



DRACULA: MINA'S RECKONING | RESOURCES TRANSCRIPTS

DRACULA: MINA'S RECKONING | CATRIONA AND NATALIE

Annie who is in the Asylum, we meet all the Asylum characters at the very very start of the play as the first scene is set in the Asylum and then my other character Jonathan is actually in the scene after so Scene Two as Jonathan starts the sort of Mina's Story and the sort of journey of the play as it's Jonathan that starts the story to go to Transylvania to meet Dracula Van Helsing comes in a bit later basically once Lucy has been bit by Dracula and starts to change Seward writes to Van Helsing as his old tutor and very good friend and that's when I arrive that's when you first see me.

So I was actually first involved, it was December last year was the first research and development that I got involved with in there was quite a few ones before that I think it's been going on for a couple years or so so that was the first one I was involved in which actually was the whole sort of concept of trying out Jonathan which was in the process of me getting the part so I done the R&D the week R&D in December and then I Sally the director got in touch and said you know that she'd really love me for the part but obviously that Aberdonian accent is quite a key thing in this play especially for Morna's writing so if I could do a voice audition just on the accent so I had an hour with a voice coach and after that hour I had to send in a voice tape of me doing the Aberdonian accent to all of them yeah I didn't know that which was quite hard because I've never had to do a voice accent audition before but it was a good challenge and anyway so then that was that sent that over and then they got back in touch saying that that's fine like we want to go ahead they're going to be a voice coach on any way that can help you yeah and then we done another R&D that's with everybody that was when I joined that was when I joined, yeah, I had an audition and I think it was one of those obviously Van Helsing is such an iconic character and has been played in so many weird and wonderful ways In the audition they kind of went would you improvise... it was a lot of improvisation they said you know would you improvise and gave me some a few parameters and when they were describing the character I it was in the audition room I went that sounds like my Afrikaans Uncle 'do you mind if I do it in an Afrikaans accent?' and they were like 'yeah give it a go' and Sally leapt off her chair it was really wonderful it was a lovely audition actually 'cos I did it in this really you know rough Afrikaans thick Afrikaans accent and Sally was like 'that's amazing that's it' and loved it so I feel like sometimes you you take a chance and it pays off you know? Absolutely.

Well specifically for me it was obviously quite a bit on the accent so our voice coach Jo Cameron Brown I had like zooms with her prior to rehearsals leading up to rehearsals so that I felt comfortable going in you know first day that you know I felt like I could just try it and so for me it was the accent but also as well we we got given a bit of the script that they had obviously there wasn't that much cuz obviously we were devising quite a lot of it for me that was just getting the bits that I had I could hold on to and just making sure that I've got those in my head and understanding the character like really well so that when we go into rehearsals and we're trying new things you know I'd know exactly what Jonathan would do in this moment or say in this moment because you've already got all that research in your head from from this material that you've already been given so that was really useful for me but also as well just like being so open because we also had no idea what the six weeks of rehearsals was going to bring and just being open to having fun and just throwing yourself into it and being willing to fail as well.

I mean same thing well I got really excited when we were told we'd be devising a lot of it because that's been my journey as an actor I think I've done a lot of devising and working on new work and I love it so I was really excited about that I was really excited about the the idea of ensemble building 'cos that I know of Sally Cookson's work that it's very important to her that there's a you know she starts from ensemble and and I loved that so we did a lot of ensemble building in the beginning a

lot of playing in the room I wanted to go to the original source material so red Dracula so we come back to the source material but then we go okay we've taken what we need now let's forget that and where does this spring board us off to into a new story 'cos it's Mina's Story I think it was discovering the style was interesting yeah Sally encouraged us to think heightened, a slightly heightened style still obviously connected to truth playing with that can be quite a vulnerable thing in a in a rehearsal room because you're stretching that you know you stretch it to the nth degree and then pull it back and kind of try and kind of find where the piece breathes and I feel like we started to click into that I think Van Helsing is bigger than...

I feel like with Jonathan though like Do you?

Yeah because I think for for for me as well it was the accent so for to do the Aberdonian accent the only way I could do it was to do it like to do it to go really Doric and to just go for it but then what came with that was actually a bit of my character as well because I realised he was actually this very big sort of you know bit clumsy hopeless romantic but just so kind through that I found the accent and I found Jonathan's accent you know 'cos it's not the same as everybody else's and people have said that you it's we've all got very specific Doric accents which you do in life anyway doing it rehearsals without the costumes and without most of the set and stuff it did feel odd because you know you're just going for it but Sally always said you know you go for it and just go and you know you can always pull it back and I think that's the best way to look at it because then you can see the potential of what it could be and what we the place we can get to and then we can pull it back from there but...

and do you think that Benji Bower's music for me when Benji came in and kind of went okay well this is going to be under this piece of text all of us suddenly felt 'wow' you feel supported and you feel able to give you know that kind of heightened performance it feels yeah just felt supported I guess is the best way to think about it and it changed things you know Benji would play one piece and we would play out the scene and then play a different piece of music and we play out the scene and it would feel really different.

My probably two main relationships are with Mina in Dracula when you first see Jonathan is when he asks Mina to marry him and she doesn't say no but she doesn't say yes she just gives a very like worried and confused look. For him, Jonathan, going to Transylvania and meeting Dracula you know he's he still loves Mina and he knows that he's going to come back and he's going to try again he's going to keep trying but obviously in Transylvania when he meets Dracula Dracula is a person who just sucks the life out of him so you know Jonathan never gets bitten but he gets instead of like blood being sucked out of him he just gets the complete like life and love and happiness and you know 'cos Jonathan the start of the story is such a happy, kind soul and when you see him returning at the end of act one just before Lucy's death he's just completely traumatised and that's when he sees Mina again and Mina can see that in Jonathan that he's just he's just been through it all actually relates to sort of you know PTSD and things as well that was a conversation that we were having with Sally and you know these traumatic events just staying with Jonathan and then obviously being triggered and the rest of the play when we're talking about vampires and he wants to help but it's obviously really hard but yes he's got a bit of a journey Jonathan.

So for me it would be Seward that is the only...Seward is the only connection for me as Van Helsing so it's reported that Van Helsing was Seward's tutor and they became fast friends and they met in Aberdeen and drank pints in the fittie bar but Van Helsing is quite a solitary creature with his cats - he has two cats that he adores and clearly also adores Seward when he returns you see that old relationship kick in those patterns of tutor and student where Van Helsing constantly questions in order to hopefully broaden the mind of his student who I think Van Helsing gets frustrated that Seward is still... has become even more boxed. Seward wants to know the answer whereas Van Helsing is interested to search outside of the box and try and find maybe it's not the most obvious

answer let's look beyond so that relationship has been was quite fun to play with 'cos it it was comical and a lot of the a lot of the interactions which are quite serious about really serious subjects like trying to figure out what's wrong with Lucy become comical because of Seward's stubbornness that it needs to be something that's rooted here and now whereas Van Helsing goes 'ah but it could be' you know? there is there are things that our science can't explain let's think beyond yeah so that's the the main relationship I would say and then a relationship forms very quickly with Mina because Seward recognises in Mina this exceptional student just happens to be she's a woman oh dear and so while he gives a lot of leeway to Mina there's a moment in that relationship where it turns sour because Van Helsing recognises this wonderful brain but also puts - is a man of his time - late 1800s and at the pivotal moment when Mina wants to join the men and has and is actually thinking outside of the box much more than Van Helsing at that point Van Helsing cages Mina by basically saying you may have the brain of a man but you are still a woman so you will stay and you will be protected and it comes from love and care but at the same time he's still caging this incredible, intelligent and creative woman so that that that's an interesting relationship to play I think because you think he's this kindly older man who's going to finally finally give her her chance and he ends up being just as bad.

Jonathan tries to propose to Mina so no just going to Transylvania because for Jonathan he's a very he's a home body you know he doesn't really want to go he would love to just stay home but his boss couldn't go so he has to so that for him I think is a massive thing just just venturing out and going traveling a far and then after that it would sort of be probably when Jonathan realises that he is on his death row really and as soon as Dracula says you're going to write three letters he he knows the time span of his life and he knows exactly what date he's going to die but that is what makes him then escape and risk his life to jump out of this castle and run for his life.

We had so many chats about Van Helsing's backstory and I decided that you know Van Helsing is part of a long line of vampire hunters and had been it's finally their turn you know they've been passed down the baton and recognising I know these symptoms I and hinting in his letter to Seward could this be something otherworldly and I guess it's up to the audience to decide whether all of what I say and my first monologue is in the letter or not I have decided (I won't tell you which lines) that there are a couple of lines that I do keep back yeah only because I think that I understand that my student wouldn't be of Seward wouldn't be able to handle the truth but yeah that's the that's a big pivotal moment recognising that this dark force that I know to be Dracula the Devil Himself has returned and medically examining Lucy and recognising the two pin pricks on the neck that Mina believes were caused by a shawl pin I straight away recognised that and the and the chat of red eyes being like confirmation that's a big moment for Van Helsing and then the moment when I realised that everything I've tried to do to protect Lucy has failed - the windows open the devil has come and tricked us all and there's a lot of guilt for Van Helsing I think because he shouldn't have left he should have been there but he hadn't slept in days and he goes and he leaves two of them in charge with a stern warning but yes there's there's loads of guilt and a recognition that Dracula is more cunning than all of them put together at this point Van Helsing watches Seward completely enraged decimating the dead body of his former fiance I think that's a big moment for Van Helsing even though there are no words because it's watching a somebody that you know become something that feels very alien - and animalistic - yeah - very and Maggie plays it so well but yeah I think that's important for Van Helsing to recognise 'ooff actually did I make the right decision?' because Mina said Mina offered another option and he wouldn't listen.

