

Yen Resource Pack



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These resources are intended to give teachers and students a detailed insight into the creative process behind developing and staging *Yen*. Through interviews, production notes and rehearsal techniques, they demonstrate how the writer, director and cast worked in collaboration to create the show. We aim to provide useful information and opportunities to help students discover the unique world of the play for themselves.

I. About the Production

Yen was first performed at the Royal Court Theatre, Jerwood Theatre Upstairs, Sloane Square, on Friday 22nd January 2016.

Cast

Jenny	Annes Elwy
Maggie	Sian Breckin
Hench	Alex Austin
Bobbie	Jake Davies

Creative Team

Writer	Anna Jordan
Director	Ned Bennett
Designer	Georgia Lowe
Lighting Designer	Elliot Griggs
Composer & Sound Designer	Giles Thomas
Movement Director	Polly Bennett
Fight Director	Pamela Donald
Production Manager	Marius Rønning
Stage Manager on Book	Susan Ellicott
Stage Manager on Text	Sarah Hellicar
SM Placement	Oscar Easton

2. About the Writer

Anna Jordan is a writer, director and acting tutor. She has taught for RADA, LAMDA, Arts Ed and Identity Drama School. She is Artistic Director of Without a Paddle Theatre, where she runs regular acting courses. She has won several awards for her writing including; the West End Frame Fringe Production of the Year Award for *Chicken Shop* (2014), Bruntwood Prize for Playwriting for *YEN* (2013), Overall Winner and Audience Award in the inaugural Off Cut Festival for *Closer To God* (2009) and Best New Writing in the Lost One Act Festival for *Just For Fun – Totally Random* (2009).

Her credits as a writer include; *YEN* (Royal Exchange Theatre and Royal Court, Winner: Bruntwood Prize for Playwriting 2013), *Chicken Shop* (Soho Theatre and Park Theatre, Winner: West End Frame London Fringe Production of the Year 2014), *No Reason At All, Except I Have Toothache* (LAMDA), *Youth & Age* (Camden People's Theatre) and *The Freedom Light* (Company of Angels). She also wrote a short film for LAMDA called *The Ivory Year*.

Her credits as a director include; *Crystal Springs* by Kathy Rucker (Eureka Theatre, San Francisco), *Tomorrow I'll Be Happy* by Johnathan Harvey (National Theatre as part of National Theatre Connections), *Vote of No Confidence* by Chris Urch (Theatre 503), *Only Human* by Rose Lewenstein (Theatre 503), *4:48 Psychosis* by Sarah Kane, *Our Country's Good* by Timberlake Wertenbaker and Basset by James Graham (all Identity Drama School).

Her credits as a writer and director include; *Freak* (Edinburgh Festival and Theatre 503), *Stay Happy Keep Smiling* (Soho Theatre), *Fragments* (Riverside Studios), *STAUNCH* (Arcola Theatre), *Coming Home* (Bush Theatre), *ShortStuff* (Waterloo East Theatre), *Marianne* (Wimbledon Studio Theatre & Trafalgar Studios, Longlisted: Bruntwood Prize for Playwriting 2011), *BENDER* (Old Red Lion), *Closer to God* (Old Red Lion, Winner: Best Play Award & Audience Award for Best Play, Off Cut Festival) and *Just for Fun – Totally Random* (New End Theatre, Winner: Best New Writing, Lost One Act Festival).

the guardian

Anna Jordan on generation porn and a dog called Taliban

Anna Jordan launched her own theatre company while holding down a day job licensing fruit machines. Now she's scored a huge hit with *Yen*, a tender play about two abandoned boys and their alsatian



Playwright
Anna Jordan
at the Royal
Court
theatre,
London.
Photograph:
Christian
Sinibaldi for
the Guardian

Alfred Hickling

Monday 25 January 2016

When Jenni Murray announced that a dog named Taliban was running through her dreams, playwright Anna Jordan realised her life was about to change. It was 2013 and the night of the Bruntwood prize ceremony at the Royal Exchange in Manchester, for which Jordan had entered her drama *Yen*: a raw, poetic study of two teenage brothers and their provocatively named alsatian.

“Dame Jenni was the chair of the judges,” Jordan remembers. “As soon as she said she’d been dreaming of Taliban, I gripped my boyfriend’s hand and thought, ‘Oh my God, this is it.’”

