



# **DREAMS OF VIOLENCE WORKPACK**

Produced by Out of Joint 2009

## **Aim of Workpack**

The resource materials in this pack are intended to enhance students' enjoyment and understanding of *Dreams of Violence*. The activities present creative and practical strategies for learning in a classroom setting. The resources are primarily aimed at students aged 16+ who are studying Drama at BTEC or A Level. The workpack is in two sections – Themes and The Rehearsal Process.

### **Themes**

Stella Feehily wrote *Dreams of Violence* between 2007 and 2009. When she began thinking about the themes of the play she gathered a folder of newspaper clippings and internet research. In this section of the workpack we will examine some of the recurring themes in her research – social inequality, the financial crisis and feminism - using some of the materials she found. We are privileged to have notes on the health problems of the characters from Dr D.H. Bhatt of Cornell University, who attended rehearsals for the play. There is also an interview with Stella Feehily.

### **The Rehearsal Process**

Out of Joint's Associate Director, Jessica Swale gives us an insight into the rehearsal process for *Dreams of Violence*. Out of Joint's Artistic Director, Max Stafford-Clark, uses two stages of rehearsal – actioning and analysis – using the techniques of actioning, status and research; then staging and performance. There are exercises on actioning and improvisation for students to try these methods themselves. Jessica also provides two extracts from her rehearsal diary, and interviews two of the cast members – Jamie Baughan and Catherine Russell.

We hope you find the materials interesting and relevant for your studies.

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# Themes

*By Maeve McKeown, Education Manager*

# Social Inequality

## Poverty in the UK

In *Dreams of Violence*, the cleaners Annie and Bea are two of those living in poverty in the UK. They are struggling to make ends meet on the minimum wage and are angry at the bankers whose offices they clean, who are oblivious to their plight and earn vast amounts of money.

The United Nations (UN) defines poverty as



*"a human condition characterized by the sustained or chronic deprivation of the resources, capabilities, choices, security and power necessary for the enjoyment of an adequate standard of living and other civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights."*<sup>1</sup>

When we think of poverty we don't often associate it with the UK, as it is one of the richest countries in the world. However, nearly 1 in 5 people live in poverty in the UK. Oxfam describes poverty in the UK as:

*"not having enough money to have the things that people would consider day-to-day necessities. Be that heating, healthy food, or a house big enough that children of the opposite sex don't have to share rooms."*<sup>2</sup>

According to Oxfam:

- Just under 1 in 5 people in the UK don't have enough to live on – 13.2 million people
- 6.5 million adults lack essential clothing, such as a winter coat
- 9.5 million people can't afford adequate housing
- Women are more at risk of living in poverty than men – in 1999/2000, 1 in 4 women lived in poverty and 1 in 5 men
- Around two-fifths of people from ethnic minorities are in low-income families - twice the rate of white people
- 3.8 million children in the UK are living in poverty

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<sup>1</sup> UNHCHR, 'Poverty', <http://www.unhchr.ch/development/poverty-02.html>

<sup>2</sup> Oxfam GB, 'Key Facts on UK Poverty',

[http://www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/ukpoverty/downloads/ukpp\\_key\\_facts.pdf](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/ukpoverty/downloads/ukpp_key_facts.pdf)

## Reply

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Email: letters@guardian.co.uk

### Letters and emails

# I fear the winter and hope for nothing

Up until three years ago I was a member of the working class (Benefits clamp-down, July 21). I have no qualifications and I raised my family by working hard and earning little. As such I was never able to have either a pension, a mortgage or insurance. Three years ago, within six days of each other, I had a heart attack and my wife had heart failure (totally unconnected). We as a small family were destroyed.

My wife was in intensive care for a month and my daughter took an overdose believing us both dead. What happened to us as a family can happen to any family. We rallied and my son put himself through university by working in a pub and looking after himself – without a single penny from us because we had nothing.

My point is real poverty grows on you and as the things you have become obsolete or break, the poverty deepens. We are now three adults living on £23 a day. Admittedly we have our rent and rates paid. As heart patients we have been instructed to stay warm in the winter as the cold thickens the blood. To this end I contacted my gas and electric supplier in a bid to have the prepayment meters taken out of my home as the tariff was too high and my income was so low. I was told it would cost £200.

I told the supplier that the meters were in place from a former tenant and I had no credit issues with them. They told me it was not their problem. I went to the ombudsman and now I can have the meters taken out if I pay for the energy by direct debit, the rub being that I have to pay in advance, costing me 79% of my income in one month for this to happen. So it can't and they know it.

Every day I shop for the house. I am conscious of the need to eat healthily

but I cannot afford to. Every day I walk past the grapes and look at the price of strawberries. We eat greens and pulses, and we eat pork, but cannot afford chicken. We do not drink, smoke, go out nor entertain and life is hard and getting harder, not just for us but for many.

The television is our only window on a life we once led. We sit destroyed by poverty and watch the world go by as if we were dead but have yet to fall over. While watching the TV we see MPs and MEPs who spend more on taxis than we get to live on and they are telling the country they are going to get tough on us and people like us because we live on benefits.

In relative terms we are poor and getting poorer, but those who represent us are completely oblivious to our needs. I can speak, but have no voice, and those claiming to represent me have failed me. As the gas and electric prices rise for all, they may also become out

of reach for many. Now I fear the winter and hope for nothing.

The BBC news now tells me my benefits will be scrapped and I will be tested (I have been tested twice already). I will have to bare all my privacy in the hope of retaining the right to survive the winter. So I ask myself, why can people demand the destruction of the poor? The answer is simple. There are 600-odd vacancies in Westminster every four years. The job, if you can get it, pays a king's ransom and all that is required is that you follow whatever is in vogue. At the moment, acting Dickensian is all the rage.

**Name and address supplied**



Read the letter sent to The Guardian in July 2008, which Stella used as part of her research, and discuss the following questions:

1. What are your opinions of people living on benefits? Does this article change/challenge your opinion?
2. Do you think it is right or fair that people struggle in this way in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain or do you think this man is feeling sorry for himself?
3. There is a link between obesity and income, acknowledged in this letter – ‘I am conscious of the need to eat healthily but I cannot afford to’. How do you think this relates to the looming obesity epidemic, or not at all?
4. This family faces the choice between heating and eating. Which would you choose?
5. How were these issues approached in *Dreams of Violence*?

## Living Wage

*Hildy*                    *The cost of living has gone up  
And we've got to defend ourselves but how do we do that when wages fall miserably short of  
being a living wage?*

The Greater London Authority has estimated that earning less than £6.65 per hour in London puts a person below the poverty line.<sup>3</sup> It is argued by many pressure groups, including London Citizens and The Living Wage Campaign that workers in London require a Living Wage. The Living Wage is defined as “a wage that achieves an adequate level of warmth and shelter, a healthy palatable diet, social integration and avoidance of chronic stress for earners and their dependents”.<sup>4</sup> The Living Wage is calculated to ensure that a person would not fall into poverty due to unforeseen circumstances. To calculate this 15% is added to the poverty threshold wage, making the London Living Wage £7.60 per hour.

The Living Wage shouldn't be confused with the minimum wage. The minimum wage is set by the government and must be adhered to by employers by law. It is currently £5.73 per hour – nearly a pound less than the London poverty threshold. The Living Wage is a voluntary commitment that employers choose to make and currently very few companies have signed up to it.



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<sup>3</sup> Greater London Authority, 'A Fairer London: The 2009 Living Wage in London,' [http://www.london.gov.uk/mayor/economic\\_unit/docs/living-wage-2009.pdf](http://www.london.gov.uk/mayor/economic_unit/docs/living-wage-2009.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

## Justice for Cleaners

*Hildy            You work in the same offices but live in very different worlds.*



***“London's cleaners are fed up with employers who do the dirty on them. They are fed up with fat cat profits for the bosses while cleaners struggle to make ends meet on poverty pay. It is time for justice for people who keep these buildings running, the cleaners toiling for a pittance to make these places fit to work in. It is time to clean up the City.”<sup>5</sup>***

Justice for Cleaners is a campaign initiated by the Transport and General Workers Union (T&G). It was launched in February 2006 and campaigns for the London Living Wage, sick and holiday pay and free London travelcards, for cleaners in the City. The campaign mainly targets ISS, the largest cleaning contractor in the City, which employs 135,000 people worldwide and has a turnover of £170 million. Firms including Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley, Barclays and PriceWaterHouseCoopers use ISS cleaners.

