposed on stage. There are only four of them and not much in the way of design – some chairs and no props.

AW And that's wonderful because not having any props releases the sensuality of the actors in a much more primal way. It's the opposite of that fake TV aesthetic of realism where you've got everything there, you've got a whole set kitted out, which actually lets the actors hide. So it's about finding a more primal truth and a more sensual truth beyond that, I think. Because the play is a poem of sorts, but it's judging that so it sits both with the poetry and with a realistic truth as well.

Q How does Peter start rehearsals? Does he have certain exercises he uses?

AW We started mostly with talking a lot about Catholicism, all of our own family experiences. Because essentially the play is about boys' relationships with their mothers, we talked a lot about that kind of inheritance. What you get from your parents that helps you in life and what you get that you wish you didn't have.

You have to appreciate how far reaching the Catholicism is within this play. You have to understand the difference between the two boys' upbringing. Although Vincent has been brought up a Catholic, he hasn't in the same way as Gerard. And also how the differing beliefs effect the two women's temperaments. Mrs Driscoll, who kills herself, is not Catholic, she's Protestant.

The Catholicism is also important in terms of that sense of always trying to be better and always relating a direct line from the past to the future that sort of bypasses the present – sort of paralyses your ability to live in the present – because you're always worrying about what you've done, that guilt, and promising

you'll be better in the future. Gerard has that line, 'When you get out of the habit of living in the present moment…'

It's that constant sense of guilt and also the mythologizing of the mother, the mother-figure, into this kind of saint. So these boys live haunted by this mother-figure and can never find a woman that will match up to her. So they swing between this brutality and resentment, hatred even, of the mother-figure and the huge adoration for her. That's one of the biggest conflicts within the play, I think.

So we did a lot of talking, which was fascinating, and then Peter said,

'Right, we're getting too heady. I want the boys to give the girls a massage and then the girls to do the same to the boys.'

So they got to know each other sensually as well. It's a kind of parallel process of working on the intellect and working physically. It's a bit like yoga the way Peter works. It's really intense but really releasing at the same time. It's that balance which he judges so beautifully between pushing you and also allowing you to grow as an actor.

Then we did some spatial activities where we all got up and remoulded each other in the space. And we did it first as the actors and then as the characters. Matt would sit there and we would remould him physically to turn him into Gerard. And that was a kind of preparation for those moments when the actors, in character, are sitting at the back. They're sort of in the essence of the character without really doing anything. It's not supposed to be too indicated but vivid nonetheless.

And then with blocking, Peter will say, 'What feels natural?' and the actors'll do what feels natural and then he'll streamline it. So that's how it works. It is a rigorous process, it's intense, but Peter's also very playful as a director.

Q But how do the actors get their heads around *when* everything's supposed to be happening in the play?

AW Well, we went through the text – this was one of the very first things we did – and we discussed where we felt pieces came in relation to one another. And then we discussed what we thought the overall arc of the play was, which we think is something like 1939 to the mid-seventies. The reasons for that being at the beginning you're very much in the aftermath of the First World War and then by the end you're just sort of on the cusp of something new, of some new swing that no one can quite articulate. Gerard and Vincent can't articulate it but they have a sense that something is going to change. There's that sort of post-Second World War optimism, consensual politics and all that. There's an interesting scene where Vincent is saying, 'Something will happen, something will change…' and Gerard says, 'It won't, though. Will it?'

And that intuitive thing that Peter talks about, of them kind of intuiting that although there is this upsurge of optimism, we're still going to have Thatcherism and things aren't going to change all that much. And I think that kind of transition also leaves you feeling rather stranded within your own life, if you've lived through such a set of changes as these boys have. I guess the play really is about their overriding sense of disorientation and their continual attempts to pin down their experiences, to sort of work out the moment where it all went wrong in order to make things better. Although after a while it becomes an obsession in itself for Gerard, if he could only pin down what's happened to him in his life.

Q Did Peter ask you to create the chronological version of the play?

AW It just came out of rehearsals that it would be a really useful thing. Because the way the play's written there are odd lines and speeches here and there. There's a speech Mrs Harte has about Jimmy Harrington and odd lines just come out of nowhere that refer back to this speech, which is right at the start of the play, where she says things like, 'He was lost at sea…' And maybe in one scene that's all she'll say.