Yen received ecstatic reviews when it was first shown in Manchester a year ago. Now the 36-year-old writer is attending rehearsals at the Royal Court in London, where the production is being remounted by director Ned Bennett with the original cast. “It was a joy having the play produced in Manchester, but I’m a London girl,” says Jordan. “In many ways, it feels like it’s coming home.”

Taliban was a real animal, believe it or not. “I used to live in a flat in Hounslow with all sorts of problem neighbours. There was a woman in her 60s who had a boyfriend half her age and this enormous alsatian they hardly let out of the house. You could hear them through the walls going, ‘Oi! Shut it, Taliban!’ And I thought, I ought to put that in a play some day.”

Murray praised “the beautiful empathy and humanity” of Jordan’s writing and there is a heart-melting tenderness in the play’s depiction of extreme poverty. “It did worry me that pitching the audience into such a hardcore situation might run the risk of turning people off,” Jordan admits. *Yen* was quite instinctual. “It came from a time when I was writing in coffee shops and absolutely no one was waiting for this play. The challenge I set myself was to explore the most taboo subject I could possibly imagine.”

The initial spark was a news report about a couple of boys who had been abandoned by their mother and convicted of a violent sex crime. “What these children had done was abhorrent,” Jordan says, “but I tried to imagine the situation as fully as possible. These kids don’t go to school, there are no responsible adults around and they don’t have any real friends. They come from a generation that cannot remember a time before violent video games and free access to 24-hour porn on the internet. What can we realistically expect from children whose opportunities and experience of life are so limited?”

Jordan is quick to point out that *Yen* is a work of imagination. Her own childhood was far removed from that of Bobbie and Hench, the brothers in the play. If anything, she feels closer to their eventual saviour, Jen, a compassionate young animal-lover who tames the boys and finally lets Taliban off the leash. “Though I’m more of a cat person,” she clarifies. “I grew up in Brentford, close to Feltham where the play is set – but a bit nicer.”

Jordan seemed destined for a life in the theatre – both her mother and father are actors – but her backstage upbringing didn’t make it any easier when she graduated from drama school and struggled to find work. The lack of offers prompted her to co-found her own theatre company, Without A Paddle with her friend Charlie Swallow, while holding down a day job licensing fruit machines in Hounslow.

A decade spent honing her craft on the fringe finally paid off in 2014 when Jordan had two plays, *Chicken Shop* and *Freak*, running in London simultaneously.

“There’s an obsession with discovering young, debut writers that carries an unrealistic burden of expectation,” Jordan says. “Even though winning the Bruntwood opened all sorts of doors, I’m hopefully a lot more level-headed about it than I would have been 10 years ago. *Yen* isn’t my first play, but my seventh or eighth full-length piece.”

With a further commission from the Royal Court on the table, Jordan is currently throwing her energies into establishing a new, low-cost training programme for actors at the Hackney Showroom. She also has various projects in development at the BBC. Though she regards theatre as her natural home – Jim Cartwright, Simon Stephens, David Eldridge, Sarah Kane count among her favourite writers – Jordan’s first and greatest inspiration was John Sullivan’s *Only Fools and Horses*.

“The rhythms of his dialogue and the pathos of the comedy are just peerless,” she says. “I’m probably just a little bit obsessed. If you look, there’s a gag lifted from *Only Fools* somewhere in all my plays. I met my boyfriend because he posed an *Only Fools* trivia question as an ice-breaker. We even had a cat called Boycie, but we lost him.”

I express sympathy and ask if the animal was very old? “No, I mean he wandered off. But he was chipped, and I keep thinking that any day now he’s going to have a terrible accident and someone will bring him back with a massive vet’s bill. In which case, I’m going to need to win another playwriting competition.”

3. Synopsis of Yen

Hench and Bobbie are brothers who live alone on an estate in Feltham. Hench is 16 and Bobbie is 13. They have a dog called Taliban who they keep in their bedroom because he bit someone on the estate. The boy's mother Maggie, lives with her boyfriend, Alan so they are left to fend for themselves. Neither boys are in formal education, Bobbie however is required to go to a children's unit as he has ADHD, but he doesn't attend. The boys mostly spend their time watching porn and playing Call of Duty.