Justice for Cleaners staged demonstrations outside ISS employers' buildings (see the advert opposite, which appeared on a message board on libcom.org – a Marxist, activist website). The protest in *Dreams of Violence* is modelled on their demonstrations.

Justice for Cleaners has had a lot of success. Canary Wharf is now a London Living Wage Zone and the campaign has moved on to target the hotel industry.

### Justice for Cleaners demo Tuesday 21st November !2pm at Goldman Sachs

NEXT TUESDAY NOVEMBER 21st at LUNCHTIME

'JUSTICE FOR CLEANERS' WILL DEMONSTRATE AGAINST 'GOLDMAN SACHS' WHO OWN 45% OF THE PROPERTY SERVICES GIANT – ISS.

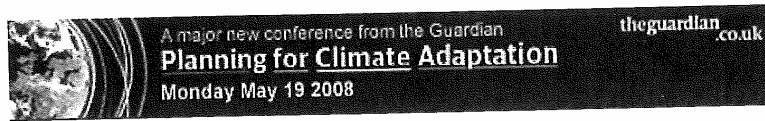
MEET 11.30 AT T&G CENTRAL OFFICE  
TRANSPORT HOUSE  
128 THEOBALDS RD HOLBORN  
LONDON WC1X 8TN

A FEW MINUTES FROM HOLBORN TUBE.

THE DEMO SHOULD START BY 12.15 ....IF IT'S MUCH EASIER FOR YOU TO GO STRAIGHT THERE, CAN YOU PLEASE TEXT ME 07 \*\*\* \*\* ABOUT AN HOUR IN ADVANCE .... IN CASE THERE HAS BEEN A CHANGE OF PLAN.

GOLDMAN SACHS

<sup>5</sup> T&G, 'Campaigns,' <http://www.tgwu.org.uk/Templates/Campaign.asp?page=6&nodeid=89576>

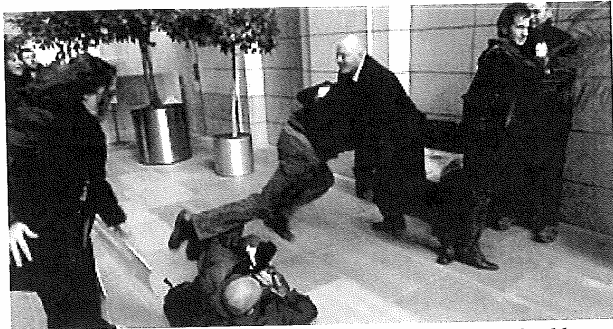


guardian.co.uk

2.30pm

## Cleaners burst into Goldman Sachs offices

guardian.co.uk, Tuesday November 28 2006



Employees of cleaning company ISS burst into the offices of Goldman Sachs.  
Photograph: Andrew Stuart/PA

Office cleaners staged a protest at the Fleet Street offices of Goldman Sachs today as part of their long-running campaign for higher wages.

Around 40 cleaners, some carrying placards saying "Goldman Sucks", blocked the investment bank's entrance and there were scuffles with security guards.

The cleaners are employed by one of Britain's biggest building services companies, ISS, which is part-owned by Goldman Sachs.

They are demanding a pay rise for cleaners in the capital, many of whom are on the minimum wage of £5.35 an hour.

Goldman Sachs recently appointed 100 new partners, a quarter of them based in London, who can expect to earn more than \$10m (£5.3m) from annual bonuses on top of their seven-figure pay packets.

• Email [business.editor@guardianunlimited.co.uk](mailto:business.editor@guardianunlimited.co.uk)

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# The Financial Crisis




*Dreams of Violence* is set against the backdrop of the financial crisis. When writing the play, Stella Feehily used a timeline of the credit crunch to set the events in context. Here is a timeline of some of the main events that took the world into recession.

The seeds of the **credit crunch** were sown in the USA between 2004-2006, when mortgage lenders were giving mortgages to people with poor or no credit histories – known as sub-prime mortgages. As US **interest rates** rose from 1% to 5.35%, these borrowers were unable to make their mortgage repayments, infecting the markets with bad debt.

21 Jan 2008	Global stock markets suffer biggest falls since September 11 2001.	1 Dec	The US <b>recession</b> is officially declared.
17 Feb	Northern Rock, a UK mortgage lender, is <b>nationalised</b> .	16 Dec	The US <b>Federal Reserve</b> slashes interest rates from 1% to a range of 0%-0.25% - the lowest since records began.
17 March	Wall Street's fifth-largest bank, Bear Stearns, is taken over by JP Morgan Chase for \$240m – it was worth \$18bn a year before.	31 Dec	The <b>FTSE 100</b> closes down 31.3% since the beginning of 2008 – the biggest annual fall in the 24 years since it started.
30 April	The first annual fall in UK house prices is recorded – 10.5% in one year.	8 Jan	The Bank of England cuts interest rates to 1.5%, the lowest in its 315 year history.
30 Aug	Chancellor Alistair Darling warns the economy is facing its worst crisis for 60 years.	9 Jan	US unemployment rises to 7.2%, the highest for 16 years.
7 Sept	Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, America's two largest lenders, which account for nearly half of US mortgages, are rescued in the biggest bailout in US history.	13 Jan	China exports report the biggest decline in a decade.
15 Sept	Lehman Brothers files for bankruptcy – the biggest major <b>investment bank</b> to collapse so far.	23 Jan	The UK officially enters recession.
17 Sept	Lloyds TSB takes over the UK's biggest mortgage lender HBOS.	10 Feb	The former bosses of RBS and HBOS apologise "profoundly and unreservedly" for their banks' failures.
29 Sept	In a shocking move, the US <b>House of Representatives</b> rejects a \$700bn rescue plan for the US financial system. Wall Street shares plunge.	17 Feb	The new US President, Barack Obama, signs a \$787bn recovery deal – "the most sweeping recovery package in our history."
3 Oct	The US House of Representatives passes a revised version of the rescue package.	2 April	At the <b>G20</b> summit in London, leaders agree on \$1.1trillion to tackle the global crisis.
8 Oct	The UK government announces a rescue package of £50bn.	1 May	The UK Treasury Committee says that bankers have made "an astonishing mess" of the financial system.
14 Nov	The Eurozone officially slips into recession.	9 June	UK unemployment rises to 7.1% with 2.22million people out of work.



## Glossary

<b>Credit Crunch</b>	A sudden reduction in the availability of bank loans (credit).	
<b>Federal Reserve</b>	The US's central bank – part-government owned, part-private. Responsibilities include moderating interest rates and maintaining financial stability.	
<b>FTSE 100</b>	The hundred biggest companies on the London stock exchange.	
<b>G20</b>	The world's 19 largest economies plus the EU.	
<b>House of Representatives</b>	The US government is divided into two chambers – the House and the Senate. There are 435 members of the House of Representatives, who are elected in proportion to the population of the State.	
<b>Interest Rates</b>	The price a borrower pays for money they do not own; in terms of financial policy they are used to control inflation, investments and unemployment.	
<b>Investment Banks</b>	Provide financial services for governments, companies or extremely rich individuals. They differ from commercial banks where you have your savings or mortgage.	
<b>Nationalised</b>	Taken into government ownership.	
<b>Recession</b>	Technically defined as two consecutive quarters of negative economic growth	

## Bankers' Responsibility



One of the themes of *Dreams of Violence* is responsibility – Hildy's responsibility for her family; Hildy and Shirley's responsibility for the elderly and infirm Jack; Hildy and Ben's responsibility for their son's drug addiction; and of course the bankers' responsibility for the financial crisis. The main contrast is that between public and private responsibility.