I guess we pull it back and we sort of see it from starting off as like from Mina's perspective I think you know if you're there wouldn't be in my eyes I don't think there'd be any point in doing Dracula just now to just do Dracula the original story I think it's there's nothing there's nothing new there's nothing relevant you know and it's kind of us going back to the whole female the whole female rage thing and with the whole and Sally wanting us to find a story based on that and I think for 2023 for just now I think by putting Mina in the middle of the story and you know flipping it upside down I

think it says like a million things and also is so out there you know and it's the female non-binary cast playing men and almost you know taking the mick out of you know for example Seward the way he speaks and you know the way that Jonathan for example is as sweet as he is he just he assumes that he is going to take Mina's hand in marriage and you know all of these things which now we just laugh at we're like oh that's so funny but that that was there that happened you know and that was that existed and it's so important I think to see how far we've come and also how far we've got to go regarding that I think.

I think that's important 'cos I think for me what was striking when I read Dracula again was obviously Mina - Mina Harker - in the book is there to support the male characters in their huge wonderful journeys and some of the lines that for example Van Helsing says are directly from the book it's a compliment in the in the book when Van Helsing turns to Mina and says you have the brain of a man it's a compliment. For me I think while we have come a long way while I was reading Dracula again I was also watching the news and seeing women all over the world be refused a right to education be tortured, abused, disappear for not wearing a head scarf correctly or not adhering to certain rules women rioting, cutting off their hair that was all happening in Iran while I was you know reading Dracula after that having you know the right to education refused in Afghanistan I felt like wow we have come a long way and yet we're going backwards look at Roe and Wade and what happened in America with you know right to a woman's right to their own body and that's something that Dracula offers Mina in our version your body will be yours you'll be able to walk the streets at night without fear you will be able to study what you want build a library in the house that you own not have to worry about taking a man's name if you don't want to and that's not to say and it's very this is very important for me if you want to take a man's name that's absolutely wonderful but it's the idea of being forced to it's a choice isn't it?

Its about choice and I think that's one of the huge themes that runs through our piece is that it's about choice and at the end of the piece when Mina turns around and says follow me if you want - it's your choice - you know this is a leap of faith I'm not going to tell you what to do and I'm not telling you that I will rule over you I remember the first time I heard that and the first time I heard Liz's monologue in the audition room and I wept. It struck a cord.

I hope that the that the themes are encouraging and beget conversation - yeah conversations - that in turn begets progression yeah those are your ideals at the same time we also hope people have fun yeah and and have a laugh yeah and I think it has done that I think speaking to folk after the show it's been really interesting to to see how much conversation there is and people disagreeing over certain things and you know I love that I think that's what good theatre does.

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SALLY COOKSON

With Dracula how the whole thing came about was that I was contacted by NTS, National Theatre of Scotland and asked whether I'd be interested in directing an adaptation of the novel by Morna Pearson, a writer who comes from the Northeast, I'd never worked with before but I was very interested post-pandemic I was very keen to work with new writers, I'm known for devising and I was spending some time specifically working with writers who were you know adapting and so I was really keen and a novel that I'd always been interested in I knew it as a young person and was always in the back of my head thinking wow that would be an interesting novel to turn into a piece of theatre, so before I knew anything about Morna's writing or her adaptation I was interested, so I said yeah put me in touch so we got together and we had our first meeting during the pandemic on Zoom, like Morna she wanted to bring the character of Mina right into the centre of the adaptation and that was something that I felt was important as well so we were, we were gently put together we we talked about what we liked from the novel what we didn't like, things that we thought were challenging, her area of of exploration and and we thought well let's give it a go and see and see how we go so she started to kind of write ideas, scenes, thoughts and then we got together for a workshop, I think the following year we got into the rehearsal room at NTS, recruited some actors and just started brainstorming ideas Morna had brought some scenes in , we start started to kind of just play around with ideas at a very kind of basic level and then from that we had regular discussions, regular meetings, where the ideas evolved really slowly so that Morna's adaptation was written over a period of nearly two years and even when we started rehearsals the adaptation wasn't complete there were some gaps that we knew that we were going to go into the room together and with the company and the team, fill those gaps, so it was quite an exciting way of adapting a novel.

So we had a writer who, who was adapting the piece so we had some script, we had some gaps but I'm a very collaborative as all directors are collaborative people who who enjoy the connections made with actors and actors always bring so much to a process right from the beginning we have to understand the material so we all read the novel, we all understood what we were trying to do was sort of move away from the novel in order to focus in on certain themes and ideas and get everybody's response about how they saw the story.

I'm interested in what actors are bringing not just as brilliant actors but as their interests in theatre and what they think we should be looking at in terms of adapting a Victorian novel now, so it was really drawing out other people's ideas about the story before we before we made a decision together on how to process all of this stuff.

I suppose the the way I work practically, I always start the day with a warmup, I mean that happens regardless of what's going on. Moving in the space together responding to music, ensemble exercises that create a sense of collective sharing but also understanding that the individual is important as well, then we will spend time looking at the script so whether we have a written scene, we will look at the the scene and we'll do what's called table work but I never use a table I just do it sitting around in a circle where we discuss everything that happens in that scene we pull it apart we make sure we understand exactly what's happening. What is the journey of the characters, what's going on underneath the surface, what the protagonist and all the characters need and want so there's quite a lot of kind of unpacking work to do before we can then get it up on its feet to play around and pull it apart even more. I find improvisation a hugely helpful tool during rehearsals it's something I use always not just to explore an actor's backstory or things that happen off stage, to physicalise sometimes some of the emotional states that are embedded in the character, so for instance if a character's got a deep secret or an unspoken love or desire I really investigate what that feels like physically in an actor and and I will work very closely with the movement director to explore

what that means and so Vicki did a lot of work we both did with the actors on what does it mean to be addicted to blood, what happens when that is your driving force that that that is what drives you through life is to get your next fix of blood. We did a lot of work on that and and holding private deep down unspoken desires, where do you hold that in your body is it in your stomach is it in your is it in your heart is it where is it so so there was a lot of physical improvisation that we do as a company to explore some of the ideas and the experiences of the characters with gothic horror genre and the style of the novel and indeed Morna's adaptation in many ways a lot of melodramatic elements to it and sometimes that does demand, especially when you've got a lot of big music underneath you and on a big set and performing in huge spaces that demands a sort of heightened style but that doesn't mean it should be untruthful it just means you've got to use your voice in a slightly different way and not be frightened of opening up to the audience. Naturalism or sort of filmic acting would not work on this set in these sizes of theatres and for the style of storytelling that it is so we were very aware of that and and tried lots of different ways of making that fit comfortably with within the actor's kind of remit and sometimes we discover that it we were going too over the top so we had to bring it down and really kind of question what's going on here what's the truth what does this character want, let's not forget all of that so it was a constant kind of grappling with that idea I think that my role as a director when the show is on tour and the role of the associate director is is to make sure that actors when they become so familiar with something and it becomes so kind of second nature that that they don't push it too much it's very easy I remember as an actor myself I once did a yearlong run and I sort of pushed it because I didn't feel I was I was doing a good enough job because I got so familiar with it it's just trusting that you are and listening actually don't not forgetting to listen to what is being said around you and hearing what is being said around you sometimes actors can get very tempted by the response from the audience especially if they get a laugh, they'll go for that even more and actually I try and encourage actors to avoid being seduced by the laugh too much.

We were having lots of conversations about what, what are the themes what are the things we want to put at the centre of our story and and right from the get go we knew that Mina Murray who is an important character in the novel, was going to be our protagonist she was going to be the character who went on this massive journey and in the novel even though Bram Stoker kind of introduces the idea of Mina being not exactly a new woman but she's heading that way, acknowledges her intelligence and her ability, the idea of the new woman someone who resists the patriarchy someone who wants to kind of have their own agency and independence he just keeps her in her little box and at the end makes sure that she adheres to what is expected of her as a Victorian woman, so she becomes a wife and a mother and lives happily ever after in that domestic domain.