Bobbie notices a girl looking at their window, who has been doing so for 3 months. A while later, the boy's mother, Maggie turns up outside the flat, drunk. The boys take her inside and force her to drink some Lucozade as she has diabetes. This is a regular occurrence which irritates Hench. Bobbie, however, still dotes on his mother and puts her to bed. The next morning, Maggie has sobered up. Bobbie and Maggie watch Lorraine, until they are interrupted by Hench who starts to play Call of Duty. Bobbie goes out to steal some beers for Maggie, leaving Hench and Maggie alone at the flat. Maggie asks Hench for money and threatens to sell their TV. Hench forces Maggie to leave and tells her not to come back. Jen, the girl who has been looking through the window, comes to the flat. She is worried about Taliban's welfare and offers to take him home with her. This upsets Bobbie, who begs Hench not to let her take him. Jen relents and gives Bobbie the dog chain she bought for Taliban. The three strike up a friendship and Jen visits the next day, this time bringing dog treats for Taliban. Bobbie goes to sleep and Jen and Hench talk about their families, which bonds them. Jen continues to visit the boys and offers them a ray of hope in an otherwise isolated world. However, Maggie also comes back to visit and offers the boys a chance to leave the flat. For Bobbie and Hench choosing between Jen and Maggie is a decision that will have consequences for all four of them.



Jake Davies as Bobbie and Alex Austin as Hench © Richard Davenport

4. About the Design

The inspiration for the design came from the director's experience working with boys with emotional and behavioural difficulties. The idea was to create a playground where the actors could play around in the space. Elements such as the keyboard being used as a swing or the ladders as a climbing frame, helped bring a playful atmosphere to an otherwise bleak space. The use of the ladders also helped create a feeling of containment as the actors are trapped in the space, giving the audience the impression that this is all they see of the world.



Annes Elwy as Jenny and Jake Davies as Bobbie © Richard Davenport

Questions for your students

When discussing the set with your students, ask them the following questions as a starting point:

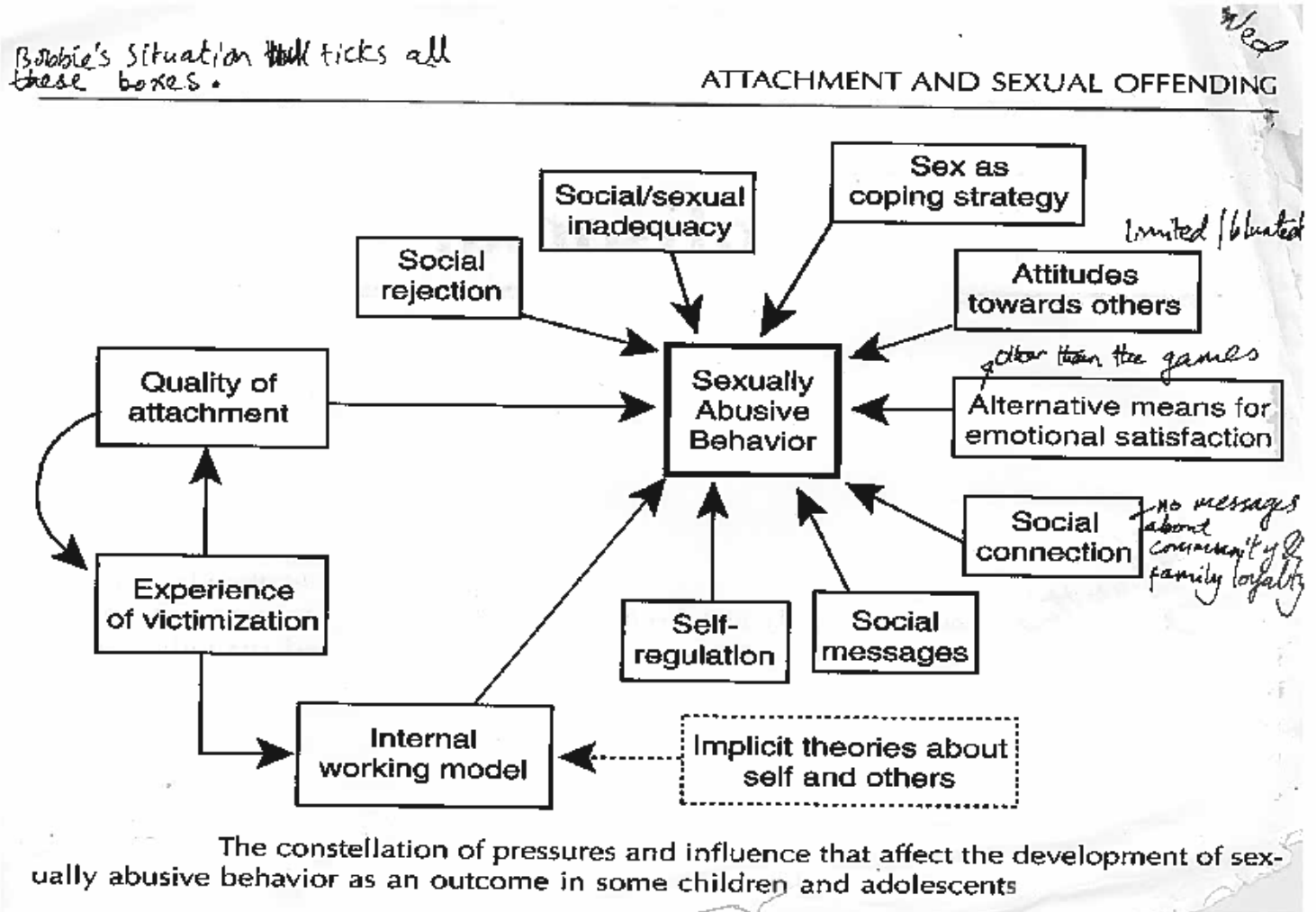
- Do you think the set was effective in helping tell the story of the play?
- Did being close to the action affect you as an audience member?
- Did you think the staging (traverse) was successful in helping tell the story of the play?
- Did you think the minimalistic aspects of the set worked?
- Why do you think the director and designer used non naturalistic elements? Such as the fan heater to represent the dog and the lights to represent the television.

