

# GASLIGHT

**A Victorian thriller  
by Patrick Hamilton**



**WIMBORNE**  
DRAMA PRODUCTIONS

**21-23 February 2019  
Tivoli Theatre Wimborne**

# DIRECTOR'S NOTE

For a long time, *Gaslight* was just a name to me, the slightly improbable, but evocative title of a play – and was it also a film? And did it have anything to do with *Fanny by Gaslight*? Then a few years ago, when I was looking around for a good play to direct, I was recommended *Gaslight* and shortly afterwards went to see a local production of it, which I thoroughly enjoyed. Ever since, I have been looking for a chance to put it on myself. I quickly discovered that *Fanny by Gaslight* is not the same thing at all, and also that *Gaslight*, originally produced on stage in 1938, was made into two films in the 40s, one of which earned Ingrid Bergman an Oscar in the main role.



But far more significant than these bits of trivia are the qualities of the play itself. I always like taut psychological dramas and I love thrillers. I also think there is something particularly powerful about theatre performed in “real time”. This play has all those elements; and then when you throw in the setting, on a dark and foggy 1890s London night, when Sherlock Holmes might be just around the corner, what could be better?

As well as it being, I hope, good entertainment, there is a very serious core of social comment in this play. It has given its name to the modern term “gaslighting”, whereby an individual is manipulated into questioning his or her own sanity. Only recently in the media, the former Spice Girl Melanie Brown used the term about her own abusive marriage.

It has been a hugely rewarding experience directing this play, exploring the many facets and nuances of the characters and plot. I have been very fortunate to work with such a wonderfully talented and committed cast and production team. I hope you enjoy watching this play as much as we have enjoyed working on it.

**Sam Moulton - Director**

# THE RISE AND FALL OF PATRICK HAMILTON

*Gaslight* made Patrick Hamilton rich and famous. When it opened at Richmond Theatre in December 1938, he was – at 34 – already regarded as a highly promising novelist, his reputation recently boosted by the final part of his semi-autobiographical trilogy *20,000 Streets Under the Sky*.

He had also achieved, almost 10 years earlier, overnight notoriety with his stage-debut thriller *Rope* – based loosely on a true murder case in which two friends murdered a fellow university student as an expression of their supposed intellectual superiority. Nevertheless, his follow-up, subtitled “a Victorian thriller”, put him in a different league.

There was adulation from reviewers, as well as his peers, and George VI and Queen Elizabeth hastened to the Apollo Theatre to see what everyone was talking about. The play had a six-month run in the West End, before wowing Broadway for four years (under the title *Angel Street*).

A bit-part actor himself briefly in the early 1920s, when he accompanied his actress sister Lalla on tour, Hamilton was well versed in the mechanics of Victorian melodrama, with its stock characters, sensational plots and happy endings.

But his stroke of genius was an idea that Hamilton drew from a story written by his elder brother Bruce, whereby the gaslights in the parlour would dim when the lights had been turned up by someone in another part of the house, thus adding to Bella Manningham’s psychological torment.

“I am now what you might call ‘known’ by reading and theatre-going people,” Hamilton excitedly declared in a letter to Bruce in the spring of 1939. “In fact, I think I can very nearly say, paraphrasing Keats, I think I shall be among the English writers while I live.”



Patrick Hamilton, in 1947

The pointed phrasing of that line would prove apt – for when he died from liver failure in 1962, his reputation had waned. While *Rope* and *Gaslight* paid his bills in later life, he never had another comparable success and he sank deeper into alcoholism and depression. He died, aged 58, a largely forgotten man. So where did it all go wrong?

Patrick Hamilton was born in 1904 in Sussex, into a rather unhappy though talented family. His father was a barrister, writer and alcoholic, and inept with money, while his mother was a singer and painter who mawkishly clung to her son which inhibited him sexually (he sought throughout his life his “ideal woman”, was twice married and enjoyed the company of prostitutes).