We wanted to ask the question you know what happens if if Mina resists that and is able to live the life she actually wants to live, she wants a career, she wants the travel and see the world so that was a very important aspect of how we told the story and that led us to research not just what it was like to be a woman in 1900s but to because the, part of the story takes place in a psychiatric hospital or an asylum as it was termed back in Victorian era that led us to do some research on mental illness during the Victorian period and we got in touch with a professor called Gail Davis who is the professor of the history of mental illness and medicine and she has a wealth of knowledge about asylums in that era and knows all about the the Scottish psychiatric hospitals and gave us a lot of information about how psychiatry started to become recognised in the mid 1800s and how it often and historians have noted this how psychiatry was sometimes used as a tool to control marginalized people especially women who didn't adhere to the norms of the time be they class or gender so that women sometimes were diagnosed as mad because they were resisting patriarchy, being disobedient and those expectations of women during the 19th century were really strict and were required to adhere to the feminine ideal of being the kind of 'Angel in the home', the domestic goddess, the perfect mother and wife and sometimes if people didn't want to follow that path they were considered deviant or you know abnormal that was really interesting to us and so when we started to look at all of these archives about patients from the Edinburgh psychiatric hospital we discovered that there were women in there who'd been put in just because they wanted to live a slightly different life and

didn't want to get married and they wanted to be independent but they were considered by their families, their husbands, their fathers as mentally ill and so were incarcerated and that that was just so fascinating and that gave us the idea of well because this hospital is an important part of the story why don't we frame the whole thing why don't we put it in a psychiatric hospital which would leave us to be able to cast an entire, the actors from non-binary and and female to tell the story it made total sense that because the one of the main themes of the of the piece is freedom to be who you want to be, let us empower women and marginalized people in the form of the story and cast them so that so that we can kind of realise that as a a thing that connects up with the theme of the play because we always wanted to kind of reclaim some of those Gothic horror tropes that that put women and marginalized people you know they constrain them silence them in the novel Lucy gets kind of eviscerated for for disobeying what is expected of her essentially you know she becomes a vampire but but she's able to explore her sexuality and and express that and gets punished for it and the character of Renfield gets horribly kind of violently killed and in other Gothic horror genre stories it's always the women who are passive and straight jacketed and so we wanted to kind of question that explore that and also shine a light on some of the inequalities that that we see in contemporary society so so that's one of the reasons that that we made that decision.

There are lots of lots of different themes but I think the the central one for me anyway I think is is the idea of , what happens and Morna has said this before what happens when you find yourself in a world that is not made for you, what do you do how do you live your best life when you don't fit in, when when the ideology is set up to restrain you and not let you be who you are that's that's I think one of the main themes of the of the piece and Mina Murray in our version is a young woman a 19-year-old girl who because of her circumstances because of her gender, she's she's a poor orphan, she's no money no connections, she has a a very low paid job as a teacher in a, in an orphanage and she has no means of living the life she really wants to live which is to be educated, to educate herself, to go to university, to have a career, to see the world to become independent and that that's virtually impossible for someone like Mina Murray, a woman of colour as well which makes everything much harder especially at that time Danielle Jam you know was cast right from the get-go we had conversations about okay well let's bring your own experience into Mina's experience and we had lots of open conversations about Danielle's experience of a woman of colour growing up in Aberdeen what that was like and now in the industry all of those questions we had lots of discussions about it and it fed into the writing and fed into her performance and her character and the making of the character, so those were things that we wanted to put right at the centre, you know what do you do when when you don't have a choice in your life, and you can't live the life that you want to live so that is a big central theme and who has the power and who doesn't have the power and I think right in the very first scene which is set in the Asylum I will call it, we don't call them asylums now but that's what they were called back in the day I think we set up those themes right in that first scene you see all the patients and it might not be obvious but it's in the writing they are all there that you know they're not all mentally ill they have been put there either because their husband can't handle their disobedience or they're being abused at home or whatever reason it is they are incarcerated and silenced in some way so that immediately sets up this is about what happens when you are restricted in some way so right from the very first scene we are setting up what our story is exploring and I think all the way through it you know I think the friendship between Mina and Lucy is the is the central relationship and I think in most Gothic horror genre there is usually a romantic relationship that that is at the heart of a story and and in Bram Stoker's novel that is Mina Murray and Jonathan Harker but in our version the friendship between Lucy and Mina is the central relationship and and that felt important because it felt for Mina who is a 19-year-old girl who is not ready to make decisions about her romantic path in life, she's not even sure who she is let alone what her kind of sexual preference is and this friendship that, that is the kind of bedrock of her of her existence is under threat when Lucy is going to get married which means that they're not going to be able to have the freedom to have this the friendship in the same way that is the thing, that is the heart of the story for us that that idea of friendship and when you're 19 those friendships are so important so that's what we put at the centre of ours that that relationship really and friendship which is another theme.

Absolutely want audiences to be entertained, I want them to have a good night out you know that's why you go to the theatre, and to be made to think and but to enjoy yourself as well you know and I've loved hearing young audiences responding in the way that they have and and vocally kind of reacting it's been fabulous so absolutely to entertain that's the most important thing.

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Annie who is in the Asylum, we meet all the Asylum characters at the very very start of the play as the first scene is set in the Asylum and then my other character Jonathan is actually in the scene after so Scene Two as Jonathan starts the sort of Mina's Story and the sort of journey of the play as it's Jonathan that starts the story to go to Transylvania to meet Dracula Van Helsing comes in a bit later basically once Lucy has been bit by Dracula and starts to change Seward writes to Van Helsing as his old tutor and very good friend and that's when I arrive that's when you first see me.

So I was actually first involved, it was December last year, was the first research and development that I got involved with in there was quite a few ones before that I think it's been going on for a couple years or so so that was the first one I was involved in which actually was the whole sort of concept of trying out Jonathan which was in the process of me getting the part so I done the R&D the week R&D in December and then I Sally the director got in touch and said you know that she'd really love me for the part but obviously that Aberdonian accent is quite a key thing in this play especially for Morna's writing so if I could do a voice audition just on the accent so I had an hour with a voice coach and after that hour I had to send in a voice tape of me doing the Aberdonian accent to all of them yeah I didn't know that which was quite hard because I've never had to do a voice accent audition before but it was a good challenge and anyway so then that was that sent that over and then they got back in touch saying that that's fine like we want to go ahead they're going to be a voice coach on any way that can help you yeah and then we done another R&D that's with everybody that was when I joined that was when I joined, yeah, I had an audition and I think it was one of those obviously Van Helsing is such an iconic character and has been played in so many weird and wonderful ways In the audition they kind of went would you improvise... it was a lot of improvisation they said you know would you improvise and gave me some a few parameters and when they were describing the character I it was in the audition room I went that sounds like my Africans Uncle 'do you mind if I do it in an Africans accent?' and they were like 'yeah give it a go' and Sally leapt off her chair it was really wonderful it was a lovely audition actually 'cos I did it in this really you know rough Africans thick Africans accent and Sally was like 'that's amazing that's it' and loved it so I feel like sometimes you you take a chance and it pays off you know? Absolutely

Well specifically for me it was obviously quite a bit on the accent so our voice coach Jo Cameron Brown I had like zooms with her prior to rehearsals leading up to rehearsals so that I felt comfortable going in you know first day that you know I felt like I could just try it and so for me it was the accent but also as well we we got given a bit of the script that they had obviously there wasn't that much cuz obviously we were devising quite a lot of it for me that was just getting the bits that I had I could hold on to and just making sure that I've got those in my head and understanding the character like really well so that when we go into rehearsals and we're trying new things you know I'd know exactly what Jonathan would do in this moment or say in this moment because you've already got all that research in your head from from this material that you've already been given so that was really useful for me but also as well just like being so open because we also had no idea what the six weeks of rehearsals was going to bring and just being open to having fun and just throwing yourself into it and being willing to fail as well.

I mean same thing well I got really excited when we were told we'd be devising a lot of it because that's been my journey as an actor I think I've done a lot of devising and working on new work and I love it so I was really excited about that I was really excited about the the idea of ensemble building 'cos that I know of Sally Cookson's work that it's very important to her that there's a you know she starts from ensemble and and I loved that so we did a lot of ensemble building in the beginning a lot of playing in the room I wanted to go to the original source material so red Dracula so we come

back to the source material but then we go okay we've taken what we need now let's forget that and where does this spring board us off to into a new story 'cos it's Mina's Story I think it was discovering the style was interesting yeah Sally encouraged us to think heightened, a slightly heightened style still obviously connected to truth playing with that can be quite a vulnerable thing in a in a rehearsal room because you're stretching that you know you stretch it to the nth degree and then pull it back and kind of try and kind of find where the piece breathes and I feel like we started to click into that I think Van Helsing is bigger than...

I feel like with Jonathan though like Do you?

Yeah because I think for for for me as well it was the accent so for to do the Aberdonian accent the only way I could do it was to do it like to do it to go really Doric and to just go for it but then what came with that was actually a bit of my character as well because I realised he was actually this very big sort of you know bit clumsy hopeless romantic but just so kind through that I found the accent and I found Jonathan's accent you know 'cos it's not the same as everybody else's and people have said that you it's we've all got very specific Doric accents which you do in life anyway doing it rehearsals without the costumes and without most of the set and stuff it did feel odd because you know you're just going for it but Sally always said you know you go for it and just go and you know you can always pull it back and I think that's the best way to look at it because then you can see the potential of what it could be and what we the place we can get to and then we can pull it back from there but...

and do you think that Benji Bower's music for me when Benji came in and kind of went okay well this is going to be under this piece of text all of us suddenly felt 'wow' you feel supported and you feel able to give you know that kind of heightened performance it feels yeah just felt supported I guess is the best way to think about it and it changed things you know Benji would play one piece and we would play out the scene and then play a different piece of music and we play out the scene and it would feel really different.