Design task

Yen has always been performed in a studio space. This creates a feeling of intimacy and helps the audience engage with the play more. Imagine you had to design Yen for a 400 seat theatre. How would you design the set to keep the feeling of intimacy for a larger audience? Think about styles of staging. I.e. would you use end on staging or in the round? How would you incorporate lighting and sound? In the play the PlayStation controllers are used to highlight the sense of play. How would you use the stage/props to emphasise this?

5. Points of Discussion/ Research

During rehearsals the cast and creative team were visited by a child psychologist helped them better understand Bobbie and Hench's behaviour. The flow chart below was used by the director and actors to help them understand the reasons why Bobbie raped Jennifer.



Discussion Point: In what ways could this chart help the actors understand Bobbie's violent behaviour?

This is research used by the creative team, detailing attachment theory. This helped the cast understand how Bobbie and Hench form relationships, and how this affects their bonds with each other as well as Maggie and Jennifer.

What Is Attachment Theory?

The Importance of Early Emotional Bonds

By Kendra Cherry

Psychology Expert

Attachment theory is focused on the relationships and bonds between people, particularly long-term relationships including those between a parent and child and between romantic partners.

British psychologist John Bowlby was the first attachment theorist, describing attachment as a "lasting psychological connectedness between human beings."

Bowlby was interested in understanding the separation anxiety and distress that children experience when separated from their primary caregivers.

Some of the earliest behavioral theories suggested that attachment was simply a learned behavior. These theories proposed that attachment was merely the result of feeding relationship between the child and the caregiver. Because the caregiver feeds the child and provide nourishment, the child becomes attached these theories suggested.

What Bowlby observed that even feedings did not diminish the anxiety experienced by children when they were separated from their primary caregivers. Instead, he found that attachment was characterized by clear behavioral and motivation patterns. When children are frightened, they will seek proximity from their primary caregiver in order to receive both comfort and care.

What is Attachment?

Attachment is an emotional bond to another person. Bowlby believed that the earliest bonds formed by children with their caregivers have a tremendous impact that continues throughout life. He suggested attachment also serves to keep the infant close to the mother, thus improving the child's chances of survival.

He viewed attachment as a product of evolutionary processes. While the behavioral theories of attachment suggested that attachment was a learned process, Bowlby and others proposed that children are born with an innate drive to form attachments with caregivers.

Throughout history, children who maintained proximity to an attachment figure were more likely to receive comfort and protection, and therefore more likely to survive to adulthood.