On leaving Westminster School, Hamilton thwarted his parents’ hopes that he would choose a respectable profession by taking a succession of lowly paid clerical jobs before deciding – after his very brief acting career – to be a writer. His first novel, *Monday Morning*, was published in 1925, when Hamilton was only 20.

His reputation slowly grew. With *Craven House*, *20,000 Streets Under the Sky*, and then *Hangover Square*, he found his most profitable field: “the brick and concrete jungle of lower middle-class London life,” as JB Priestley described it, “the crowded, muddled, noisy but inarticulate world of small pubs just off Oxford Street and Edgware Road, the monster Corner Houses, cheap lodgings in Pimlico, and the less expensive picture theatres, a world of barmaids and waiters and prostitutes and the lower orders of secondhand motor salesmen.”

Hamilton watched the predators and victims of his concrete jungle, by whose law the most unscrupulous survive. In this complex moral area, he was aware of the flaws of the weak which helped the strong to get their way. His murderers are often charming people, who are tempted by the stupidity of those around them to make the best use of their talents. Hamilton’s characters are always products of their environment as well as its manipulators.

Allan Prior, the screenwriter, who knew Hamilton in the 1940s, described him as “a very sharp sort of chap, very much of his time... very good company. Not at all like the usual literary figures of his time, who were inclined to be a bit stuffy”.

Even in his earlier years, and despite his fame, he had preferred to investigate the seedy side of life rather than spend his time among the fashionable society. Hamilton probably spent a bit

too much time researching in pubs, but that may not have had disastrous consequences had he not suffered a serious accident in 1932, when he was knocked down by a car. His injuries, although not permanent, were bad enough to prevent him from writing for two years and certainly increased his drinking.

All the same, Hamilton's life had not yet taken its chronic downward turn. Following the success of *Gaslight* on stage, the film studios came calling and two versions were made for the big screen: the first British in 1940, starring Anton Walbrook and Diana Wynyard – it was one of the most popular films of the year – and the second American in 1944, in which George Cukor directed Charles Boyer and Ingrid Bergman, who won an Oscar for her performance.

Yet these films had a devastating effect upon Hamilton. He hated both of them deeply, nor did he take any more pleasure in the version – “distorted almost beyond recognition” – of *Hangover Square* that was released in 1944.

The fourth and final blow from the movie world was Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope*, released in 1948, which the great director turned into an experiment with cameras. The piece was shot in ten-minute takes which put too much of a strain on the action. Interesting though it was from a technical point of view, the film was generally viewed a failure.

In the aftermath of the war, Hamilton's life began to decline. Not only did he feel that his masterpieces had been ruined by the film-makers, but he hated the modern world in general for the changes it brought.

Consequently he set his unfinished quartet of Gorse novels, about a charming con-man, in the inter-war years. He wrote three – *The West Pier*, *Mr Stimpson* and *Unknown Assailant* – but he struggled to get them published as publishers were looking for something more up to date. This set the seal on his pessimism, and he spent more and more of his time in an alcoholic haze.



# GASLIGHTS STILL BURN BRIGHTLY

Until quite recently, few of us perhaps would have been familiar with the term 'gaslighting'. But over the past year or so, in part due to the emergence of the MeToo movement and society's focus on abuse against women, as well as there now being more awareness generally about mental health issues, it has entered the national conversation and became one of the buzzwords of 2018.

Gaslighting is a form of manipulation in which victims are targeted in a way that makes them doubt themselves, their own perceptions, sometimes their own sanity. Like all forms of abuse, it's about power and control. The victim is usually a woman.

The term originates from Patrick Hamilton's play *Gaslight*, in which Jack Manningham slowly convinces his wife Bella that she is going insane in order to cover his own nefarious deeds. She is



**Cassandra, from Ancient Greek mythology: a victim of gaslighting**

told by her husband that the gaslights dimming in the house at night are a figment of her imagination, when in fact they do so for a perfectly rational reason.