My probably two main relationships are with Mina in Dracula when you first see Jonathan is when he asks Mina to marry him and she doesn't say no but she doesn't say yes she just gives a very like worried and confused look. For him, Jonathan, going to Transylvania and meeting Dracula you know he's he still loves Mina and he knows that he's going to come back and he's going to try again he's going to keep trying but obviously in Transylvania when he meets Dracula Dracula is a person who just sucks the life out of him so you know Jonathan never gets bitten but he gets instead of like blood being sucked out of him he just gets the complete like life and love and happiness and you know 'cos Jonathan the start of the story is such a happy, kind soul and when you see him returning at the end of act one just before Lucy's death he's just completely traumatised and that's when he sees Mina again and Mina can see that in Jonathan that he's just he's just been through it all actually relates to sort of you know PTSD and things as well that was a conversation that we were having with Sally and you know these traumatic events just staying with Jonathan and then obviously being triggered and the rest of the play when we're talking about vampires and he wants to help but it's obviously really hard but yes he's got a bit of a journey Jonathan.

So for me it would be Seward that is the only...Seward is the only connection for me as Van Helsing so it's reported that Van Helsing was Seward's tutor and they became fast friends and they met in Aberdeen and drank pints in the fittie bar but Van Helsing is quite a solitary creature with his cats - he has two cats that he adores and clearly also adores Seward when he returns you see that old relationship kick in those patterns of tutor and student where Van Helsing constantly questions in order to hopefully broaden the mind of his student who I think Van Helsing gets frustrated that Seward is still... has become even more boxed. Seward wants to know the answer whereas Van Helsing is interested to search outside of the box and try and find maybe it's not the most obvious answer let's look beyond so that relationship has been was quite fun to play with 'cos it it was

comical and a lot of the a lot of the interactions which are quite serious about really serious subjects like trying to figure out what's wrong with Lucy become comical because of Seward's stubbornness that it needs to be something that's rooted here and now whereas Van Helsing goes 'ah but it could be' you know? there is there are things that our science can't explain let's think beyond yeah so that's the the main relationship I would say and then a relationship forms very quickly with Mina because Seward recognises in Mina this exceptional student just happens to be she's a woman oh dear and so while he gives a lot of leeway to Mina there's a moment in that relationship where it turns sour because Van Helsing recognises this wonderful brain but also puts - is a man of his time - late 1800s and at the pivotal moment when Mina wants to join the men and has and is actually thinking outside of the box much more than Van Helsing at that point Van Helsing cages Mina by basically saying you may have the brain of a man but you are still a woman so you will stay and you will be protected and it comes from love and care but at the same time he's still caging this incredible, intelligent and creative woman so that that's an interesting relationship to play I think because you think he's this kindly older man who's going to finally finally give her her chance and he ends up being just as bad.

Jonathan tries to propose to Mina so no just going to Transylvania because for Jonathan he's a very he's a home body you know he doesn't really want to go he would love to just stay home but his boss couldn't go so he has to so that for him I think is a massive thing just just venturing out and going traveling a far and then after that it would sort of be probably when Jonathan realises that he is on his death row really and as soon as Dracula says you're going to write three letters he he knows the time span of his life and he knows exactly what date he's going to die but that is what makes him then escape and risk his life to jump out of this castle and run for his life

We had so many chats about Van Helsing's backstory and I decided that you know Van Helsing is part of a long line of vampire hunters and had been it's finally their turn you know they've been passed down the baton and recognising I know these symptoms I and hinting in his letter to Seward could this be something otherworldly and I guess it's up to the audience to decide whether all of what I say and my first monologue is in the letter or not I have decided (I won't tell you which lines) that there are a couple of lines that I do keep back yeah only because I think that I understand that my student wouldn't be of Seward wouldn't be able to handle the truth but yeah that's the that's a big pivotal moment recognising that this dark force that I know to be Dracula the Devil Himself has returned and medically examining Lucy and recognising the two pin pricks on the neck that Mina believes were caused by a shawl pin I straight away recognised that and the and the chat of red eyes being like confirmation that's a big moment for Van Helsing and then the moment when I realised that everything I've tried to do to protect Lucy has failed - the windows open the devil has come and tricked us all and there's a lot of guilt for Van Helsing I think because he shouldn't have left he should have been there but he hadn't slept in days and he goes and he leaves two of them in charge with a stern warning but yes there's there's loads of guilt and a recognition that Dracula is more cunning than all of them put together at this point Van Helsing watches Seward completely enraged decimating the dead body of his former fiance I think that's a big moment for Van Helsing even though there are no words because it's watching a somebody that you know become something that feels very alien - and animalistic - yeah - very and Maggie plays it so well but yeah I think that's important for Van Helsing to recognise 'ooft actually did I make the right decision?' because Mina said Mina offered another option and he wouldn't listen

I guess we pull it back and we sort of see it from starting off as like from Mina's perspective I think you know if you're there wouldn't be in my eyes I don't think there'd be any point in doing Dracula just now to just do Dracula the original story I think it's there's nothing there's nothing new there's nothing relevant you know and it's kind of us going back to the whole female the whole female rage thing and with the whole and Sally wanting us to find a story based on that and I think for 2023 for just now I think by putting Mina in the middle of the story and you know flipping it upside down I think it says like a million things and also is so out there you know and it's the female non-binary

cast playing men and almost you know taking the mick out of you know for example Seward the way he speaks and you know the way that Jonathan for example is as sweet as he is he just he assumes that he is going to take Mina's hand in marriage and you know all of these things which now we just laugh at we're like oh that's so funny but that that was there that happened you know and that was that existed and it's so important I think to see how far we've come and also how far we've got to go regarding that I think

I think that's important 'cos I think for me what was striking when I read Dracula again was obviously Mina - Mina Harker - in the book is there to support the male characters in their huge wonderful journeys and some of the lines that for example Van Helsing says are directly from the book it's a compliment in the in the book when Van Helsing turns to Mina and says you have the brain of a man it's a compliment. For me I think while we have come a long way while I was reading Dracula again I was also watching the news and seeing women all over the world be refused a right to education be tortured, abused, disappear for not wearing a head scarf correctly or not adhering to certain rules women rioting, cutting off their hair that was all happening in Iran while I was you know reading Dracula after that having you know the right to education refused in Afghanistan I felt like wow we have come a long way and yet we're going backwards look at Roe and Wade and what happened in America with you know right to a woman's right to their own body and that's something that Dracula offers Mina in our version your body will be yours you'll be able to walk the streets at night without fear you will be able to study what you want build a library in the house that you own not have to worry about taking a man's name if you don't want to and that's not to say and it's very this is very important for me if you want to take a man's name that's absolutely wonderful but it's the idea of being forced to it's a choice isn't it?

its about choice and I think that's one of the huge themes that runs through our piece is that it's about choice and at the end of the piece when Mina turns around and says follow me if you want - it's your choice - you know this is a leap of faith I'm not going to tell you what to do and I'm not telling you that I will rule over you I remember the first time I heard that and the first time I heard Liz's monologue in the audition room and I wept. It struck a cord.

I hope that the that the themes are encouraging and beget conversation - yeah conversations - that in turn begets progression yeah those are your ideals at the same time we also hope people have fun yeah and and have a laugh yeah and I think it has done that I think speaking to folk after the show it's been really interesting to to see how much conversation there is and people disagreeing over certain things and you know I love that I think that's what good theatre does.

DRACULA: MINA'S RECKONING |

MORNA PEARSON

NTS came to me, it was Caroline Newall was doing maternity cover for Jackie Wylie at the time so it was that long ago that she came to me and said would I like to adapt Dracula and I said yes of course and initially it was going to be quite a short deadline, so it wouldn't have been a radical retelling it would have been oh there's not a lot of time I have to quickly make this into a stage play but in the end, it turned out that they wanted to make most of it so they didn't set a programming deadline for quite a while and then the pandemic happened and delayed the process for two years.

I adapted Jekyll & Hyde which is in the same realm is Dracula for Lung Ha Theatre Company about five or six years ago I think and I really enjoyed that I moved the location in Jekyll & Hyde's London, I moved that to Edinburgh and it worked really well so I assumed that moving Dracula from London up to Aberdeen would work the same way and I think it did, so NTS were very happy with me relocating it.

In the play Aberdeen sort of takes the place of London and Cruden Bay sort of takes the place of Whitby and we've kept Transylvania as a location and I thought I'd read the full text but it turns out I have a very heavily abridged version that I didn't return to my high school library so- I have told them now and they're just like well give it back if you want but it's been a long time.

So yes I liked Dracula from my young age but, so then I read the full text and just with a view to what on earth will I do with this because it's massive and it's impossible, especially in its form, it's impossible to just plonk it on the stage because it's all letters and journals and it's not very theatrically dynamic, so I read it and took notes and a lot of my notes sort of and my feelings about it stay have stayed the same- for instance Mina struck me as a theatrical protagonist she has quite a bit of agency in the novel, I wanted her to find more in our version and some of the characters really stuck out and then a few of the characters were, didn't feel necessary or they were hard to justify having them in a play where you have to justify the existence of all your characters because that's a whole person in a whole other part of the budget.