The bankers, such as Carl, have been dealing with other people's money. Many people feel that bankers have been irresponsible, taking huge risks with ordinary people's savings, and

that they should take the blame for the financial crisis. Robert Peston, the BBC's business editor says, "We're in this mess because too much was lent by too many in a wholly irresponsible way."<sup>1</sup>

Tempers were running high in March 2009 – it was revealed that Sir Fred Goodwin, former boss of Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS), which was bailed out by the government using £33bn of tax-payers' money, was receiving a £650,000 a year pension. A group calling themselves 'Bankers are Criminals' attacked his £2m house in Edinburgh, smashing windows, and his Mercedes. They sent him emails saying, "We are angry that rich people, like him, are paying themselves a huge amount of money, and living in luxury, while ordinary people are made unemployed, destitute and homeless. This is a crime. Bank bosses should be jailed. This is just the beginning."<sup>2</sup>



However, some people believe that individuals cannot be blamed for the banking crisis. Rather, the whole of society bought into the consumer culture of the 1990s and 2000s, and therefore responsibility has to be shared. The Guardian's Tetsuya Ishikawa argues, "ultimately whatever happens to any individual is going to have very little relevance to getting the UK out of this mess... you can't blame just those in the City. What about those in Wall Street and Washington? What about all the Ferrari-driving sub-prime mortgage brokers in California? What about the fund managers we trusted to invest out money? What about those who borrowed beyond their means, despite warnings about the rising consumer debt levels in this country?"<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Robert Peston, 'Bankers and Responsibility', [http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/thereporters/robertpeston/2009/01/bankers\\_and\\_responsibility.html](http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/thereporters/robertpeston/2009/01/bankers_and_responsibility.html)

<sup>2</sup> Jenny Percival and Severin Carrell, 'Vandals Target Fred Goodwin's House and Car,' <http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2009/mar/25/sir-fred-goodwin-royalbankofscotlandgroup>

<sup>3</sup> Tetsuya Ishikawa, 'Stop Scapegoating Bankers,' <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/feb/27/banking-recession>

## Questions

1. Do you think bankers are to blame for the crisis, or should the whole of society take responsibility?
2. What do you think of the group 'Bankers are Criminals' attacking Fred Goodwin's house? Were they justified?
3. Do you think the general public should have been more frugal, rather than taking out large loans and getting into debt? Are you responsible with money?
4. Do you think this is a wake-up call or will society revert back to how it was when the recession ends?

# Feminism

For Stella Feehily, *Dreams of Violence* is not a feminist play, but there are several feminist *themes* in the play: the debate between opposing strands of feminism, presented by Hildy and Shirley; the constraints of poverty on working class women; the question of what is a woman's responsibility; and the theme of violence challenging traditional notions of femininity.

## Hildy and Shirley

Hildy is an ex-social worker who has set up her own non-governmental organisation (Small Change). Hildy is a **Marxist Feminist**, something which Feehily researched when writing the play. For Hildy, Marxist revolution and gender equality are equally important goals. Hildy's ideals fuel her working life as she campaigns on behalf of women who work in low-status jobs.

Hildy is contrasted with her mother, Shirley. Shirley was a pop-star in the 60s. She believes that freedom for women is being able to do what they want to do (**liberal feminism**); which for her is drinking, taking drugs, having sex with whomever she wants, and being successful in a man's world.

The contrast between the two is reflected thus:

*Shirley*            *I was working at 15.  
A woman-on the road by myself.  
I employed people.  
I gave your dad a job.  
I battled in a male dominated, sexist profession.  
I fucked who I wanted.  
You, Hildy, have more in common with my mother's  
generation than you have with mine.*

*Hildy*              *Fine. You're a feminist icon and I'm a prude but  
pardon me if dope smoking, threesomes and wife  
swapping isn't my idea of liberation.*



## Poverty and Working Class Women

Gender inequality in the workplace is addressed in the banker scenes. As we have already seen, poverty in the UK is more likely to affect women than men. In *Dreams of Violence*, there are two female cleaners and one male banker; the physical presence of these characters on stage is a comment on the fact that men often have high-status, high-paid jobs, while women often do the low-status, low-paid jobs.

The contrast between the cleaners and an investment banker is stark, but it is representative of a problem pervasive across society. For example, only 11% of directors of FTSE 100 companies are women, while women constitute 45% of the UK's workforce.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Fawcett Society, 'Breaking the Mould for Women Leaders – Could Boardroom Quotas Hold the Key', <http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/documents/Breaking%20the%20Mould%20for%20Women%20Leaders%20-%20could%20boardroom%20quotas%20hold%20the%20key.pdf>

There is also a 'wage gap' between working women and men. The Equal Pay Act came into force in 1975, but women in full-time employment still earn 17% less per hour than men in the same job; for ethnic minority women, the gap is 20%; for women working part-time the gap is 36% – rising to 45% in London.<sup>2</sup>

In *Dreams of Violence*, Carl the banker argues that the female cleaners need to take responsibility for their lives. However, he fails to understand the structural constraints imposed on these women. These include, not only the wage gap, but also the fact that the cleaners have come from low-income backgrounds and so their educational opportunities have been limited; unlike Carl who was afforded a private education and the opportunity to go to university. Annie, in particular, has to take a second job to afford to look after her family. She is trapped in the dilemma faced by many working-class women – staying at home to care for her children living off benefits which don't cover basic living costs, or working extra hours in order to pay for childcare.



## Women's Responsibilities



Responsibility is the main theme throughout *Dreams of Violence*. Hildy is responsible for herself, her mother, her father, her son, and campaigning for cleaners. Her myriad responsibilities are contrasted with the other characters.

Her ex-husband, Ben, is only responsible for himself. Their son, Jamie, lets Ben off the hook, blaming Hildy for his problems - "Why can't it be your dad's fault? Hmm? Where the hell was he during your miserable childhood?" Ben has responsibilities

towards his girlfriend, Honey, but he sleeps with Hildy. In the past he had responsibilities towards Hildy, but he cheated on her repeatedly, eventually forcing Hildy to kick him out.

Jack is elderly infirm and therefore has limited responsibilities to other people. However, this doesn't mean he has none – he is rude to those who care for him, and gives his nurse extra work to do by pissing in the corner of his bedroom.

Jamie, Hildy's son, has descended into heroin addiction. He doesn't take responsibility for his problems, but blames his mother instead.

As we can see, the men in *Dreams of Violence* abdicate responsibility for their problems and for others. However, Shirley also avoids responsibility. She has become an alcoholic, dependent on her daughter, and still blames Jack for the decline of her singing career.

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<sup>2</sup> The Fawcett Society, 'The Facts Around Equal Pay,' <http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/index.asp?PageID=321>

The contrast in how the characters respond to responsibility for others, suggests that responsibility usually falls on women who are willing to take it – in this case, Hildy. If Hildy is really to achieve what she wants out of life – overthrowing the capitalist system – she needs to be free of the traditional feminine constraints of taking responsibility for men and other dependents: they need to take responsibility for themselves. These other adults are exploiting Hildy; this is indicative of society at large, which is dependent on women's unpaid and undervalued labour, such as raising children, housework, and caring for the ill. And while women are expected to carry out this work, they cannot achieve their true objectives.

## Violence

Hildy dreams about committing acts of violence against those close to her – “mum... I had a dream last night where I threw you down the stairs. It's not right.” As violence is traditionally considered an exclusively male impulse, Hildy is challenging our notions of femininity. Who is more feminine – Shirley who is a pretty pop-singer and considering plastic surgery, but is extremely selfish; or Hildy who is a political activist and fantasises about violence, but cares for her parents, son and soon-to-be ex-husband?

The question is also raised: Why is Hildy dreaming about violence? As all those around her blame her for their problems and fail to take responsibility for themselves, they are forcing Hildy into a deep sense of unhappiness and anxiety. And perhaps this is a problem in society at large: forcing stereotypical femininity on women – responsibility for others, caring roles, and ideals of youth and beauty – is oppressive and damaging. For Hildy, it conjures up dreams of violence and it turns Shirley to alcoholism.

## Glossary

### Marxist Feminism

Marxist Feminism argues that the oppression of women is directly related to the capitalist system: once capitalism is overthrown, gender inequality will also be obsolete. Other feminists criticise this branch of feminism as it reduces gender oppression to economics, implying that working class men and women should ultimately unite in the class struggle; this fails to recognise that working class men also benefit from unequal gender relations.

### Liberal Feminism

Liberal Feminism was inspired by Betty Freidan's 1963 book *The Feminine Mystique*, which argues that women are capable of much more than raising a family and running a household. Liberal Feminists advocate formal equality, i.e. laws that prevent sex discrimination – equal pay, reproductive rights and access to education. Liberal Feminists don't believe that society needs to be restructured like Marxist Feminists argue, rather that women should be able to operate freely and on an equal footing to men within a liberal democracy.

## Questions

1. Who do you agree with – Hildy, who thinks that society needs to be completely changed for women's needs to be fully included, or Shirley, who thinks women's liberation is about having the choice over what professions women enter and choosing their sexual partners?
2. Do you think there is a link between poverty and gender? If so, why? If not, why not?
3. Who takes responsibility in your household? Is responsibility distributed fairly?
4. Do you think it is strange for a central female character in a play to fantasise about violence?