It was really the only way to do it because the play's so disjointed, to actually take the odd line and stick them in order so that everyone could be on the same page. It's useful for the actors to have it chronologically so that they can read them as scenes, so that they have a through line in their own minds before the order starts being messed about with. It's for reference, really. And those sort of things help some actors more than others. Also while they need a sense of the through line for the coherence of it, they also need to sense each other on stage. It's an aesthetic thing as well where, even though they're not always in the same time-frame, they're still acting together.

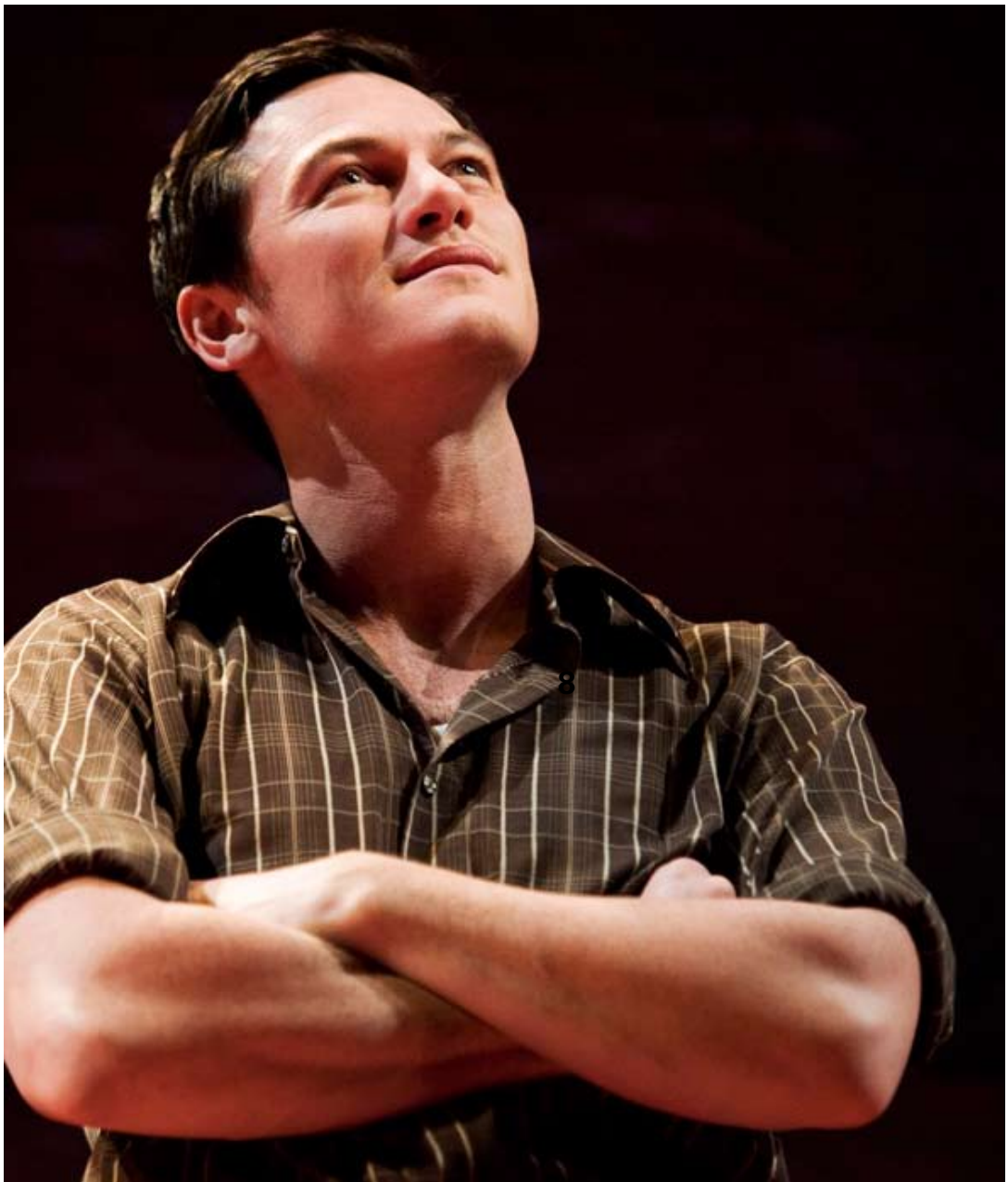
Q On several occasions watching Peter I was reminded of a conductor bringing in the different instruments of an orchestra. Has that been prevalent throughout rehearsals?