Through the process of natural selection, a motivational system designed to regulate attachment emerged.

So what determines successful attachment? Behaviorists suggested that it was food that led to the formation of this attachment behavior, but Bowlby and others demonstrated that nurturance and responsiveness were the primary determinants of attachment.

The central theme of attachment theory is that primary caregivers who are available and responsive to an infant's needs allow the child to develop a sense of security.

The infant knows that the caregiver is dependable, which creates a secure base for the child to then explore the world.

Ainsworth's "Strange Situation"

In her 1970's research, psychologist Mary Ainsworth expanded greatly upon Bowlby's original work. Her groundbreaking "Strange Situation" study revealed the profound effects of attachment on behavior. In the study, researchers observed children between the ages of 12 and 18 months as they responded to a situation in which they were briefly left alone and then reunited with their mothers.

Based upon the responses the researchers observed, Ainsworth described three major styles of attachment: secure attachment, ambivalent-insecure attachment, and avoidant-insecure attachment. Later, researchers Main and Solomon (1986) added a fourth attachment style called disorganized-insecure attachment based upon their own research. A number of studies since that time have supported Ainsworth's attachment styles and have indicated that attachment styles also have an impact on behaviors later in life.

Maternal Deprivation Studies

Harry Harlow's infamous studies on maternal deprivation and social isolation during the 1950s and 1960s also explored early bonds. In a series of experiments, Harlow demonstrated how such bonds emerge and the powerful impact they have on behavior and functioning. In one version of his experiment, newborn rhesus monkeys were separated from their birth mothers and reared by surrogate mothers. The infant monkeys were placed in cages with two wire monkey mothers. One of the wire monkeys held a bottle from which the infant monkey could obtain nourishment, while the other wire monkey was covered in a soft terry cloth.

While the infant monkeys would go to the wire mother to obtain food, they spend most of their days with the soft cloth mother. When frightened, the baby monkeys would turn to their cloth-covered mother for comfort and security.

Harlow's work also demonstrated that early attachments were the result of receiving comfort and care from a caregiver rather than simply the result of being fed.

The Stages of Attachment

Researchers Rudolph Schaffer and Peggy Emerson analyzed the number of attachment relationships that infants form in a longitudinal study with 60 infants. The infants were

observed every four weeks during the first year of life, and then once again at 18 months. Based upon their observations, Schaffer and Emerson outlined four distinct phases of attachment.

1. **Pre-attachment Stage:** From birth to three months, infants do not show any particular attachment to a specific caregiver. The infant's signals such as crying and fussing naturally attract the attention of the caregiver, and the baby's positive responses encourage the caregiver to remain close.
2. **Indiscriminate Attachment:** From around six weeks of age to seven months, infants begin to show preferences for primary and secondary caregivers. During this phase, infants begin to develop a feeling of trust that the caregiver will respond to their needs. While they will still accept care from other people, they become much better at distinguishing between familiar and unfamiliar people as they approach seven months of age. They also respond more positively to the primary caregiver.
3. **Discriminate Attachment:** At this point, from about seven to eleven months of age, infants show a strong attachment and preference for one specific individual. They will protest when separated from the primary attachment figure (separation anxiety), and begin to display anxiety around strangers (stranger anxiety).
4. **Multiple Attachments:** After approximately nine months of age, children begin to form strong emotional bonds with other caregivers beyond the primary attachment figure. This often includes the father, older siblings, and grandparents.

While this process may seem straightforward, there are a number of different factors that can influence how and when attachments develop. First is the opportunity for attachment. Children that do not have a primary care figure, such as those raised in orphanages, may fail to develop the sense of trust needed to form an attachment. Second, the quality of care-giving is a vital factor. When caregivers respond quickly and consistently, children learn that they can depend on the people who are responsible for their care, which is the essential foundation for attachment.

Patterns of Attachment

Secure Attachment

Secure attachment is marked by distress when separated from caregivers and are joyful when the caregiver returns. Remember, these children feel secure and able to depend on their adult caregivers. When the adult leaves, the child may be upset but he or she feels assured that the parent or caregiver will return.

When frightened, securely attached children will seek comfort from caregivers. These children know their parent or caregiver will provide comfort and reassurance, so they are comfortable seeking them out in times of need.