# Health

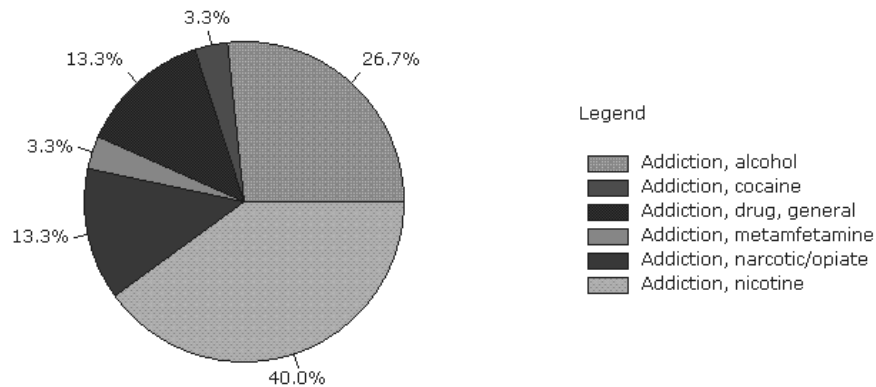
Dr D. H. Bhatt, the Assistant Professor of Neurology & Psychiatry at Cornell University, was present in rehearsals for *Dreams of Violence*. He provided an insight into the medical conditions of each of the characters. Dr Bhatt has diagnosed the characters' conditions as follows:

- Hildy has heart disease and depression
- Jack has had a stroke and has dementia
- Shirley suffers from alcoholism
- Jamie suffers from heroin addiction

Here he provides some notes on these conditions and how they explain the characters' behavior.

## Addiction

Although an exact definition for addiction varies, most doctors and scientists agree that there are two key features. One is the persistent use of a substance despite negative consequences; someone who continues to drink or use a drug even though it is adversely affecting their performance at work/school or creating turmoil in personal relationships or personal safety (often, all of these problems are present). Secondly, addiction requires the presence of physical dependence displayed through withdrawal. Withdrawal is a biological reaction that occurs when levels of a drug drop below a level to which the body has become dependent. It is in essence a physical craving that is coupled but separate from a psychological craving. Different drug addictions have different symptoms of withdrawal. Below is a diagram charting addiction in the UK:



## Alcoholism - Shirley

*Shirley*      *I think it might be best if I were to have a drink.*

The quantity, frequency and regularity of alcohol consumption required to develop alcoholism varies greatly from person to person. Although the biological mechanisms underpinning alcoholism are uncertain, some risk factors, including social environment, stress, emotional health, genetic predisposition, age, and gender have been identified. For example, those who consume alcohol at an early age - 16 or younger - are at a higher risk of alcohol dependence.

Alcohol is the same regardless of the type of drink - wine, beer, hard liquor or mixed drink. It is a drug that has an effect on almost every organ in the body. Alcohol depresses the central nervous system even though the person who drinks alcohol initially seems 'stimulated' - speech becomes free and animated, social inhibitions may be forgotten, and the drinker can begin to act and feel more emotional. But the effects are misleading; "being stimulated" by alcohol actually amounts to a depression of self-control.

Taken over a long period of time or with frequent use, alcohol has irreversible negative effects throughout the body. With each drinking episode, central nervous system functions (i.e., the brain and the spinal cord) deteriorate in a predictable sequence, beginning with intellectual functioning, followed by disturbances in sensory and motor control. Last affected are the automatic biological functions, such as breathing and heart action. However, the brain is the organ that is most affected by alcohol and we can see this through the drinker's behavior changes and emotional distress.

As mentioned earlier, any addiction is defined by two key features: dependence and withdrawal. It is important to note that alcohol withdrawal is the most dangerous of all the drug withdrawals since it can lead to death without timely medical attention. Symptoms of alcohol withdrawal include:

- *Hangovers* - headache, fatigue, thirst, nervousness, nausea and abdominal cramping.
- *Sleep disturbance*
- *Irritability, anxiety, and restlessness*
- *Tremors or "morning shakes"* - physical weakness, rapid heart rate, mental sluggishness. Tremors will clear after several days of abstinence if there is no permanent damage to the nervous system.
- *Alcoholic hallucinosis and delirium tremens* -- This period may last for three to four days - the detoxifying person is in a severe state of agitation, hallucinates, is often completely disoriented and sleeps little, if at all. The delusions are almost always terrifying and may produce violent behavior. There is a 10%-20% mortality rate associated with this stage of withdrawal.
- *Convulsions* -- seizures usually occur between 12 and 48 hours of the last drink.

In almost every scene in which Shirley appears we see some sign of her addiction. Most obvious is her actual drinking but we can also see the long-term effects of alcohol in the way she hallucinates. Alcohol can lead to large gaps in memory and reality perception, which often lead the alcoholic to confabulate - create magical stories. In the last scene, where Shirley has not been able to have a drink for over 36 hours, she becomes shaky, irritable and fixated on leaving her sick daughter's bedside to grab a drink. These are all very real examples of how an alcoholic would behave.

## Heroin – Jamie

*Jamie*            *I'm off the gear mum.*

Heroin is an illegal drug derived from the opium poppy plant, which was first synthesized in London in the 1800's. Its addictive properties are manifested by the need for persistent, repeated use of the drug (craving) and by the fact that attempts to stop using the drug lead to significant and painful physical withdrawal symptoms.



Heroin exerts its primary addictive effect by activating many regions of the brain; the brain regions affected are responsible for producing both the pleasurable sensation of "reward" and physical dependence. Together, these actions account for the user's loss of control and the drug's extremely powerful habit-forming action.

Heroin is primarily taken by injection in the vein. This form of use is called intravenous injection (commonly known as IV injection). This means of drug entry can have grave consequences: uncertain dosage levels (due to differences in purity), the use of non-sterile equipment, contamination of heroin with cutting agents, or the use of heroin in combination with such other drugs as alcohol or cocaine can cause serious health problems such as serum hepatitis, skin abscesses, inflammation of the veins, and cardiac disease. Of great importance, however, is that the user never knows whether the next dose will be usually potent, leading to overdose, coma, and possible death.

The signs and symptoms of heroin use include euphoria, drowsiness, respiratory depression (which can progress until breathing stops), constricted pupils, and nausea. Withdrawal symptoms include watery eyes, runny nose, yawning, loss of appetite, tremors, panic chills, sweating, nausea, muscle cramps, muscle spasms and insomnia. Elevations in blood pressure, pulse, respiratory rate, and temperature occur as withdrawal progresses.

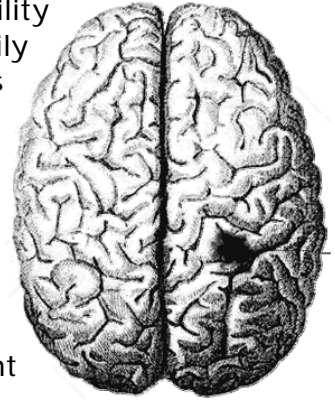
One treatment for heroin addiction is methadone. Methadone is also an opiate drug that has affinity for the same brain receptors as heroin, but has a far less potent effect. Methadone allows the heroin addict to function – avoiding heroin induced highs and stupor, bypassing the dangers involved with obtaining and administering the drug. Nevertheless, the person is essentially 'swapping' their heroin addiction for a methadone addiction.

Before he makes his entrance the audience is made aware of Jamie's drug problem. The fact that he has damaged his relationship with both of his parents, especially his mother, and the degree to which he must solicit family members for money clues us into the depth of his addiction. As stated above, for a user, the psychological craving for heroin is intense and can lead the addict towards self-destruction in attempting to acquire the means or the drug. Once he enters, Jamie admits to his mother that he is in a methadone program. We also see that he has gained a significant amount of weight which is also seen after a heroin addict stops using. Changes in metabolic rates, activity and eating habits (especially a marked increase in sugar intake) contribute to this. In the play, the actor portrays Jamie with a physicality that involves certain muscle ticks and a 'jitteriness' that can indeed be associated with withdrawal. Other symptoms that lead to an overall feeling of misery, are listed by the character himself in the first scene in which he appears.

## Dementia – Jack

*Simon            He's being most uncooperative.*

Dementia is the severe loss of mental functions such as memory, mood stability and reasoning, substantial enough to interfere with a person's daily functioning. Dementia is not a disease itself, but rather a group of symptoms that are caused by various diseases or conditions. Symptoms can also include changes in personality, mood, and behavior. In addition to the dramatic loss in memory and comprehension, people with dementia can also become paranoid, irritable and have poor control of their emotions. Because they are often unable to properly gauge their valuations of thoughts and memories, crying outburst can be frequent and appear unprovoked and inappropriate. Some dementias, those brought on by substance abuse or depression can be treated and often cured but true dementia is permanent and progressive.