When you write a new play, it's usually just your whole idea, the way that Sally works is very hands on, on her feet, when she came on board she was never going to just put my script on the stage she would obviously want input as a theatre maker which she is as well as a director and so although I had ideas of what I wanted to do with it, Sally also had big ideas of how she envisioned it. I'm very not, I'm not visual at all, I literally don't have a visual memory so and Sally is very visual and not sort of text based such as I am, so somewhere in between us Rosie Kellagher the dramaturg here at NTS sort of was the bridge between our two processes.

So the development process worked by, some weeks in Rockvilla here with Sally, actors, Benji the composer and myself and Rosie Kellagher, I think the first couple of development weeks there was a lot of exploration of themes and visual ideas and exploring how on Earth do you put horror on stage, yeah so how do you make something scary when there's nothing to hide behind really, and then in between these weeks we would have schedule Zoom meetings because Sally's Bristol based, I'm Edinburgh based and so yes fully 21st Century theatre development and then gradually especially when we settled on the Asylum framing and that therefore informed casting choices, then we started to see people who would really fit the roles, we hadn't found our Dracula in any of the development weeks so there was always a question of who is Dracula, what do they sound like?

So it's only when rehearsal started that I met Liz for the first time and I was like - ah that's Dracula there, she just has a natural power and grace about her and when you read Dracula for the first time you assume Jonathan's the protagonist you go oh this is his story then suddenly he disappears obviously and then for a very long time Dracula the you know the namesake isn't really in it much,

the tension sort of rumbles beneath the novel of Dracula but he's rarely in it and why would you want to show a point of view from a, an evil person I'm not into that, I prefer to take the point of view of somebody who's open to sort of personal growth and change as a character throughout a story, that was Mina for me and contextually women in the late Victorian era had quite a lot of challenges I would say so I find digging into that history quite interesting filtering it through a 21st century lens you can see how far or not we've come, also helps at comedy you can laugh at the past, sometimes it's easier to laugh at the past that feels distant, for instance Dr Seward the character his thoughts about a woman's place of the time was reflected in Victorian times and there were two lines you know if you were a woman you had to think about your reproductive health, your worth was as a mother and a wife and then similarly if you were a man you had to work stay fit and strong for work and do nothing but work and and that was pretty much the two choices of the the time, and if you sort of landed anywhere other than those two lanes you were seeing as different or other or mentally ill.

I suppose the the book endures because there's room for interpretation in different reflections and in our case we sort of investigated certain threads and themes that are very much of this time so it allows you to do that. The biggest change with having the asylum frame the story is that I had to create another seven characters so all the actors doubled up apart from Mina she plays herself in both worlds as it were so I created all the patients in the asylum scenes, I did create their full back stories and everything but it turns out we didn't need that much stuff as you'll see when when you see it but, and then it was about how to how to balance those scenes throughout the the play actually the early weeks of rehearsals we felt like we had too much of the asylum world in it so we sort of took it all out and then then we realized very near the end that there wasn't enough asylum world in so we quickly threw some stuff back in, so hopefully the balance is right we want people to like these characters but also we don't want them to overtake the main story of Dracula but they are there to listen to Mina tell her story and and therefore we see it through their eyes as well as hers.

So when Sally's trying to think of how on Earth does she stage Dracula she was trying to find a a hook into it and she suggested we frame it with all the other patients in the Asylum that Renfield would share this building with and have that as a way into the story and so Mina comes into the asylum to tell the story of Dracula.

Well I think as soon as Caroline asked me to if I wanted adapt it, I think she'd already assumed I'd want to relocate it just because all my writing is set in the northeast of Scotland that was my initial feeling as well, I'm not particularly familiar with London it's partly write what you know and where you're comfortable but also the link between the northeast of Scotland and Bram Stoker the novelist was striking enough to say well why wouldn't we set here being the National Theatre of Scotland, me being a writer who grew up in the Northeast and Bram Stoker wrote as far as we aware most of the novel in Cruden Bay and was inspired by Slains Castle.

Who has power in the world, who doesn't and why don't they, autonomy especially we've got a cast of women and non-binary, that helps us sort of elevate that theme and suppose identity and I'd like to say regional representation because that's important as well these days.

So I suppose in the novel what I find striking was that all the male characters ended up more powerful than they were at the beginning of the novel and all the women characters were either dead or less powerful, which I knew I wouldn't have in this version you had Arthur who inherited his the title and land from his dad, Jonathan inherited his boss's business after he was killed, he had Mina who became a wife and mother at the end as the only surviving female character so it's a valid choice to become a wife and mother but where that's the only option presented in a novel where all the other women are dead then that's not a great representation of options in the world.

In the novel Mina has, I was actually surprised the amount of agency Mina has in the novel and that probably helped me decide oh hang on she's a great sort of character to follow, her skills and mind

is vital in defeating Dracula in the novel and I suppose I felt disheartened at the end where she is happy with the status quo, everything, everything goes back to normal she has a baby called Quincy, I thought, felt like that wasn't satisfying for me, so Mina in our play has all this agency, she's not as privileged as she is in the novel I find it more interesting to have her have more barriers to fight against and different set of expectations I suppose, so throughout the play Mina has, she uses as much power as she's got in her position in life as a school teacher, she's friends with Lucy who's of a higher class than her the whole backstory I wrote about them is that Lucy and Mina met in Mina's orphanage during a fundraiser like afternoon tea thing so that's how they sort of crossed the class divide and became friends so Mina uses all her skills, she loves learning, gaining knowledge where she can and doesn't settle for what she's given really, although Jonathan wants to propose early on in the play she doesn't feel ready for the question, never mind she is only -we decided she's about 19, that was a point in the play where we sort of diverged from the novel as well we thought that's not quite right for our Mina she doesn't even know what she wants to do with her life yet, never mind settle down.

I suppose we've given her more agency in the play through when Van Helsing comes into town she helps him with research and takes on a lot more research and is more fired up to find Dracula and know how to defeat Dracula and then by the end of the play she is willing to risk her life to defeat Dracula but it turns out she's the power has transferred to her, the power can't die, the Vessel it is carried and dies and then so we leave her overwhelmed not knowing what to do with the power and that's when she goes to the Asylum to to sort of figure out what to do.

I hope an audience primarily enjoys what they've seen, hope they're at least mildly scared and it gives them nightmares and I hope they feel like it's a compassionate and humanist 21st century retelling of the story and I hope they see themselves or people they know in in the story too.

DRACULA: MINA'S RECKONING |

LIZ, DANIELLE & ROS

The first glimpse of Dracula is in their castle in Transylvania. Dracula has purchased a property in Scotland, Carrbridge house, an agent has been sent with paperwork for Dracula to sign before heading for Scotland so Jonathan Harker comes to Transylvania and despite all the warnings along the way and enters the castle and wants to conclude the business quite quickly but it becomes clearer that he's uh he's been entrapped.

Mina the first time we see her is after the events of the entire play have happened she has come to the Aberdeen Asylum and is banging on the door to be let in she's already turned as a vampire and she's coming to share her story with the Asylum patients and explain that she wants to give them her powers as well almost in respect to Renfield because she couldn't save them so everything's already happened to Mina and this is the first time that we're seeing her and then we go back to the start when she starts to explain everything that's happened when, before she turned, before anyone died, before anything majorly awful happens and she's a school teacher at the orphanage that she grew up in and she's with Jonathan and Jonathan wants to propose to her but she doesn't want that, yeah she's kind of on the precipice of all these new things happening to her.

Renfield's first appearance is in a cell in the Aberdeen Asylum and communing with Dracula for the first time so Dracula somehow enters Renfield's cell, Renfield's psyche and yeah they're speaking to Dracula or this mystical being that they don't know what it is but it feels exciting.

Act one when we came into the rehearsal process was pretty much written and we sort of, we did devise around the scenes that were already written and made small changes but that was developed through the development weeks similar to how we developed act two in the rehearsal process where we had scene breakdowns, almost like this is where this will happen, this is Mina's research, this is this scene, this this and then we just sort of worked around it and Morna would take conversations, take improvisations everything would be filmed and she'd go away and make it sound much more beautiful than any of our improvisations could do.

I just want to get as familiar as possible with the character and learn about who they are and we got this amazing 42 page document before the audition which had loads of information about different character breakdowns and vampire information resource, there was, there's so there was so much in there and different scenes, potential scenes so and then we got through, like our first draft of the script and I read each scene and then wrote down my first impressions of Mina and questions that I had about her, why she did some of the things that she does in it, like what I got about her, what I didn't get about her just to start painting a picture and see where the gaps are and yeah just like because my job is to know who she is completely so the sooner I can start on that the better really.