Gaslighting is a new term for a relatively old set of behaviours. If you've read the Ancient Greek myth of Cassandra (about a woman cursed to foresee true prophecies that others disbelieve due to her perceived mental instability), watched *Homeland* or *The Cry* on TV (in which the lead female characters were manipulated psychologically), or listened to *The Archers* (in which Helen stabbed her husband Rob who had been systematically eroding her sense of self for over two years), you've witnessed gaslighting in action.

Recently former Spice Girl Melanie Brown revealed that she had been a victim of gaslighting in her 10-year marriage to film producer Stephen Belafonte. Her husband used drugs and alcohol to control her, blackmailed her and cut her off from family and friends. He would hide her phone in the fridge and then make her think she'd put it there herself.

"You feel like you're going absolutely bonkers, and you're not," she said. "It's just them being able to



**Spice Girl Mel B**

manipulate and do really radical, weird things, and you're constantly trying to just please them. It's just so bad, and it gets into a thing where you feel so empty, so lost."

Last month *Countdown's* Rachel Riley spoke about her experience of anti-Semitic abuse on Twitter. Giving a speech at a Holocaust Educational Trust event in Westminster, she told how she and other people who try to speak out are subjected to gaslighting by



those who say anti-Semitism doesn't exist.

Last year viewers of popular TV reality show *Love Island* accused producers of gaslighting Dani Dyer by forcing her to watch a carefully

edited video that suggested her boyfriend was going to get back together with his ex, when in reality he was not. It was claimed the producers were guilty of manipulating Dani's wellbeing for the sake of TV ratings after she was left distressed.

In family entertainment show *Strictly Come Dancing*, comedian Seann Walsh was accused by his former girlfriend, the actress Rebecca Humphries, of being aggressive and controlling. She walked out on him after he was caught kissing his professional dance partner Katya Jones.

Monica Lewinsky, the former White House intern who had a relationship with President Bill Clinton that almost forced him out of office, has described herself as living in the "House of



Gaslight” ever since the affair was exposed in 1998 “clinging to my experiences as they unfolded and railing against the untruths that painted me as an unstable stalker and Servicer in Chief.”

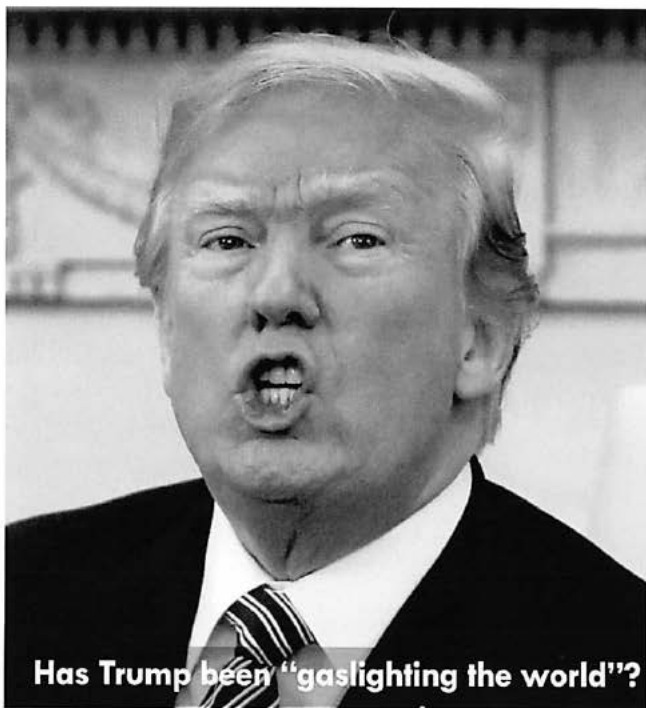
Some commentators have accused President Trump of “gaslighting the world” with his bizarre tweets, twisting of facts and frequent cries of “fake news”.

“He asserts fictions as facts, uttering falsehoods with such burning conviction that listeners may doubt the testimony of their senses,” said one commentator.