Dementia develops when the parts of the brain that are involved with learning, memory, decision-making, and language are affected by infection, trauma, stroke or disease. The most common cause of dementia is Alzheimer's disease, but there are as many as 50 other known causes. Here are some of the various causes of dementia:

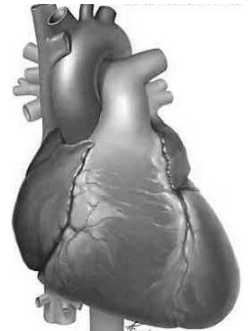
- Diseases that cause degeneration or loss of nerve cells in the brain such as Alzheimer's (over 50% of all dementias), Parkinson's and Huntington's.
- Diseases that affect blood vessels, such as stroke.
- Toxic reactions, like excessive alcohol or drug use.
- Nutritional deficiencies, like vitamin B12 and folate deficiency.
- Infections that affect the brain and spinal cord, such as AIDS, dementia complex and Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease.
- Certain types of hydrocephalus - an accumulation of fluid in the brain that can result from developmental abnormalities, infections, injury, or brain tumors.
- Head injury -- either a single severe head injury or longer term smaller injuries, like in boxers.
- Illness other than in the brain -- kidney, liver, and lung diseases can all lead to dementia.

We first meet the character Jack in a nursing home. As delineated above, there are various reasons he may be in this condition, however all people with dementia are ultimately unable to take care of themselves because of the deterioration in their mental function. Gaps in memory, reasoning and self-control lead to altered perceptions of reality and time, and can often make the patient feel isolated and paranoid. These in turn can make one easily irritable and heavily reliant on structure and routine. Damage to the brain can also make a person emotionally labile. They may cry or have an outburst to what would otherwise be a relatively benign stimulus or provocation. This is all part of how dementia presents itself and the character of Jack is accurate depiction of how the disease affects both the one afflicted and the strain on the family unit.

## Heart Disease - Hildy

*Hildy*            *My tongue has been stinging all day  
And my arm.*

Heart disease or cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in the US and Europe. It usually refers to coronary artery disease, which is the hardening and narrowing of arteries in the heart. But there are a variety of diseases that affect the heart such as, cardiomyopathy (heart muscle disease), arrhythmias (abnormal heart rhythms), congenital heart disease, heart valve disease, and heart failure. When any part of the heart doesn't receive adequate blood flow, as can happen in any of the aforementioned conditions, heart muscle can die. This can eventually lead to a heart attack, cardiac arrest and death.



The signs and symptoms of a heart attack can vary greatly with age, gender and cause. Typically symptoms of a heart attack or an abnormal heart rhythm involve shortness of breath, discomfort in the chest, sweating, nausea, vomiting, dizziness, palpitations, pain radiating to the jaw or shoulder or arm, indigestion, tingling in the extremities, including the tongue. Sometimes there may be no symptoms at all.

The reason why damage to the heart can result in pain and discomfort elsewhere in the body is due to the phenomenon of referred pain. On occasion, pain felt in one area of the body does not accurately represent where the problem is, because the pain is 'referred' there from another area. Pain can be referred because signals from several areas of the body often travel through the same nerve pathways in the spinal cord and brain. So pain from a heart attack may be felt in the neck, jaws, arms, or abdomen. Pain from a gallbladder attack may be felt in the back of the shoulder.

Hildy's complaints of tingling and physical unease are peppered throughout the play, typically after moments of exertion. Her complaints of tingling in her tongue and limbs are examples of referred pain, as may be her indigestion. In the scene where she collapses, it is after an extremely emotional and physical argument with her son. This could certainly precipitate an episode of severe arrhythmia or heart attack in someone with underlying heart disease.

D. H. Bhatt M.D., Ph.D.

Asst Prof Neurology & Psychiatry

## **Stella Feehily on *Dreams of Violence***

### **What is *Dreams of Violence* about in your own words?**

It concerns Hildy Hooper-Jones, a former social worker who is now a grass-roots activist. Her mission is to make the voice of low-paid workers in financial institutions heard. She's sickened by the bonus-culture greed, but she's a person who's always been politically involved. She's in early middle-age; her son is a drug addict, her parents are ill and ageing, she is herself experiencing the first and troubling signs of ageing, and her marriage is on the rocks. The play is basically about disintegration of ideals and family. I use this to look at the disintegration of the financial system.



### **Where did the idea come from?**

It's two-fold: I've been following the plight of cleaners in Canary Wharf and the City for a number of years. I read an article in The Guardian in 2005, by Jonathan Freedland; which talked about how the bonus-culture had gone berserk while millions of children in the UK were living in inadequate housing. It got me thinking. Then in 2006 there were a number of scuffles outside Goldman Sachs - cleaners trying to draw attention to the fact that they were being paid buttons, while bankers were paid a fortune. I thought that was very interesting. That was one part of it, the other part was, in 2006 my partner became seriously ill and it was a near death experience. Something like that makes you reassess everything. It's quite hard to put your finger on what makes a whole play; I suppose they're two quite solid things that got the ball rolling.

### **Did you set out to write a political play?**

I think it's very hard to write about the world and not be political.

### **Would you describe yourself as a feminist writer?**

I come from a small town in the West of Ireland and while growing up feminism was never mentioned and, as far as I was concerned, all the women were the bosses anyway. It was only in later life that I started to realise the inequalities around me. I wouldn't describe myself as a feminist writer but if I were to be called that I wouldn't mind.

### **Do you share Hildy's political convictions?**

I'm not a seasoned campaigner like Hildy but I certainly believe what she's doing is absolutely right. I think all writing is moral; you always write a play from a belief structure. It's really sickening to think that people are working from ten at night to six in the morning and earn less than what a banker spends on an evening in a pub. That anger and outrage is what fuels political beliefs. So though I wouldn't take Hildy's route in many ways I share her beliefs.

### **Hildy can't seem to get the work/life balance right. Why do you think that is?**

Hildy is a product of her own dysfunctional upbringing. She's been drawn to her work, not only from her natural political beliefs in socialism, but because it's the absolute opposite of what her mother does. She's made choices in her life that in different ways mirror the dysfunction that she grew up with. Hildy might think she is a feminist but actually if you

track through her life she makes quite 1960s choices. I think she's in flight from her parents' life, yet in a way that traps her as a woman. Shirley says, "You've got more in common with my mother's generation than you have with mine," which I think is true for Hildy and a surprising number of women of my generation.

**Shirley's a really interesting character. Where did the idea come from for her?**

I was a cabaret singer and an actor, and I love those great ladies of classic cinema, like Lauren Bacall, Ava Gardner. They're what you call 'broad', and they battled in a very male-dominated, sexist profession - in the movie business. On screen they're quite ballsy ladies. Shirley is a mixture of my own experience of being a singer, but also mixing it with this image of a 'broad'.

**The financial crisis features in the play. Is this something you are angry about? And what comment did you set out to make on it?**

The financial crisis frightens me. I was brought up in the 1980s and I remember the effect of recession in our house: only being able to keep the emersion heater on for twenty minutes in case my parents couldn't pay the electricity bill; the postal strikes; the oil strike; I remember my father nearly losing his job. What I've tried to capture is fear of the future. The cleaners are afraid, the banker is afraid and in the end, because it's not clear what Hildy's prognosis is - will she live, will she not - the future is uncertain.

**Have you ever been a cleaner?**

Yes I have. When I was at drama school, my best friend's brother was a solicitor and I used to clean his offices for £20. This is seventeen years ago; £20 was a decent amount of money to do four hours cleaning. It was hard. It was really, really heavy work. I did that for a year.

**So you know exactly how Annie and Bea feel?**

Yes I do. I feel angry on their behalf. I think cleaning is a valuable job and workers should be remunerated properly. It should be a job that is respected, instead of a lowly profession.

**Hildy doesn't just have her day-job, she's caring for several other people, and all the other characters abdicate responsibility for those duties, so she has several jobs at the same time.**

I think it's the feminine problem - women are expected to do more, they take more responsibility, they get all the blame. Hildy has a long speech where her son is saying, 'you've ruined my life', and she takes out a photograph and goes through all the things that she did for him when he was a child - looking after a child is really hard work and this work is often not valued. Jamie, in my opinion like a lot of kids, values his absent father more than he does his mother. Why doesn't he blame his father for his problems?