I think there's a difference isn't there between having a published text and having a one that is that is still evolving -yeah- I think that that that made a big difference for for us,

I think it made a massive difference like I think like Renfield was still being developed you know in the last week of rehearsals even so in, before rehearsal period started you know I was working off a couple of monologues but not really knowing how this character fits into the story as a whole. The main thing that I found incredibly useful was the ability to just talk about it all and sort of sit down with big pieces of paper, draw big pictures and go okay Renfield is here, Renfield needs to get here, what happens in the middle, how do we like what parts of this person's narrative are the most important who is Renfield connected to because for instance for this character their such an outsider they're just like, they're like, if you look at the book- If you removed Renfield nothing would

change, the plot would take place as it has taken place and it's about well what are we commenting on, we're commenting on power, we're commenting on desire, freedom uh how how do I get that, what do I find connection with Mina, how do I connect with Dracula, what is it that they're offering me, is it being seen that connects me to Mina and is it the thought of being seen but it's actually somewhat false and the offer of freedom all of these things are sort of like within reach, and sort of being able to just sit down a big pieces of paper, map it all out and just I've never been in a room with so many like brilliant creatives before you know we're working with a composer who is just sort of there knocking up something absolutely stunning, while you know Morna's there typing up an improv that somebody's just done, and Sally's you know thinking of the next thing and it's just so exciting to be in that space and I have always loved working from devising you know this is something that needs to happen in the play, let's put it up on its feet and see what that might look like and maybe it'll be disaster, maybe it'll be absolutely terrible and not work at all, so then it's like okay well let's try something different with that let's do this thing and then let's write a bit of that and see if it works on paper as well as in an improv and I just love that way of working.

The atmosphere was created such that I've never at any point felt I couldn't try something or that anything would be a bad idea because, because you know, you're up against time, you know the days march on and there's an opening night looming and you just have to keep producing ideas and eventually some will stick, but you've just got to keep trying, keep trying, try different way, it's like working your way through a maze but it was certainly a rehearsal room where I also felt quite brave I didn't think I'd have anything to lose by trying things which is actually quite rare, you know I can remember the times when I've just frozen in a rehearsal room because I've just been, I don't know what is it, worried about what other people might think, I'm too old for that now, I don't give it you know so yes you just try everything everything-

It's like failure brings reward in a way even if it's like even if you try it and it's so horrendous that you go well we're definitely not doing that so now we can now we can forget that that happens and like okay let's try something and it's like,

Of like really of ideas that I put forward that were immediately like yeah that's definitely not going to work but at least I was like well I'm happy that I'm giving you an option that you can bat out and then we'll get to the gold underneath, so my bad ideas are very important actually.

We called them making offers-

Making offers exactly, not bad ideas, making offers yeah -

Can I make offer, can I make it offer-

Exactly, there was in terms of like things that pivoted one of them for, that was quite crucial for my story was Mina why she was at the Asylum, why she comes to the asylum in the first place at the end. Originally we were thinking is it is it because she she doesn't want all this power and she wants the inmates to kill her or is it that she wants to come and see if she can control her power somehow or in telling the story that changes her maybe and changes her mind about who she is or the inmates help her realise that she's actually got amazing strength and that she can use it for good and so we're doing a lot of figuring out why she's here, like the person that she killed Dr Seward was in charge of that and where people would know to come and and look for her and that definitely helped us tie up the relationship with Renfield because we then obviously decided that it because she promised Renfield the freedom that she wanted them to both share that ended up not happening because Dracula. So she comes to the Asylum and says look I couldn't save Renfield but I want to help you I want you to have the freedom, yeah I think that ties that loose end up quite nicely.

It's a very different ending to the novel which you know constantly calls Mina Murray you know this

new woman but in fact Mina almost disappears to go and cut the roses and make tea it doesn't she at the end almost-

And we had a task to find a woman or non-binary person from Victoria era Britain who had been silenced in some way and we brought a photo of them into rehearsals on the first day I think and shared that and yeah that's sort of well sort of got us thinking about the world that we were in and how far we could reach out of the box and what our constraints were in the society and just get yeah get the wheels turning really.

Yeah and I'm really like not much of a reader like me sitting reading a book about history it's probably never going to happen but I really valued like listening to podcast reading things like trying to understand like the world, the time period, like watching things from you know the time that the play set is of such good value to like understanding the world and where my character might be able to like slot into that or at least understand the sort of politics of the time or yeah the types of people that they would interact with.

I went and sat in Slains Castle, but Slains Castle is supposed to have been the inspiration for the Transylvanian castle and so we were in Aberdeen and very close to Cruden Bay and I just wanted to hear what I know Lucy and Mina can hear on the clifftops because I appear on the cliff top with them and I just wanted to hear what the soundscape was and so that's in my head you know and when I say to Jonathan Harker that the castle is vast, it really is huge and there are lots of doorways, doors that will be locked if the place still had a roof, would have been locked you know and it yeah it's useful because you can get visual images in your head of of places and and it helps to root the words.

Because we're sort of looking at power and the dynamics of power and who's in power, when you watch certain versions of Dracula it's very much like almost caricatures or like stereotypes people like, Renfield is just like this absolute symbol of insanity you know like all of these things like trying to escape but you don't actually get to the crux of like what's going on with them and the same with like you know then Lucy's just there being all like, oh I'm just a woman like caught in something awful as apposed to like finding out like what's driving her to exist and I think well particular from like my character's perspective it's like I don't believe that they are mentally ill at all I think they're just a person who's been put in circumstances that have driven them to behave what is considered abnormally in a society that has these expectations and I think it's really important that we remind ourselves of the fact that this is still happening you know we are very quick to label people in so many different sections of society who we don't understand and we're like well they're odd and it's sort of I think it's sort of allowing us to view that like even though we've come so far and we're not necessarily locking somebody odd up in a room forever and ever but we're still you know locking them up in another way potentially.

I think for me this play, looking at it through today's lens and applying that to something that was written hundreds of years ago is the most powerful and most prominent part is Mina's rage and that being given space and time to be witnessed and in the book she finds out everything about vampires and Lucy dying and her best friend dies and she reads it all and then she just sort of collapses, and is like oh God and then like like there's not much of a reaction she's not given it doesn't feel real and centering a woman's rage that's what makes it a more modern retelling for me.

Also looking at myself and being like where in my life do I give myself space to be angry and we don't really get to do that like publicly, so that's for me the most important thing about why we're telling Dracula today in this way.

For me now a question I asked myself as an actor a lot is if you have a situation in a play what's it like, try and relate it to something in your life or contemporary times and I find myself thinking about figures like Donald Trump or Andrew Tate who must be somehow incredibly attractive and charming to the

women that are drawn to them, but it's but at the end of the day are such coercive controllers and so manipulative and so terribly terribly dangerous , but I see a link from, I see a link a thread running through hundreds of years of that kind of behaviour and in a way that's why I'm doing this play with a with a female and non-binary cast, with this playwright and this director, and this theatre company is to try and turn a mirror back and say look at it because characters like Dracula are not pretty and they're not funny and they're not safe.

Seeing this classic story which is majority male characters and the female characters being victims and our version having women, non-binary people telling the whole story playing all of the male characters as well, it's important that because it means that we are telling it through our point of view and giving a voice to those parts that didn't have a voice back then either and I think as well with with Mina being a woman who's racialised as Black as well, she exists in this world, she exists in 1890 as people that looked like her existed back then too, is important to me that she's there and we're not pretending that she's not Black, her being a person of colour, as well as being a woman, as well as being young and and also having a career and not wanting to get, like all of these things can coexist and she's not just somebody who is a victim and marginalised pushed to the side like she has a voice and she has a purpose and she has drive and for me watching if I was watching that as, from the audience that would make me feel like I can take up more space in the world and I know that as a kid watching shows where the shows that I did find that had people that looked like me and it meant the world because it helped me see who I could be when I grew up, and helped me take up more space like I say it's validating it's really important.

I think for me like obviously the the term non-binary is you know fairly recent phenomena you could say whereas like non-binarity in general has existed for thousands of years to sort of label a production with people that are non-binary is very different and we've completely shifted the plot because obviously Renfield is typically a man and we've made Renfield a non-binary person in the Aberdeen Asylum for women, who is being completely judged and assessed by doctors who are men and who have decided to sort of, oh well that's abnormal so therefore you're you know you're not going to be a child maker, you're not going to be a wife, you're not going to be a homemaker you're not going to be any of these things so therefore you're almost useless to society and I think it's really exciting to have non-binary voices on stage and non-binary characters, because while there's been non-binary actors working in the industry for years and years very rarely do you see that represented through the character itself, very rarely do you see it almost referenced or mentioned and I think it's really important that those stories start to exist on larger platforms, it's something I would have loved to have seen when I was younger so yeah that's really important for me to be part of that.

Yeah Dracula's key figures, obviously my first encounter is with Jonathan Harker who is the means to an end and the end is Mina Murray, that's what when I get a scent of like a like a wolf when I get a scent of Mina Murray, I'm hot on the trail and so I make it my mission to go to Scotland to find Mina Murray, yeah so Jonathan and Mina I think.

Yeah I would say Lucy is Mina's most important relationship because she's been her best friend for 10 years, she's her only family we see that strongest when you first see them together in Cruden Bay and how excited they are to be together in the summer and how free they feel together and then also when Lucy is ill, Mina's taking care of her and learning all she can about her disease and what it is and learning about and then learning about vampirism after she dies like all of this is because of Lucy and wanting her to be, to rest with dignity as she says and not wanting her body to be violated by the men and wanting her soul to be free, those are like- Lucy drives Mina completely like from from the start.