Ambivalent Attachment

Ambivalently attached children usually become very distressed when a parent leaves. This attachment style is considered relatively uncommon, affecting an estimated 7-15% of U.S. children. Research suggests that ambivalent attachment is a result of poor

maternal availability. These children cannot depend on their mother (or caregiver) to be there when the child is in need.

Avoidant Attachment

Children with an avoidant attachment tend to avoid parents or caregivers. When offered a choice, these children will show no preference between a caregiver and a complete stranger. Research has suggested that this attachment style might be a result of abusive or neglectful caregivers. Children who are punished for relying on a caregiver will learn to avoid seeking help in the future.

Disorganized Attachment

Children with a disorganized attachment often display a confusing mix of behavior and may seem disoriented, dazed, or confused. Children may both avoid or resist the parent. Some researchers believe that the lack of a clear attachment pattern is likely linked to inconsistent behavior from caregivers. In such cases, parents may serve as both a source of comfort and a source of fear, leading to disorganized behavior.

Problems with Attachment

What happens to children who do not form secure attachments? Research suggests that failure to form secure attachments early in life can have a negative impact on behavior in later childhood and throughout the life. Children diagnosed with oppositional-defiant disorder (ODD), conduct disorder (CD) or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) frequently display attachment problems, possibly due to early abuse, neglect or trauma. Clinicians suggest that children adopted after the age of six months have a higher risk of attachment problems.

While attachment styles displayed in adulthood are not necessarily the same as those seen in infancy, research indicates that early attachments can have a serious impact on later relationships. For example, those who are securely attached in childhood tend to have good self-esteem, strong romantic relationships and the ability to self-disclose to others. As adults, they tend to have healthy, happy and lasting relationships.

Why Attachment Matters

Researchers have found that attachment patterns established early in life can lead to a number of outcomes. For example, children who are securely attached as infants tend to develop stronger self-esteem and better self-reliance as they grow older. These children also tend to be more independent, perform better in school, have successful social relationships, and experience less depression and anxiety.

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How to Cite This Article:

Cherry, K. A. (2006). What is attachment theory? Retrieved from
<http://psychology.about.com/od/loveandattraction/a/attachment01.htm>

Points of discussion

This is an exercise for teachers who have looked through the research with their students.

Have a discussion with your students about the events of the play. This can be done as a sit down discussion or as a sliding scale. Use the suggested questions/comments as a starting point for your discussion. If you are doing a sliding scale exercise allocate parts of the room as agree, disagree and not sure. Read out the questions and ask the students to stand on the section of the room they feel fits in with their opinion most. Then pick a few students to share their reasons for standing in a certain area. When the sliding scale or discussion has some momentum read some of the research with the group. Ask them some of the same questions to see if their opinions have changed to help build on the discussion.

Suggested questions/points of discussion:

- Maggie is a bad mother.
- Maggie is a victim of circumstance.
- Bobbie is cruel.
- Bobbie is a product of his environment.
- Jennifer is a snob.
- Jennifer is a good influence on Hench and Bobbie.
- Hench is responsible for Bobbie's assault of Jennifer.
- Hench is kind.
- Bobbie is to blame for his assault of Jennifer.
- Jennifer brought on Bobbie's assault.
- Bobbie and Hench need a father figure.

6. Interview with the Director, Ned Bennett

What did you make of *YEN* when you first read it?

I was blown away by it. I found it incredibly gut-wrenchingly sad. But what I was most floored by was how compassionately Anna had drawn the characters. What I love about Anna's writing is that I think she loves all the characters. And I think that's a really important aspect of writing a play. Particularly, if the characters commit heinous actions.

What was your vision for *YEN*?

I think what me and Georgia Lowe, the designer, were keen to do, was at every opportunity heighten the action and the emotional undercurrent of what's going on in the story. And what we were really keen to do from the get go was to not set it in a naturalistic flat. Georgia's perspective of the set that opened up a lot of doors was that, from their point of view, it's their kingdom and they like where they live. A couple of times they do actually call it a shithole but ultimately, it's their territory.

The set really brings you into their world. You get a sense of containment because of how intimate the space is. And for a large part of the play we don't see the outside world.