**You've written about dysfunctional families in all your plays. Why do you think that is?**

I think it's Sam Shepard who was asked, 'why do you always write about the family?' and he said 'what else is there?' And I'm certainly of that belief; I think it's where problems start. Without nurture, without education, without kindness and patience, I think we create more instability in the world. There's a book called 'Changing Stages' by Richard

Eyre and Nicholas Wright; they say every writer has an 'imp'. Someone like Sebastian Barry often writes about the bad father who appears like the good man, David Hare often has a good woman at the heart of his plays who has tremendous power to effect change. So mine might be a child feeling unloved and the damage that can have on the rest of their lives. Hildy feels unloved, Jamie certainly feels unloved, and I think if we were to go back further, Shirley feels unloved. I wouldn't want to think it was something to play into the hands of conservative fears. It's not who parents you; it's the kind of parenting and the consistent parenting that you get.

### **Are you critical of Hildy's parenting of Jamie?**

No I'm not. I think she's damned if she does, damned if she doesn't. Her mother says to her, 'you should never have had a child, you don't have one maternal bone in your body.' It's a cruel criticism but it's possibly a correct observation and it's because she feels unmothered and uncared for. Hildy for some reason has gone into the traditional roles of female – mother, carer, nurturer – when actually she may have been better off just getting involved politically and probably not having a family. She's done her best for Jamie, but even if she'd been the perfect mother (is there such a thing?), I think he'd still find something to blame her with.

### **There's a surreal aspect to your writing. Where do you think that comes from?**

I've never deliberately sat down to write a surreal play. I actually think it's something that's particular to Irish people. I think it's in the water, it's in the psyche; we have a very left-of-centre way of thinking and sense of humour. Many Irish writers have that – whether it's stream of consciousness or a lean to the absurd. I don't know where it comes from, but you could be really smart about it and say: in a country that has been colonised we had to find ways of dodging the master, to be funny or underhand or devious. Maybe the surrealism bubbles up from that well.

# **The Rehearsal Process**

*By Jessica Swale, Associate Director*

# Rehearsals

Max Stafford-Clark, the director of *Dreams of Violence*, is well known for his inventive and rigorous rehearsal methods. The rehearsal process usually lasts about five weeks and can simply be broken into two stages. During the **first stage** (weeks one and two) he uses various exercises and methods to **analyse the text and to explore characters**. In the **second stage** (weeks three, four and five) he focuses on **staging and performance**.



## Stage One: Actioning and Analysis

The first two weeks are spent analysing the text, primarily using a process called 'actioning' which encourages actors to fully explore their intentions in every line.

### How to 'action' the text

Before we block (move) any of the scenes, the actors sit around a table with the writer and director, and together decide an 'action' for each line of the scene. An action is a transitive verb (something you want to *do* to the person you are talking to - to challenge, to belittle, to amuse). This helps the actors establish their objectives (their motivation for speaking.)

Stanislavski, the pioneer of naturalism (believable acting) believed that everything a character says and does must have an established 'objective'; actioning encourages actors to make these specific decisions.

By establishing an action for each line, you can clearly track the way your emotions build through a scene. It is all too easy to play a scene on one dramatic level, for instance, you could play Hildy's opening monologue as if every line is shocking. However, it is much more interesting dramatically to build up emotion as the scene progresses, in order to show a character's emotional journey and to build tension. By choosing actions which gradually increase in strength (e.g. to focus, to alert, to warn, to grip, to shake, to horrify), you ensure that that scene develops in an interesting manner towards the climax.

After actioning, Hildy's opening monologue might look something like this (actions are in brackets in bold). Note how actions like *shocks* and *grabs* (strong actions) are saved for only the most dramatic lines. Also notice how the actions at the beginning of the monologue are focussed towards drawing the audience in, in order to make them feel involved in Hildy's world.

Hildy           **(Prepares)** So he's sitting on the edge of the bed.  
                  **(Intrigues)** He says I don't feel well.  
                  **(Bonds)** Younger - His hair dark.  
                  **(Stirs)** He says I feel cold.

(Prepares) I get out  
(Warns) I see his-  
(Amazes) In three pieces  
(Engages) On the pillow  
(Alerts) "I'm not feeling well," he says.  
(Amuses) I'm not surprised-says I.  
(Shocks) He's covered in blood.  
(Grips) I say, "I'm calling an ambulance"  
(Surprises) "Why?" he says.  
(Grabs) I say "Look down"  
(Unsettles) He says "Oh dear".  
(Entertains) Understatement of the year.



Actioning is useful for monologues because it helps an actor to find different levels of drama, and to establish their relationship with the audience, if the piece is spoken to them (as Hildy's is).

Actioning is equally useful in dialogue as it helps you establish what you are trying to *do* to the other person. Have a go at the actioning exercise on the **Things to Do page** to investigate how actions can help you build a relationship between two characters.

## Improvisations

Improvisations are used daily in the first two weeks of rehearsal to help investigate the characters and the narrative in depth. An integral part of forming a characterisation is to think about the wider life of the character - what has happened to them before the play begins, and what happens in between the scenes we see.

Often there are clues which help us to form their 'back stories' (their lives outside the scenes) in the text. For instance, Hildy tells us that 'the last time I saw my son he held me up at knifepoint'. Improvisations of these unseen events can help actors to understand the action of the play, and help them investigate other aspects of character, like physicality, voice and attitudes.

Each improvisation we do is meant to inform a specific aspect of a character's story. They are also an engaging way of encouraging the actors to play with different ideas and to feel comfortable about working together as an ensemble. It can be great fun thinking up new improvisation scenarios. For example, we improvised a scene in which the cleaners listen to the radio during their tea break. We chose a dance track by Little Boots to give a lively feel to the scene, then established that Annie and Bea might dance to the music on the radio as a release from the drollness of cleaning. Several of the 'spare' actors played other cleaners mentioned in the script (*Lithuanians, Ghanaians*) in order to add energy and interest to the scenario.

The aim was to establish the level of friendship between Annie and Bea. You can also add external circumstances to enhance the drama- for instance, what would happen if the Lithuanian cleaner fancied Annie. Playing cards are often used to

give specific levels for these external circumstances and to add an element of chance (actors choose a card at random, the higher the number, the higher you play your given motivation). The Lithuanian cleaner picked a 9 (the highest possible is a ten as face cards are removed in advance). He therefore had to flirt outrageously. This allowed the actor playing Annie to consider how her character might react, whether Annie would enjoy flirting back or remain highly professional. This informed her sense of fun and liveliness when, later that afternoon, we rehearsed her scenes.

## **Research**

We also use this time to do research, which includes reading newspaper articles, relevant books, sometimes watching film extracts and interviewing people of interest. In order to understand the lifestyle and experiences of Hildy in *Dreams of Violence*, we interviewed both a social worker and a member of a grass roots organisation which campaigned for living wages, as Hildy does in the play. This helped us to understand the pressures she was under, the passion which she would have felt for her campaigns and something of the lifestyle which she would have led. We also interviewed bankers, a doctor and rock musicians from Shirley's era to give us insight into the roles of Carl, Ben and Shirley.

## **Second Stage: Staging and Performance**

By week three we begin to focus on putting the play 'on its feet'; in other words, working out where the actors will stand, how they move, how to set each scene. We begin by roughly sketching ideas out physically, using bits of furniture to figure out how a scene might look. When we later come back to the scene we might try something a little different, until we find 'blocking' which works. The key aspect is to serve the text at all times, to make sure we are telling the story accurately, without adding too much 'business' (extra movement, elements which aren't in the script) which remove the focus from the narrative. Remember there are 15 scenes in the play. Can the furniture 'double' from scene to scene? Who moves it between scenes?

During the second stage we continue to investigate the scenes, using improvisations occasionally to investigate new ideas. Playing cards are used a great deal to establish objectives and different variables within a scene. For instance, in the dinner scene between Ben and Hildy, both actors might pick a card to explore the extent to which they are attracted to each other. If Ben picks a 9 and Hildy picks a 3 then he will try very hard to seduce her with his lines, whilst she will resist. We could also use the cards to establish dramatic angles for each actor independently, for example, how upset is Ben by the prospect of divorce, or how annoyed is Hildy that Ben has a new girlfriend. This allows us to play around with the angles of the drama within any given scene. Try some of these exercises for yourselves in ***Things to Do.***

# Things to Do

## 1. ACTIONING

Actioning a scene gives you the opportunity to investigate what a character wants from the person they are talking to. They also help to establish a character's objective (motivation).