I think there are a lot of key moments for for their relationship, seeing Lucy be killed as a vampire as well that's like I would say is her most key moment, yeah the final nail in the coffin for her to completely just erupt and go after Dracula and want to take that power from Dracula so I would say yes her other key relationship is Dracula and is the person who is subconsciously entering her field

through Mr Swales and his warnings, through Renfield and what Renfield sees that's sort of brewing in her like this darkness and that is Dracula so I'd say that their key moment is well their first one is their initial meeting and the first offer and then their second one is the sharing of blood,

There's also the subconscious one isn't there where where where having seen your best friend staked, the Dracula speech where Dracula offers Mina a different, a way out a freedom supposedly you know where you could cast aside all the restrictions of your life, current life, if you become if you become a vampire so we don't really see each other I think I think the audience is is asked to imagine that that's what Mina that's the voice that Mina can hear in her head although I'm standing right behind her when I'm saying it, yeah we're not in the same space at that point.

Yes and then the blood sharing, Mina turning into a vampire like yeah huge moment and then killing Dracula because she as soon as she learns about Dracula she wants to destroy him and she, and she gets thrown in so many different directions from that point until she finally finds her moment and goes this is, this is it I'm taking you out right now this is my chance um so yeah Lucy and Dracula.

My key relationships are definitely Mina and Dracula for sure, I mean I think it'd be very easy to read it as Seward being one of those key relationships because obviously Dr Seward is the one that's keeping Renfield locked up but I feel like they almost more represent like society and the politics and doctors and research and all of this stuff that's happening, for Renfield themselves they are entirely alone until Dracula enters their world and their sphere and offers them something new and freedom and excitement and things that they desire more than anything they almost give them a new lease of life.

And Mina obviously is this sort of odd relationship to Renfield like I think there's in a way like I don't really know why you're being kind to me like why you're entering my my cell and chatting to me like I'm a normal person which obviously never happens, and I think because of that I see our connection much stronger and I think we both understand that we could both be in one another's situations if life had turned slightly different and I think we really find connection in one another which is why I very much like warn you about Dracula and the risks when I start to realise that a bit of deception going on there and things but yeah entirely you two for Renfield

Actually seeing Mina create Jonathan's journey to Transylvania is a key moment that might get overlooked but I think it's really important because it shows Mina's love discovery, and education and how clever she is, how much she want, wants to get out of her box that she's in and she wants to see the world and experience life the way that Jonathan can, that's really at Mina's core like she wants that freedom to move.

Mina learning about vampires as well and again shows how she just takes her own initiative and does all the research herself and reads Emily Gerard's book, *The Land Beyond the Forest* which is a real book which you can read, and she's a Scottish writer- read that it's brilliant- yes Lucy being killed as a vampire that unleashes something very dark in Mina, her grief and her rage at that happening to her because the men locked her in and didn't allow her to be part of what happens to her best friend and then her turning her decision to turn to a vampire and drinking the blood, allowing Dracula to feed from her and then her retaining the power at the end as well which was unexpected.

For Renfield it's that the second monologue they do after the Asylum scene where I've just met you, and it's where I'm at , where Renfield is at this point in their life where they can imagine what freedom is and they know exactly what they want and they can understand exactly what's wrong with the world and they almost recognise it in Mina's character and see you know almost like it's not even just me, like everything is ridiculous and run by this you know society, run by this doctor, they make the decisions and we don't have power but at a pivotal moment in their life where they see themselves getting it, like Dracula's visiting them and they're speaking to Dracula and saying look I know that you can give this to me and it's going to be stunning, and then by contrast I think their sort of second to last key scene is the last one with you, where they've almost accepted that it was all a deception and

they understand that they've almost been like used and played and want to use that connection that was formed like, like I saw that in you then and I'm seeing that you're being tricked like I was and you need to find it another way because you're not locked in and I think that's, I think that's a really like heart-wrenching scene to sort of have that understanding that that that you're screwed, you can't you can't change the way your life is going and even when you offer me freedom, it's like you're not going to be able to give it to me like this is it this is life and then obviously the final moment where Dracula, Dracula kills me, yeah you finally meet him yeah it's like Dracula finally appears and it's to it's to die and in a way it's interesting the way we've done that like the sort of just standing and almost watching my own fate play out I find quite interesting and it's I I think Renfield in a way accepts their fate because I think they'd imagined that the afterlife could potentially be more freeing than the the life that they have.

Especially like hearing a lot of the feedback that we've had so far with the show, I would love audiences to come out seeing like, feeling excited about having different interpretations of stories and that that's that's a good thing, and that it doesn't have to mean that we're making it like worse, like just because it's different.

I mean I always hope that people leave theatre feeling like part of their minds opened up a little bit more to whatever it is we've discussed on stage.

like the fact that they have spent 2 and a half hours watching live theatre, you know when the curtain went up last night and the music started, a couple of women screamed, they got the fright of their lives and then I met somebody coming out the other night who said 'I'll no sleep tonight' and you just think wow- we in two and a half hours we've thrilled and we've we've made people kind of go and we've given them a lot of laughs and we've told a good story and essentially that's what it is, it's a fantastic story.

DRACULA: MINA'S RECKONING |

KENNETH MACLEOD

I think I first met Sally, Sally Cookson the director last summer and had a wee sit down and she explained to me the kind of basic premise, I think at that point in one of the studios downstairs there was lots of big sheets of paper with all the kind of major plot points, kind of still, kind of finding their place in the script but she kind of outlined this basic premise of re-examining Dracula through the eyes of Mina, who is this main character who somewhat sidelined in the book despite being the kind of, core kind of database of information which ultimately brings Dracula down, putting her at the forefront but also relocating all the action to Aberdeenshire, touching on some of the time that Bram Stoker spent there writing the novel and looking at how doric, and the kind of Northeast could play a part in retelling the story.

From that point on it really sort of first, first steps were just casting the net as broadly as possible so to speak, looking at every single reference, every single Dracula done before as much as we could, on Slains Castle getting up there for a visit looking at the coastlines of Aberdeenshire, looking at the fashions of the late 1890s which we knew, we were going to, we wanted to explore keeping it in that period but ultimately kind of it was it was a really broad kind of initial research about everything to do with Dracula.

To kind of get the ball rolling, I did a very early design for the show, just a really kind of kind of blue sky idea, that was able to sit down with Sally with and say this is not necessarily fully developed or perfect but it's kind of a starting point and that let us kind of have a starting point, we started to tear it up we started to kind of build something new but that kind of first initial design was just a a good kind of starting point for trying to establish what the tone of the show was and what her initial instincts were of kind how to stage it.

Initially that was that was drawings, that was all kind of full colour renders, kind of a, kind of pack of story boards with kind of five scenes about how each one could kind of look and how the whole thing could evolve but quite quickly, we moved into, into 3D and we- our next few meetings we sat down with a with a model box of HMT in Aberdeen and started to tear up bits of card and piece them together and sellotape them together and start to kind of actually get into the kind of nitty gritty of what the what the 3D space is and thankfully we were also very lucky to have two developments in that time which we were able to have prototype scaffolding sets built for us in the space that also let us interrogate even more what we wanted this final space to work like.

The whole process begins I think with the first sit downs with Sally, with the director at which point in this case we had very rough kind of headings almost for each scene so I had a kind of really great jumping off point of what locations we were going to visit from that point I start sketching and researching, lots of very fast thumbnail sketches things that wouldn't make sense to anybody else but trying to get a sense of the shape of the thing in really broad strokes and trying to capture again, this kind of first initial gut instinct that we wanted for the space was which was the sense of kind of impending doom and this kind of outer world kind of encroaching.

From that point I start modelling in 3D quite quickly I use Vectorworks and start modelling in a, in a kind of 3D way on the computer which I enjoy because it means there's no waste I'm able to quite quickly knock up a version of the space before I even start cutting card or cutting paper and somewhere around the same time I'm sitting down with Sally with bits of paper and tearing them up and putting them into a 3D model, so between that and this much more refined computer model, hopefully able to begin to gather a lot of the details for the, for the final set in there there's also lots of research, I think in this I tend to just have one big document on my laptop that I just drag every

single image that I think could ever possibly be useful in there, mostly as a way to immerse myself in, in the, in the period and all those details. I think in this ended up with about 200 kind of A4 sheets, A3 sheets of images and research going all the way from the institutions at the time, to Bram Stoker, to Emily Gerard who influenced Bram Stoker and then that begins to influence a lot of the yeah finer details on the set and eventually I find myself at a point where I'm able to produce a final colour model build 1:25 version of His Majesty's Theatre in Aberdeen, and then fill it with with a final colour model which in this case was a combination of 3D parts representing the pre-existing bits of set from NTS and handmade pieces to kind of create the more custom bits that would bring it all together and that's coloured, that's painted, which is then used further down the line as a reference for the scenic artists in painting the final model as well as for the Carpenters and metal workers who who'll be building the set pieces and yeah from then it's kind of much more detailed drawing, I do drawings construction drawings that are focused more in the detail more more in the design detail whereas Courtland and Cliona and the production management team here at NTS take those and also do their own set of construction drawings that break them down into much more kind of bread and butter information for the makers, and then alongside all of that there's the research that's going into the costume again that begins from really loose sketches, looking at each of the characters looking at who they're going to change into and what the major things that we can do to have them change character but in the kind of swiftest, easiest way a huge plus point of this process was how much development time we had with the cast and so was able to get a sense of of their physicalities, of their body shapes, of their like what they were going to bring to the character and what the first instincts of the character were as well so that set me off really well and producing a full set of colour renderings which then go to wardrobe and able to be costed and things sourced from. And yeah from there we then start gathering fabric samples the brilliant makers that we had building the masks were able to provide some prototypes and some samples of what those materials would of, what those masks would be made of, as well as the scenic artist did some samples for us of exactly what that kind of silvery finish to the set into the clifftops would be, and yeah and then eventually before you know we're in the space the set's built, we're adding lights and sound and projection and we're able to start snagging finer details, things like masking to make sure we're not going into looking the audience isn't looking into the wings and yeah making sure it all comes together cohesively.