AW Yes. I'm not sure how conscious on Peter's part that is, but it certainly does feel like that. Because it's a piece that is very lyrical and is, in a way, quite a self-aware piece. I think it's very aware of its own language and the kind of sensuality of that. It is essentially a musical piece.

Q How would you prepare a young person coming to see SMALL CHANGE?

AW I'd tell them not to worry about it. Not to struggle over the literal meaning of each section because I don't think that's really what the piece is about. They'll definitely get the relationships. They're physical, they're primal, they're relationships they should be able to identify with. This is the story of people growing up, rites of passage and all that. So I would tell them just to watch it and to try and switch off that part of your brain that tends to panic when you don't understand something.

It is a kind of coined language Peter's writing in. And I think the play is supposed to hit you impressionistically. It's a collage. I think it's fine just to be there, experience it and take what you take from it and not get too schooly about it and feel like you have to deconstruct the play and pick out the themes. Just listen to it, watch it and enjoy it.



section 5

SMALL CHANGE in performance

Practical and written exercises based on an extract from the play

The following extract is taken from what we'll refer to – for the purposes of this document – as Act One, scenes fifteen to seventeen (pp.129-134). It comes early in the play while the characters and their relationships are still being established and provides a neat example of the many temporal shifts within the text. Essentially three separate scenes, the middle one (Gerard's speech) divides the two either side by jumping forward in time to the near present.

- As a group read through the extract and explore the staging of this scene/s. You may find it useful to refer to Section 4, 'Inside the rehearsal room now' – in particular director Peter Gill's notes to his actors – when working on the extract. Consider Christopher Hampton's note that this play needs to be executed with 'musical precision'. What does he mean? Remember also the image of the director as conductor.
- As a director what atmosphere do you want to create? Experiment with the idea of two separate scenes being presented simultaneously on stage. You will need to consider the positioning of the actors, their relationship to one another, very carefully. Give some thought also to the transition between scenes. How will you move out of one into another in order to establish a new time and space? You must ensure, as Peter Gill says, that there's a link with what comes before and after.
- Take your time with Gerard's speech. Work through it slowly, paying particular attention to the punctuation as each comma and full stop may indicate a development in thinking or a change of thought. (It may help you to mark the punctuation on the script with a pencil.) However, bear in mind Peter Gill's thoughts on speaking text: 'Phrasing is all, and phrasing forward towards the stop. To be reliant on punctuation only as far as is necessary for clarity and musicality is important, acknowledging the stop and never overmarking the commas.'
- You should also take into account the other elements of production. For example, what should the lighting be like? Is any specific sound required?
- Once you have seen the Donmar's production of SMALL CHANGE consider how their staging of this scene/s compares with your own.

SMALL CHANGE

By Peter Gill

An extract from Act One, Scenes Fifteen to Seventeen

Vincent Do you want a lift, Gerard?

Mrs Harte You're not giving him a lift. I've told you two before. About that. On the handlebars. I saw you.

Vincent Only on the bar, Mrs Harte.

Mrs Harte No.

Gerard No, you go on. I'm not going this afternoon.

Mrs Harte What did you say?

Gerard You heard.

Mrs Harte What did you say?

Gerard You heard that, too.

Mrs Harte Come here, I'll cleave you, you little get.

Gerard I'm not feeling well. I can't go back.

Mrs Harte On your way. And you too, Vincent. Off you go.
Gerard I'm not going.
Mrs Harte You are.
Gerard I'm not.
Mrs Harte Oh, oh, but you are.
Gerard Oh, but I'm not.
Mrs Harte Now, get your blazer.
Gerard I feel sick.
Mrs Harte So do I. Where is it?
Gerard Blazer!
Mrs Harte That's a nice blazer.
Gerard You wear it, then.
Mrs Harte Come here.
Vincent I'm going, then.
Gerard Yeah. You go on.
Mrs Harte He's coming now, Vincent. Get your blazer. Now get it.
Gerard I don't know where it is.
Mrs Harte Find it. Upstairs.
Gerard It isn't upstairs.
Vincent I'm going then.
Mrs Harte I'm not writing you a note, so don't think I am.
Gerard That's OK by me.
Mrs Harte You're a hateful kid.
Vincent Tara.