Gaslighting is a common technique of abusers, dictators, narcissists and cult leaders. It can occur in the workplace, in personal relationships or, as we have seen with Trump, across an entire nation.

An abusive partner in a relationship manipulates their victims carefully and purposefully; they switch readily between charm and rage, like Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. Indeed, to an outsider, the perpetrator may appear to be the perfect, caring partner.

Jack’s treatment of Bella in *Gaslight* is a classic example of such behaviour. One wonders if Patrick Hamilton could ever had imagined that his play would have such relevance 80 years on.



Has Trump been “gaslighting the world”?

# GASLIGHT

by Patrick Hamilton

## THE CAST

Bella Manningham

Jack Manningham

Elizabeth

Nancy

Inspector Rough

Other parts played by

**TRACEY NICHOLLS**

**RICHARD NEAL**

**CHRISSIE NEAL**

**JEMMA CABLE**

**CHRIS DURHAM**

**GARY PAINE**

**RICHARD SCOTSON**

## PERIOD AND SETTING

The action takes place in the first floor parlour of a house in late Victorian London, during the course of one winter evening



Running time approximately 2 hours 20 minutes, including a 20 minute interval

## THE CREATIVE TEAM

**SAM MOULTON**

**PHYLLIS SPENCER**

**CHRIS DURHAM**

**CHRIS DURHAM**

**COLIN PILE**

**ANN McCOLGAN-CLARK**

& members of the company

**JAN STEVENSON**

**ANN McCOLGAN-CLARK**

**SHEILA DOVE**

**JUDY GARRETT**

**MICHELLE BARTER**

**RICHARD NEAL**

**KYLE BEST**

**LUKE BAINES**

**CHANDLER WHITELOCK**

Director

Stage Manager

Set Designer

Set Construction

Continuity

Costumes

Properties/ASMs

Sound

Publicity and Programme

Tivoli Production Manager

Lighting Programmer

Head of Sound

## PRODUCTION ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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**Nick Clark, Paul Dodman, Janice Ewens, Steph Jones, Phil Spencer, Daisy Graphic, Dumpton School, Forest FM Gullivers Bookshop, Tivoli Theatre, Wimborne Royal British Legion and Wimborne Tourist Information Centre**

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# THE LUNATIC ASYLUM IN VICTORIAN TIMES

The Victorian era saw an explosion in the number of asylums or 'madhouses' in England and Wales and patients treated within them.

The first known asylum was at Bethlem Royal Hospital in London. It had been a hospital since 1247 but began to admit patients with mental health conditions around 1407, not that the term 'mental health' had been conceived at that time. Patients were often considered 'mad' and described as lunatics, imbeciles, idiots or cretins.

With the passing in 1845 of The Lunacy Act and The County Asylums Act, local authorities in England and Wales were legally obliged to provide asylum for people with mental deficiencies. By 1890, over sixty asylums had been built (asylum numbers reached a peak in the 1950s with more than one hundred hospitals and approximately 150,000 patients in England and Wales).

In Dorset, the County Asylum was originally founded in 1832 and was based at Forston House in Charminster, Dorchester. By the 1860s, this facility was too small, and a new asylum nearby at Herrison, Charlton Down was opened in 1863.

Admission into asylums was based on class. The upper and middle classes could admit family members who were suffering from some sort of mental illness as private patients. Those with little or no funds, however, were admitted as paupers.

To avoid abuse of the system, the 1853 Lunatic Asylums Act laid down guidelines for admitting patients to the asylums. Pauper lunatics could be admitted if there was a medical certificate signed by a doctor or apothecary who had personally

examined the patient within the previous seven days, plus an order from a Justice, a clergyman or the Relieving Officer, an official appointed by the parish to administer relief to the poor. Private patients needed a medical certificate signed by two physicians (doctor, surgeon or apothecary).