Try this for yourself. Work with a partner and action a chosen section from **scene 2**, the dinner scene between Ben and Hildy. Ben's primary objective here is to seduce Hildy. Hildy arrives with the intention of sorting out their divorce, although there may be smaller objectives which she has to play first (to befriend him, for example) in order to achieve her primary objective. See if you can choose actions which create tension between them as Hildy rejects his advances and pushes for her own objective. Remember, though, that interesting drama is always varied, so look for moments when she might soften, in order to find an engaging journey through the scene. Choose where to play your strongest objectives according to where you think the dramatic highpoints of the scene are.



## 2. IMPROVISATIONS

We regularly use improvisations to create a backstory for the characters and to build relationships to inform performance. It's also important for a director to remember that a 'play' should involve a certain 'playfulness'. 'Play's aren't called 'plays' for nothing, and improvisations involve, even at their least important level, the actors having fun. Try the following:

### a. Jamie visits his relatives to get money

We know that Jamie was addicted to heroin; he became so desperate for money to buy drugs that, several months earlier, he held Hildy up at knifepoint. Set up each of the other characters in a corner of the space, Ben in his consulting room, Shirley at her home, Jack in the care home, Hildy in her kitchen. Jamie must visit each of them in turn and try his best to persuade them to lend him some money, which he wants to use to buy drugs. Think about the tactics he might use to do so. All of the family have been warned by Hildy not to give Jamie money. Might they mention this in order to pass the blame on? How would each react differently? How much money would they give him - £50 is probably a lot more for Jack than it is for Ben. Explore the way that rejection from each of the other relatives might add to Jamie's immense frustration and desperation by the time he gets to Hildy's. Look at the notes by Dr Bhatt to see the symptoms of addiction and to consider the physical repercussions as his need for a hit increases. This will allow you to investigate both Jamie's life circumstances and his relationship with each of his relatives.



## **b. Family Meeting**

We know that Jack has been put in a care home several months earlier, as he is unable to look after himself; he is suffering from cognitive decline. Improvise the family meeting at which they have to decide what to do with him, whether he should continue living with Shirley, whether Hildy should look after him, or whether he should go into care. Everyone should choose whether they think they would want him to go to a home or not, then pick a card to establish how vehemently they believe this, 2 is lowest, 10 is highest (take the face cards out before you begin). Shirley has been looking after him but finds it difficult. Jamie might be upset by the prospect of granddad moving away to a home, how do you think Ben and Shirley would feel? Introduce a fifth actor half way through the meeting, Jack himself, who walks in without knowing about this meeting. When this happens, ask every actor (except Jack) to pick a new card. Jack should recognise the faces of anyone with a black card. If you have a red card, he does not remember who you are. See how this effects your opinion of whether he should go into care- you are free at this point to change your opinion.



## **3. INVESTIGATING WHAT IS AT STAKE**

Pick your favourite scene from the play. Now consider the key questions in terms of characterisation in that scene, firstly for each actor, then for the scene as a whole. For example, if you pick the bankers scene, your questions might be: How angry is Annie with Carl? How upset is Bea about losing her job? How scared is Carl of the cleaners? Or you could explore their objectives, you might decide that Annie wants to get revenge, Bea wants to persuade Carl that he is to blame and Carl wants to befriend the cleaners in order to avoid confrontation. An overarching question might be how dangerous are the cleaners (might they really throw him out the window?). Once you have established these questions, use playing cards to decide the levels at which you play these emotions or objectives. Try it at least once with high cards in order to see how dramatic you can make the action. Then try selecting cards at random to see how much more interesting it is when subtlety and contrast are employed.

## EXTRACTS FROM A REHEARSAL DIARY

*In order to see the day to day life in rehearsal, have a look at the following extracts from my diary. They reveal how the rehearsal process develops as the weeks go on.*

*Week 1, Friday, AM:*

*Having worked as a full company for the first few days we are now working on separate scenes, actioning each as we go along. We actioned scene nine, the geraniums scene, which gained a great deal of heat from our chosen verbs (quite a few 'castigates', 'chastises' or 'wounds' as the scene went on). This was balanced at the top of the scene by choices like 'evades', 'needles' or 'dampens' in order to ensure that the scene builds slowly towards its climax, rather than giving everything away. We worked on the backstories- we decided that Shirley would have smacked Hildy as a child, that Jack and Shirley would have gone to Ben and Hildy's for Christmas (Hildy would be much more able to control the situation that way) and that they would be very unlikely ever to all go to Shirleys. Shirley might have got Jamie gig tickets and gone with him, he probably smoked his first pot with her. Shirley is definitely much cooler, in Jamie's eyes, than his mum.*



*Paula (Shirley) and Catherine (Hildy) then picked cards to show their level of irritability in the scene. Both had an 8, which raised the stakes and the energy immediately. We then tried the scene as two highly camp New Yorkers to establish the biting tone and wit, hilarious but hugely informative!*

*Late morning we looked at Annie and Bea's scenes and added information to the timeline of the play. We read an article on 'Boss-napping' round the table; I was surprised to hear that bosses were treated extremely well when taken hostage. Clearly the point was to send a message to the outside world rather than to do damage to any individual. Stella talked about the real incidents which had inspired Carl's story, which led to our working on the sequence of events on the day of Carl's capture. We established that Annie and Bea join Hildy's march at lunchtime, then go to the pub afterwards to celebrate with other marchers; this is where they first hear stories of boss-napping (seeds which later flower). That evening they go to work to find out that it is to be their last shift. The frustrations of this inspire them to act, inspired by their pub conversations.*

*We then improvised the scene in the pub, in which Bea and Annie bond with Hildy. Max jumped in as a journalist from the Metro, asking them questions about participating on the march which made them feel rather like celebrities and which clearly boosted their passion. They then left the pub and made the phone call to Hildy (scene 10), telling her how inspired they were to take action ('we've even got a few ideas of her own'). This 'joined the dots' in terms of scenes, clarifying the time line. Fundamentally, however, it established a level of passion and excitement for the cause from Annie and Bea which then informs their decision to take action into their own hands. The bankers scene, as a result of this improvisation, made perfect sense as a natural progression of the narrative, when I think Mossie and Thusitha had previously found it rather a huge jump. A full and greatly informative morning.*

Week 4, Tuesday AM:

*Second run through.*

*Max began by asking everyone to step up the emotion in this particular run, as opposed to the first run, where we had focussed on the wit in the play. He said "I often give notes on keeping emotion tight during rehearsals, in order to encourage you to play the objectives clearly without adding too much, but at this stage, don't hold back and let's see where it takes us." There are at least three emotional breakdowns in the play, so it is important not to shy away from this. We counted that there are eleven instances of crying in the play, so hitting the emotion is now bad thing. The play is only ninety minutes but it is certainly emotionally packed, and actually, right from scene nine onwards tempers really fly- there is no room for dawdling in terms of working up to those scenes. In the run I felt like the increase in pace helped hugely- not having too much time for lines to land and shortening the pauses meant that we had to work harder as an audience, and it kept the energy high. Sometimes the emotion did seem to bleed somewhat between scenes (a scene with a sombre ending would sometimes seem to colour the way an actor played the beginning of the next scene, rather than always playing each for their own emotional weight), but with a week and a half to go there is plenty of time to sharpen things up. Max gave an excellent note last week about the play being like a necklace in which each scene, like a bead, should have its own colour and qualities- I think that is true of every play. It is, however, particularly important in a fast paced play like this that there is not too much blending, that each scene holds its own. This was much clearer in the first half of the play but is more difficult, I think, when the heat is turned up in the last five or six scenes. Max also noted that it is not a political play but it is a play written with political sensibilities, which helped us to see that we shouldn't focus on the issues but on the family story, which is at the heart of Stella's writing.*

*In the late morning I worked with Thusitha and the accent coach on Honey's scenes, looking at the way that a characters voice is a blend of accent and personality. Some of Thusitha's vocal choices are based on the Canadian accent, but there are also elements of her character choices (her increasing desperation, her edgyness and paranoia) which inform her use of intonation and tone. Going back to the actions again helped to find the core of the scene here, which can easily slip away when you focus too much on making it dramatic. We looked at the fact that the words do most of the work for you- there is enough danger in the line 'I will kill you' without you playing 'to threaten' on top, it is a far more interesting choice to play 'teaches' or 'levels'. Thusitha's characterisation is really coming on.*



**Interview with JAMIE BAUGHAM, who plays JAMIE:**

**You are one of the few actors in the company who has never worked with Max before. How have you found your first experience of actioning, and which elements of the rehearsal process have you found most interesting and useful?**



I have found it fascinating. I have worked with *actioning* before in other people's rehearsals, but never as intensively as here. I find it incredibly useful because it forces you to be specific. It doesn't allow you to generalise. I also love the use of improvisation. The ones we have done have, almost without exception, been hilarious, but also essential in terms of creating a backstory, which enriches characterisation.