Gerard Anyway, I'm leaving.

Mrs Harte I wish you could bloody leave. The sooner the better. But you're not leaving. Right. Dear dear. You'd better go, Vincent.

Vincent Tara then.

Gerard What's the matter?

Vincent I'm going then.

Gerard What's the matter?

Mrs Harte Nothing's the matter. I'm sick of you, that's all, you little swine. I am. Honest to God, I am. You're tiring me out.

Gerard All right, I'll go.

Mrs Harte I don't care if you do go.

Gerard All right, I'm not going.

Mrs Harte And I'm not writing you a note.

Gerard Don't worry, I'll write one myself.

Mrs Harte Oh, Jesus, help me with this swine of a kid.

Vincent I'm going then.

Gerard Look at it.

Mrs Harte What?

Gerard All of it. In here. Out there. The street. I'm fed up. I'm fed up.

Mrs Harte You're fed up. That's a laugh. You're bloody fed up. A kid of your age. I'm fed up to the back teeth, I am.

Gerard And I'm bored.

Mrs Harte Bored. What you bored with then? Eh? Eh?

Gerard Oh, nothing, nothing. I'm going.

Mrs Harte Where?

Gerard Oh, I don't know. School.

Mrs Harte You'd better run for it then.

Gerard Or perhaps I'd been over the park. Seen the old man with his plastic shopping bag and sandwiches for his favourite children. Or gone down the other end, the nice end, with the dilapidated tennis courts and garden and bowling green fielding old men with flannels and cream jackets and rubber overshoes, with their rubber mats. Boring, unavoidable, glimpses of peace, with their gardens, and allotments, pipes. Unendurable visions of their perfect lives. Gardens, cars, good sense, polished furniture, kindliness. Their dullness and their humour killing me. Clerks in the Inland Revenue, with established posts or perhaps retired, with daughters and a son with a car. Holidays. Two weeks. Rockeries. Kindly good sense. Delivered papers. Everybody's, News Chronicle, Herald. Reynolds News? Hardly. Perhaps. Radio with pleated silk, backing the fretwork. Anonymous, once pretty wives. With their prudence and irritating passions and have been in the war.

Mrs Driscoll Aren't you going out, Vincent? Vincent?

Vincent No.

Mrs Driscoll Don't you have to go to church tonight?

Gerard Don't forget I'm on the altar tonight, Mam. Mam.

Vincent No.

Mrs Harte What?

Gerard Don't forget, will you?

Mrs Harte (*imitating his whine*) Don't forget.

Mrs Driscoll Well, don't sulk in here, Vincent.

Gerard I wants a clean cotta, mind.

Mrs Harte Do you? Well you can want on.

Gerard Aw, Mam.

Mrs Driscoll Stop spitting, Vincent. There's a good boy. It's a terrible habit you've got. Are you sure you're not meant to be going to church?

Gerard Mam.

Mrs Harte You had it clean on on Sunday. Anyway you didn't bring it home in time.

Gerard I did. I brought it home yesterday.

Mrs Harte Yesterday.

Gerard Well, will you iron it then?

Mrs Harte No, I won't bloody iron it. On your way.

Mrs Driscoll It's Wednesday night, Vincent. I'm sure you're supposed to be in church.

Mrs Harte And I'm not washing any more football gear. Right?

Gerard Right.

Mrs Harte You cheeky… Come here. Come here, till I kill you.

Mrs Driscoll Vincent.

Vincent Oh Christ. I'm going out.

Mrs Driscoll What did you say? Vincent.

Vincent Tara.

Mrs Driscoll Vincent. What did you say, Vincent!

Mrs Harte Come here.

Mrs Driscoll Vincent!

Questions on the production and further practical work

You may wish to work individually on completing these questions.