In the sort of normal process of designing a set, a lot like architecture you present a a rough, no colour, no detail but accurate 3D model. At NTS there's a massive push to adhere to the theatre green book and make sure that I think 70% of the set is either reused or is able to have a future life afterwards, so that initial presentation with model is also the point where we talk about what elements could be borrowed from previous sets, what elements could be made from materials that are renewable and that's the point we try and take all of our green boxes before I then make the final colour model at the final presentation.

Here at NTS we've got a brilliant head of stage Courtland who has a fantastic 3D printer, the in the set we have these brass sconces which are really beautiful and they're all custom 3D printed in order to hide all the wires, gubbins in them but the other benefit was that we knew that we wanted this set to be as as recycled and as green as possible and NTS had a huge stock of sets from previous shows that we wanted to reuse so for example the the kind of cliff shapes are kind of basic kind of theatre flattage but are actually kind of a frankenstein of lots of previous shows and our metal gantry system is also a kind of patched together bits of James play and bits of Midsummer and bits of lots of other previous shows so to help that process we were able to 3D print all of NTS's set stock which made it very easy for me to take what we knew the shape the shape of the set to be and incorporate all these existing pieces while retaining the vision so that was amazing.

We knew it was going to be Liz Kettle playing Dracula who already is such a like incredible presence and we knew with all costume design in the show that we didn't want to lose seeing the person there, we didn't want to overcrowd them with too much stuff.

For example the characters that that kind of switch between male and female characters we didn't want to start putting facial hair on them or things like that we didn't want to lose, lose the performance there and so we had some really great early days with Liz where she came in and we got to play with fangs, we got to play with nails, we got to play with, we talked about contact lenses and we realised a lot of these kind of vampire iconic things are quite kind of close-up um features things that work really well on film but don't necessarily translate on stage, which was good because you found that Liz couldn't talk as well in fangs as she wanted to and so that was a detail that we were quite happy to lose, especially if it meant relying on Lewis's projection or Aideen's lighting to kind of blow up some of those some of those moments.

Something that I think was always in our minds because there's so much gender swapping in the in the in the show, was exactly where Dracula would land kind of on that scale, was Liz going to be playing it as a man, was Liz going to be playing it as a woman, or was Dracula this kind of ancient being where the gender kind of lost all meaning and I think that's kind of where we where we found it, so what we did to Liz was was fairly minimal on the end, Liz has amazing almost waist length hair that just is is kind of wild and we wanted to keep that but we ended up augmenting it with a small wig piece which changed the shape of Liz's hairline, and I think gave her a much more kind of severe look. This really minimal makeup in the final design it's mostly about highlighting kind of the extremes of her features, and the biggest thing is the kind of talons which Liz has which are these lovely kind of 3D printed claws, which catch the light painted into to kind of blend into Liz's skin tones and there's one kind of variation of those talons, which lets Liz kind of open a vein during the show, blood drips out of her arm, the kind of image that we wanted to go for was Dracula kind of opening a vein, and so we went through several kind of ideas about how she might do that, some of them were quite elaborate kind of piping systems that she was maybe able to operate from under her arm or from off stage but at the end it was a really kind of low-fi solution, she has a small pump hidden in her palm, which has a pipe up to, a copy of one of the talons but if you look closely they're really very different but um painted in, you don't get to appreciate that from the audience um and so Liz is able to control the flow of blood herself and which I think makes it much more show proof, and so Liz is able to pump with her hand and kind of make the streak of what is actually chocolate syrup down her arm for Danielle who plays Mina to then drink up and the reason we use chocolate syrup is that it washes out the costumes really well and from the distance on stage you don't appreciate that it's brown rather than red.

And beyond that it was kind of about finding the the costume and making sure that the costume supported her as much as possible so there was a lot of back and forth, how long could it be to give Liz the drama but also how short it have to be to make sure that she could scale all the kind of gantries and stairways so we've hopefully found a good balance.

We knew that the story was going to be set in 1890 as it is in the novel the novel was published in 1897 so in my eyes we had almost that kind of window to play in kind of and also as much as we knew that we wanted it to be period because we were dealing with social issues of the time, we also didn't want to lose anyone under too much frill, or dress, or skirt or anything that might be too restrictive and also movement wise we didn't want to restrict anyone, so there was a a kind of balance to be found about making sure that the silhouettes and the shapes were recognisably Victorian but not going to hinder the cast too much, again because the scripts and the plot were were developing so so much we knew that we had these characters in the Asylum that were going to switch to become the male characters that from the original Dracula story but we didn't know quite how or when those changes would be happening, so thankfully all the costume all the costumes were designed to be able to be quick changeable from the get-go which meant that as we progressed we always knew a regardless of what the structure of scenes might end up being we knew that we could get them in and out fairly quickly.

So we have the asylum in the kind of main almost kind of parchment linen dresses, so our asylum costumes are kind of inspired by the fact that some of the asylums had proper uniforms some of

them didn't a and so the initial notion was that it was this idea that the women had also almost been given fabric to make their own outfits that incorporated some aspects of their back stories, which was a great starting point Morna had written back stories for each of the women about what their previous lives were, what their family situations were like, what their social status was, that formed some of the some of the shapes and details on their Asylum costumes.

Initially those quick changes were going to be much quicker in that we were going to retain the skirts and it was only going to be the top half that changed with waist coats and with hats to turn them into the male characters, with the skirts remaining as kind of a reminder we that we're in a kind of memory world but as we got closer and closer we found that the the kind of change in physicality that that gives a performer between a skirt and trousers was far more interesting and far more useful to them, so that was something that changed over the course of it.

And again I suppose the biggest design challenge costume wise was Dracula, we were going to have several outfits that show Dracula kind of progress from a much more ragged ancient kind of medieval Baron, when we meet him in Castle Dracula to much more svelte kind of Victorian gentleman when he lands in Cruden Bay to a kind of carnal bird inspired monster when he attacks Lucy, ultimately all those ideas kind of became one costume which I think was far more useful in kind of defining Dracula's look.

My favorite piece of costume is probably, is probably Dracula's cloak which was made by a costume maker here in Glasgow it's beautifully made and really every single aspect of it was looked at in so much detail whether Dracula could open their sleeves properly to let blood, whether it had enough volume to sweep about but also not get tripped up in the front, there's little details like it's got a kind of blood red lining as well as a of small red button at the top little kind of hints as to their kind of more carnal nature and it's got this lovely kind of almost leathery geometric pattern to it which I really enjoy.

The almost jumping point theme wise was that we wanted this sense of this impending doom of there always kind of being something on the periphery, this danger we wanted the set to have a tension between the natural world and the kind of more built institutional world of the Asylum and we also knew that a lot of these scenes moved so fluidly that we wanted to be able to go from Asylum to Castle Dracula to Cliffs of Cruden Bay very quickly and swiftly, and we also knew that we had Lewis den Hertog able to augment the set with more images to help us with those scene changes, so the set became a kind of exploration of how do we make something that is this kind of climbing frame of possibilities for movement and for scaling, there's a lot in the original novel where Dracula climbs cliffs and climbs the walls of Castle Dracula and so we felt like that was a good starting point in terms of what we felt the movement might be, but again it was finding a balance and making sure that it was skeletal and climbing frame like but also had enough surface for Lewis to cover and augment, so we landed with this kind of almost gun metal metal structure which represented the, represent the Asylum and it kind of snakes in and out of these kind of abstracted Cliff shapes which drew their inspiration from the kind of natural world the the kind of cliffscapes at Cruden Bay as well as the ruins of Slain's Castle the shapes of Castle Dracula, again a lot of it was about finding a colour that is going to take the lighting well but also disappear when we wanted to go to moments of darkness so we developed this kind of silvery gunmetal texture which actually links back into the Silver City quite nice, quite nicely

I think the biggest thing that I'd like audience is to take away from our version of Dracula, the thing that I think made the whole approach of it really interesting is this idea of Mina's kind of ultimate temptation by Dracula and that choice and I think setting it keeping it in that late 1890s time period focusing on the angle of it, as her as a kind of feminist heroine and being trapped between a rock and a hard place, between horrible kind of social conditions as a woman in the in that time and a life of kind of eternal darkness and vampirism and, but also eternal life and being able to speak thousand languages and travel across the world, and fly, and transform.

I hope, I hope it makes audience's question quite maybe where they'd fall on that, on that offer should they get it from a ancient vampire.