**In the play, we hear that the last time Hildy saw Jamie he held her at knifepoint, in order to get money to buy drugs. Can you tell me about how improvising this scene informed your understanding of Jamie's character?**

We ran an improvisation in which Jamie visits each member of his family, asking them for money, after Hildy has expressly told them not to; she says to her dad "*I told you not to give him money. He uses it to buy drugs.*" In the improvisation I hadn't had a fix, so I got more and more desperate as I visited my dad, then my grandmother, then finally Hildy. It helped me to understand how angry and desperate he would have become, which justifies his actions. It helped physically, in terms of getting into the body of an addict. It helped me understand my relationship with all the members of my family. The key scene for me is the argument with my mum, and that was fed by the fact that our improvisation led me to think that she'd turned my family against me.

**So did it help you make sense of the text specifically?**

Yes. In the scene Hildy tells Jamie that his dad contributed to the breakdown of the marriage. In our improvisation I went to meet my dad, and he led me to believe that it was not his fault, that Hildy was overreacting. This informed my understanding of the confrontation scene, and helped me build up the necessary resentment and belief in Hildy's guilt to play the scene dramatically.

**We were very lucky to have Dee Bhatt, a psychiatrist who has dealt with treating addiction, in rehearsal with us. How useful was it to you to have this resource?**

Extremely helpful. Now I think there should be a psychiatrist in every rehearsal process! The medical expertise which he offered was crucial to my character development. Also the analysis of Jamie's psychology was just so helpful. He talked about the physical symptoms which you would experience if you were on a methadone programme, recovering from addiction; the physical ticks, the hunger, the desperation. This all informed my performance.

**How has this affected your physical decisions as an actor?**

Elements like nail biting and his obsession with food. He would be physically edgy all the time. I guess that is why I came to nail biting because it is a substitute for when he is not eating, a distraction, something to put in his mouth.

**Jamie is a complex character, his life has clearly been influenced by the break down of his family. It is easy to see him as a victim, but it could also be argued that he himself doesn't behave well. How responsible do you think he is for his own predicament?**

I think he has been a victim. He has done a brilliant job of turning himself around and making a success of himself (he is going to rock school, he has enrolled on a methadone programme). But, on the other hand, he has spent a long time blaming his mum for a lot of which were arguably his problems. By the end of the play though, he is taking responsibility for himself.

**As an actor do you think you have to believe in your character to the extent where you really see life through their eyes, do you stop being objective?**

Definitely. It is interesting chatting to the other actors as everyone gives their opinions from their characters' points of view. Catherine (who plays Hildy) is convinced that she is being a noble mother, when she talks about the teddy bears picnic and what she has done for Jamie, but I think there is a huge amount of resentment and that it was all done begrudgingly! You start to believe in your character's opinions as your own!

**Research has formed an integral part of our process. There are lots of issues in the play which needed insight in order for us to explore them in any depth, like the economic climate and the difficulties of addiction. Do you feel like you have learnt a lot as a result?**

Yes, a great deal. I have learnt a lot about addiction. I have grown a sympathy as a result of knowing more about its realities. You begin to realise the medical implications- that if you are an addict it is an affliction in the same way that arthritis is an affliction, you need to be treated and it takes a great physical and mental toll on you. It has also made me think a lot about family, about my own relationship with my parents, and the notion of responsibility, one of the key themes in the play. It is something that everyone struggles with.

**The theme of responsibility is one which hopefully all audiences will engage with, regardless of age and background. How do you think other themes will resonate with our audiences?**

There are the overt themes which the audience can engage with, regarding the economic climate and social responsibility. Stella sets these themes out very clearly, but there is something deeper which resonates- one's personal responsibility, both to yourself, to your family and to society, which definitely makes you think. Whether it is 'look how irresponsible the banks are' or 'look how badly I treat my mum'.

## **Interview with CATHERINE RUSSELL, who plays HILDY:**



**Hildy is a complex character in terms of her family life, background and political sensibilities. How important is research for you as an actor, in order to understand the character's world and experiences?**

Incredibly important. I do extensive research for every part I play. It is one of the joys of being an actor - to find out about other people, different eras and cultures. This is a modern play so we have all lived through the times, but I did a lot of research to help me personally prepare to play Hildy. Hildy is an activist, she runs a campaigning organisation called 'Small Change' so an important element of my research was to find out about similar organisations, how they work and what they do. I watched footage of protests and marches online. I looked at websites and materials they distribute. I also read all the books and materials that I could find which Hildy would have read. For instance, Karl Marx's 'The Communist Manifesto'; that really helped me understand her perspective.

**How does Max's rehearsal method help you?**

Actioning is such a useful method for actors because it doesn't let you get away with anything, it forces you to make specific choices about everything you say. It encourages you to consider your characterisation in depth. Even if your perspective of your character changes, as mine did (I thought Hildy was much more vulnerable than she has now become by this late stage of rehearsals, in which she is bolder and more confident), the actions still give you a starting point and show your journey through each scene. Interestingly, even though my characterisation has changed and developed quite considerably, my original actions still work throughout. I found that surprising. But actioning isn't the only interesting element of Max's process, we do lots of exercises and improvisations throughout to inform our choices.

**Are there any specific exercises which have influenced your character development?**

Two aspects of our process really, firstly improvisation, and secondly interviewing. I found the early improvisations really useful for establishing my relationships with other characters. We did an improvisation of Hildy's first success at debating society, which informed her ability and passion as a public speaker. We also did an improvisation in which the family met to discuss putting Jack into care, which made us all realise what a difficult scenario this is, and how it puts the pressure on everyone's relationships.

We also interviewed several people who gave us relevant insight about Hildy's roles and responsibilities. We interviewed a lady with experience of social work, which made me realise just how harrowing and draining Hildy's ten years as a social worker must have been. We also interviewed someone who was an activist involved in the Justice for Cleaners campaign. His passion and strength of belief were infectious. It helped us to understand the dynamics of the first cleaners scene, in which Hildy persuades Annie and Bea to march. He told us about his

parallel experiences and described the emotions involved. It is fascinating to have these insightful experiences.

**The play looks at a range of political and social themes, from large-scale issues like the financial crisis and questions of social justice, to personal issues like family, responsibility and aging. What for you is the crux of the play?**

Responsibility is the key issue. Responsibility for yourself and the importance, and the question of to what extent you should take responsibility for others. As the play goes on you realise how Hildy expends all her energy trying to cope with everyone - her cheating husband, her ill father, her alcoholic mother, her drug addict son; she never puts herself first and this becomes a downwards spiral as far as her health is concerned. The play raises key questions about the level to which you should take responsibility for yourself versus those around you. Alongside this is the theme of family; it really is a family drama, about how people have to cope with changing circumstances, coming together against adversity, the importance of love and loyalty and the difficulties of being a 'good' mother, father or child.

**Jamie accuses Hildy of caring so much about her community that she has no time for her own son: 'Single mothers, druggie teens, homeless pensioners, disabled single mothers abused by druggie pensioners-You accept anybody, everybody but your own son.' Is this justifiable?**

I think in a sense he is right, she probably didn't give him as much attention as she could have done, but when you consider the external pressures on her it is hardly surprising. She talks in depth about all the things she did for him, she took him to cello lessons, javelin, football, piano, she organised a teddy bears picnic for him, she was certainly an active mother. However, what we realised when speaking to the social worker, was that, if you were confronted by harrowing scenes every day- children who had been abused, homeless people, violent crimes, then you come home to your 'normal' family, your 'normal' son, then his little problems, like a graze on his knee or a problem with his homework might pale into insignificance in comparison. As a result we started to realise that Hildy, whilst she never purposefully was a bad mother, was probably preoccupied by the dramas of her social work role, and Jamie might have suffered as a result.

**Hildy and Shirley argue about who is the more successful woman, who is the true feminist: Who do you think is a more successful female?**

Hildy, definitely. She might not have had the fame and glamour that Shirley had, but that's not the point. She puts all her passion into leading a movement which she believes in wholeheartedly, she is making active changes in the community, she is campaigning on behalf of others to make a difference. She is infinitely a better role model than Shirley.

**Do you think you are biased, Catherine?**

Probably, yes!

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