1 When you go to see the Donmar's production of SMALL CHANGE consider the following:
   - What transformations take place within the characters through the journey of the play? How do the actors embody these changes?
   - How does the design support the tone and mood of the play, in terms of its location and atmosphere?
   - How does this play differ to others you've seen in performance?

2 Look at Section 4, 'SMALL CHANGE in rehearsal' – in particular 'Inside the rehearsal room – 1968' – and see whether you can apply any of the exercises described by Barry Hanson to working on the scene/s above, e.g. playing it without words.

3 Once you have seen the production you could improvise new scenes exploring the background to the play, taking the material within this Study Guide as a starting point. The scenes could include Gerard and Vincent's time abroad doing National Service, Vincent's relationship with his ex-wife. What discoveries do you make? How do such improvisations inform your ideas about the play and characters?

section 6

Ideas for further study

Reading and research

To find out more about Peter Gill's career in the theatre visit his excellent website at: http://dspace.dial.pipex.com/town/parade/abj76/PG/index.shtml. Features include an extensive archive of newspaper articles, programme notes and lectures covering over forty years.

The Theatre Museum Archive also holds files on Gill which can be viewed by appointment.

The following books relating to the history of Cardiff were in the rehearsal room:

Cardiff's Vanished Docklands by Brian Lee (Sutton 2006)

Bluetown and Cardiff Docks by Brian Lee (Tempus 1999)

Bibliography

Peter Gill: Plays 1 (Faber and Faber 2002)

Actors Speaking, edited by Lynn Haill (Oberon Books 2008)

Looking Back – Playwrights at the Royal Court, 1956-2006 by Harriet Devine (Faber and Faber 2006)

The Full Room by Dominic Dromgoole (Methuen 2002)

Various newspaper and magazine articles. See 'Endnotes' for publication details.

Endnotes

(Endnotes)

1 Extract from an interview in the *Independent on Sunday* (26/05/02)

2 *Peter Gill: Plays 1*, Introduction by John Burgess (Faber and Faber 2002), p.vii

3 'Festival for the actors' playwright', Michael Grandage interviewed by Lynda Murdin, *Yorkshire Post* (17/05/02)

4 'The new man at the National', Peter Gill interviewed by Michael Coveney, *Observer* (02/05/80)

5 *The Full Room* by Dominic Dromgoole (Methuen 2002), p.101

6 *Looking Back – Playwrights at the Royal Court, 1956-2006* by Harriet Devine (Faber and Faber 2006), pp.127-128

7 Ibid., p.131

8 'A word from the wise', Peter Gill interviewed by David Benedict, *Independent* (January 1999)

9 *Looking Back – Playwrights at the Royal Court, 1956-2006* by Harriet Devine (Faber and Faber 2006), p.132

10 'Peter Gill' by Nicholas Wright, opening lecture at the Peter Gill Festival, Crucible Studio Theatre, Sheffield (29/05/02)

11 Peter Gill Festival Programme, Introduction by Michael Grandage, Associate Director, Crucible Theatre, Sheffield (23/05-22/06/02)

12 'Life is sweet', Peter Gill interviewed by Lyn Gardner, *Guardian* (27/05/02)

13 *Looking Back – Playwrights at the Royal Court, 1956-2006* by Harriet Devine (Faber and Faber 2006), p.133

14 Quoted in 'Direction from the author', Peter Gill interviewed by John Barber, *Daily Telegraph* (12/07/76)

15 'Peter Gill's corner store', Peter Gill interviewed by Sheridan Morley, *Times* (05/09/78)