Once admitted, there was no procedure for the patient to appeal against detention. They could, however, be discharged on the application of a relative or friend, as long as they confirmed that they would take proper care of the patient and prevent them from injuring themselves or others.

Despite the good intentions of the 1853 Act, it appears there was still plenty of scope to abuse the system. "Unfortunately asylums were seen as a convenient way to remove the poor and incurable from society and for those with money, private madhouses were often convenient dumping grounds for unwanted wives," says author and historian Val McBeath.

The chances of admission were higher if you were a woman. Nearly all Victorian physicians considered women more fragile and sensitive than men, and more susceptible to nervous breakdown.

Reasons for admission included 'melancholia', 'puerperal insanity' or what we would now call postnatal depression, 'erotomania' (hypersexuality) or 'moral insanity' (carrying or giving birth to an illegitimate child).

Women were thought to be at particular risk of mental illness caused by supposed 'disorders' of the reproductive system such as



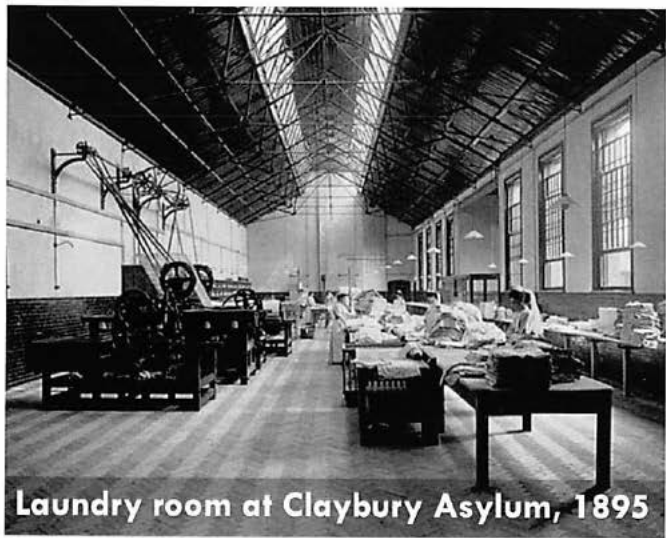
Woman suffering from acute melancholia, 1869  
(Credit: Wellcome Library, London)

menstrual problems or the menopause. 'Hysteria' – from the Latin for womb – was often cited as a reason for admission. This diagnosis covered strange behaviours and nerve symptoms found most often in women. Almost any form of behaviour, such as excited chattering with other women, could be diagnosed as hysteria.

Women at the time were expected to be demure, polite and agreeable to the men in their lives. Their place was in the home, subordinate to their husbands, and dedicated to maternal and domestic responsibilities. Should a woman dare to rebel against the norm, speak out of turn or argue with husband, she could be considered hysterical and in need of confinement and treatment.

Women could also be admitted if they had 'over action of the mind'. This could be because they wanted to educate themselves, or for some, it may have been as simple as wanting to read.

Treatment was often brutal and inhumane including ice water baths, physical restraint and isolation. Female patients were



**Laundry room at Claybury Asylum, 1895**

usually kept indoors, working in the laundry or mending clothes.

"Although many patients were admitted to asylums for short periods of time," says Val McBeath, "there are plenty of stories of patients who were admitted, often for

very unsatisfactory reasons, and basically forgotten about. Some could spend twenty or more years locked away, and sadly some patients died without ever being released."



**Tracey Nicholls**



**Chris Durham**



**Richard Neal**



**Chrissie Neal**



**Jemma Cable**



**Richard Scotson & Gary Paine**



**Tracey Nicholls & Chris Durham**

# THE CAST

## JEMMA CABLE

Jemma's last role for WDP was Tooley in *Travels with My Aunt*, and she has also played Peggy in *The Ghost Train* and Connie in *Habeas Corpus*. Jemma is very active with Wimborne Musical Theatre who also perform at the Tivoli. She most recently played Maria in *9 - 5 The Musical* and also played Sister Mary Patrick in *Sister Act*, as well as appearing in a number of concerts including *The Best of the West End* and *Encore!* Other roles at the Tivoli include No-Wit the Pirate in *Sinbad* and the Big Orange Chicken in *Jack & the Beanstalk*, and Patricia in *Crazy for You*. At Stage Wise she played the Scarecrow in *The Wizard of Oz* and Mother Abbess in *The Sound of Music*.