16 'Direction from the author', Peter Gill interviewed by John Barber, *Daily Telegraph* (12/07/76)
17 'The English Stage Company', Peter Gill interviewed by Eric Bass/Shelagh Vouilleman/Penelope Murphy, unknown publication held in Theatre Museum Archive (c.1967)
18 'Directors as God', Pete Gill interviewed by Peter Lennon, *Sunday Times Magazine* (26/11/78)
19 'Play doctoring' by Peter Gill, *Guardian* (11/07/06)
20 Ibid.
21 *Actors Speaking*, Introduction by Peter Gill, ed. Lynn Haill (Oberon Books 2008)
22 'Peter Gill' by Nicholas Wright, opening lecture at the Peter Gill Festival, Crucible Studio Theatre, Sheffield (29/05/02)
23 Ibid.
24 'A word from the wise', Peter Gill interviewed by David Benedict, *Independent* (January 1999)
25 'Peter Gill' by Christopher Hampton, *Small Change* Programme (July 1976)
26 *The Full Room* by Dominic Dromgoole (Methuen 2002), p.102
27 'A word from the wise', Peter Gill interviewed by David Benedict, *Independent* (January 1999)
28 Quoted in 'Life is sweet', Peter Gill interviewed by Lyn Gardner, *Guardian* (27/05/02)
29 'The quiet man of British theatre', Peter Gill interviewed by Kate Joyner, *Metro Yorkshire* (21/05/02)
30 Ibid.
31 'Peter Gill' by Nicholas Wright, opening lecture at the Peter Gill Festival, Crucible Studio Theatre, Sheffield (29/05/02)
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
34 *Small Change, Peter Gill: Plays 1* (Faber and Faber 2002), p.152
35 'The works speak for themselves', Peter Gill interviewed by Lynda Murdin, *Yorkshire Post* (31/05/02)
36 'Peter Gill' by Nicholas Wright, opening lecture at the Peter Gill Festival, Crucible Studio Theatre, Sheffield (29/05/02)
37 Peter Gill Festival Programme, Crucible Theatre, Sheffield (23/05-22/06/02)
38 Irving Wardle, *Times* (09/07/76)
39 'The new man at the National', Peter Gill interviewed by Michael Coveney, *Observer* (02/05/80)
40 Irving Wardle, *Times* (09/07/76)
41 *Small Change* by Peter Gill – Acting Edition (Samuel French Ltd 1979)
42 *Mean Tears* and *In the Blue* – Two plays by Peter Gill (Oberon Books 1987), p.8
43 'Peter Gill' by Nicholas Wright, opening lecture at the Peter Gill Festival, Crucible Studio Theatre, Sheffield (29/05/02)
44 'The new man at the National', Peter Gill interviewed by Michael Coveney, *Observer* (02/05/80)
45 Victoria Radin, *Observer* (11/07/76)
46 *Small Change* by Peter Gill – Acting Edition (Samuel French Ltd 1979)
47 Peter Gill Festival Programme, Crucible Theatre, Sheffield (23/05-22/06/02)
48 Irving Wardle, *Times* (09/07/76)
49 'The new man at the National', Peter Gill interviewed by Michael Coveney, *Observer* (02/05/80)
50 Irving Wardle, *Times* (09/07/76)
51 'Peter Gill' by Nicholas Wright, opening lecture at the Peter Gill Festival, Crucible Studio Theatre, Sheffield (29/05/02)
52 Harold Hobson, *Sunday Times* (July 1976)
53 Peter Gill Festival Programme, Crucible Theatre, Sheffield (23/05-22/06/02)
54 *Actors Speaking*, Introduction by Peter Gill, ed. Lynn Haill (Oberon Books 2008)
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
57 'Peter Gill' by John Burgess, forthcoming publication (2008)
58 'New boy at the National', Peter Gill interviewed by Victoria Radin, *Observer* (15/02/81)
59 'Royal Court Diary' by Barry Hanson, taken from the archive at Peter Gill's website (1968)

About the Donmar Warehouse

The Donmar Warehouse is an intimate not for profit 251 seat theatre located in the heart of London's West End. The theatre attracts almost 100,000 people to its productions a year. Since 1992, under the Artistic Direction of Michael Grandage and his predecessor, Sam Mendes, the theatre has presented some of London's most memorable theatrical experiences as well as garnered critical acclaim at home and abroad. With a diverse artistic policy that includes new writing, contemporary reappraising of European classics, British and American drama and music theatre, the Donmar has created a reputation for artistic excellence over the last 12 years and has won 26 Olivier Awards, 12 Critics' Circle Awards, 10 Evening Standard Awards and 10 Tony Awards for Broadway transfers.

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

Development Department
Donmar Warehouse
41 Earlham Street
London WC2H 9LX

T: 020 7845 5815
F: 020 7240 4878
W: www.donmarwarehouse.com/education