## CHRIS DURHAM

Since joining WDP in 2013, Chris has played a number of leading roles including Arthur Winslow in *The Winslow Boy*, Don Pedro in *Much Ado About Nothing*, Crestwell in *Relative Values*, Warnie Lewis in *Shadowlands*, and the Duke of Norfolk in *A Man for All Seasons*. These are among his favourite parts alongside Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol*

for Blandford Camp Drama Club. Chris is also a skilful set designer and in much demand. He designed and built the sets for *Pride and Prejudice*, *Cash On Delivery*, *Relative Values* and *Single Spies*, as well as this play.

## CHRISSIE NEAL

Chrissie's last appearance on the Tivoli stage was last year in *The Winslow Boy*, when she played Violet. In 2015 she played Mrs Bennett in *Pride and Prejudice* at Deans Court. Chrissie has a long association with WDP going back to the 1980s. Her favourite roles have been Mrs Swabb in *Habeas Corpus*, Queen Charlotte in *The Madness of George III*, Madame Knorr in *On the Razzle*, Mrs Danvers in *Rebecca*, Clairee in *Steel Magnolias* and Sybil Birling in *An Inspector Calls*. She has also enjoyed appearing in a number of our Agatha Christie plays, including *And Then There Were None* and *The Unexpected Guest*.

## RICHARD NEAL

Richard has appeared in more than twenty productions at the Tivoli, most recently playing Anthony Blunt in *Single Spies*, Richard Winthrop in *The Ghost Train*, Inspector Colquhoun in *The Hollow*, Professor Marcus in *The Ladykillers* and Arthur Birling in



*An Inspector Calls*. Other plays include *And Then There Were None*, *Pack of Lies*, *Witness for the Prosecution*, *The Unexpected Guest*, *Rebecca*, *Loot*, *David Copperfield*, *Habeas Corpus* and *Forty Years On*. Richard has also directed a number of plays including *Hay Fever*, *Present Laughter*, *Relative Values*, *On the Razzle* and *The Madness of George III*.

## TRACEY NICHOLLS

Tracey joined the company in 2001 and has starred in a number of roles here at the Tivoli including Mrs de Winter in *Rebecca*, Shelby in *Steel Magnolias*, Laura Warwick in *The Unexpected Guest*, Sheila Birling in *An Inspector Calls*, Joanna Lyppiatt in *Present Laughter*, Joy Gresham in *Shadowlands*, Miranda Frayle in *Relative Values*, Elsie Winthrop in *The Ghost Train* and Catherine Winslow in *The Winslow Boy*. At Deans Court Tracey has played Elizabeth Bennet in

*Pride and Prejudice* and also appeared in *Twelfth Night* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*. She has directed *Much Ado About Nothing* and *A Man For All Seasons*.

## GARY PAINE

Gary has played John Watherstone in *The Winslow Boy*, Friar Francis in *Much Ado About Nothing*, Mr Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*, The Hon. Peter Ingleton in *Relative Values* and Rev. Harry Harrington in *Shadowlands*. Before hooking up with WDP five years ago, Gary had a long association with Broadstone Players, Milo Tindle in *Sleuth* being one of his favourite roles for them.

## RICHARD SCOTSON

This is Scottie's second appearance for WDP. He played the Beadseller and McNaught in *Murder on the Nile* last October, the first time he had ever trodden the boards.



We are delighted to announce that **Edward Fox and Joanna David** have become Honorary Patrons of Wimborne Drama Productions.

The couple, who have a home in Dorset, are great supporters of local theatre and recognise the important part amateur drama plays in the cultural mix.

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