When Georgia and I were talking about it, some of my main reference points were I used to work as a teaching assistant with boys with emotional and behavioural difficulties. One of the lads, a seven year old boy, at any opportunity he would climb very high in whichever space we were in. And sometimes it was to escape from a situation and sometimes it was to observe what was going on. And equally he would hide under furniture a lot. And Georgia and I discussed that. We were very conscious of it looking like we were creating a cage. And I think it does look like a cage. But that wasn't the intention. The intention was to create a space that was like a playground. Where the actors could scuttle around and climb really high and jump off things and swing off things. And so originally the PlayStation controllers that are attached to the climbing ropes, we experimented with using those as zip lines. We swung it over cross bars and they were swinging on it, and eventually we found it to be too dangerous. But the keyboard as a swing was something we found in rehearsals. We were really keen to avoid projecting the porn or the PlayStation games. We wanted to create a sensation of it and feeling of it. And using the flat screen made of par can lights was a way of trying to create a feeling in the space of how the boys could escape from their flat and escape from their world. So there's something about how they're drawn into the light.



Jake Davis as Bobbie (Hench) © Richard Davenport

Why do you think it's important to tell stories like this?

I think it's important because, to put it simplistically, if people do bad things we need to understand why. And we need to look after them and help them. And I think what Anna's drawn, with great complexity, is the idea of hand me down behaviour and how people can get trapped in a cycle of feeling claustrophobic. And ultimately I think the play is about nurture and is about love, and the instance of what happens when there's gaps there. And I think what Anna's done so brilliantly is equip this family. This family has shown incredible tenacity in surviving against all the odds. And Hench becomes an unofficial carer for his younger brother. Hench doesn't see himself as a carer. And he's asked if he's a carer by Jennifer when she comes in and he does a really good job of looking after himself and his brother. And they might spend a bit too much time watching porn and playing Call of Duty, but ultimately they do the best they can. And I think examining this family from an empathetic point of view is really important.

And it does feel like a playground on an estate. You've got the bare essentials, but there could be more if someone was willing to provide it.

Exactly. It reflects what they've got and haven't got. The big challenge with the design was the fact that we spend over half the play in the living room. And then go to the visiting room at the secure training centre, and the heath and then back into the flat. And originally we were looking into hoisting everything up on chains into the fly tower. And then we found that to be impractical. But what Georgia and I were really keen to do was to bleach the space. Which was why we have the white out where we blind the audience. Just as Bobbie meets Jennifer before he's going to rape her. We wanted to visually abstract the idea that all the characters worlds, in different ways, have turned upside down. So we wanted to bleach the space, and have this sterile, white, clean space.

What was the decision behind not showing the rape scene onstage?

From early on there was a possibility we were going to show a lot of it onstage. And then Anna and I felt instinctively that that would not really be necessary. And that implying what was going on might be enough. And then when we started rehearsing it and we staged it we looked at realising the moment that Bobbie finds Jennifer. And then looking at what happens next. So we staged what happens next, before he actually rapes her. We found that going too literal with it, given the magnitude of what happens, it just didn't feel right. So we opted for the pulled back version of it.

When Hench clears the space it makes sense, because Jennifer is gone so he's lost all hope.

Exactly. And the other biggest challenge, was how Hench kills his dog Taliban. I didn't want to do it offstage just with sound. I wanted it to be something physical that he could do in order to create a more viscerally impacting moment. So that the strain of pulling on the cable when he's sort of unplugging the heater. And then the calculated nature of hanging him. And a lot of that wasn't planned. We went into rehearsals knowing that the dog would be a heater. But we didn't figure out how to kill the dog until tech of the run in Manchester.



Alex Austin as Hench © Richard Davenport

It's so truthful you can imagine that all of this really happened. Do you think that affected rehearsals in any way?

Definitely. We did a lot of research, where we visited the Crown Court in Liverpool during rehearsals. A representative of a company that transports young offenders from prisons and courthouses, talked us through recent trials that were similar to Bobbie's trial. And we also spoke with two child psychiatrists who looked through the script in detail and explained why someone might kill a dog, or be sexually abusive. Why someone might use misogynistic and homophobic language, and that was a really important thing to do in rehearsals.

How did you develop relationships between the characters?

While the actors were preparing for rehearsals, they did character lists. They did three lists of quotes from the play; what their character says about themselves, what other characters say about them and what they say about other characters. We then used those lists to write stream of consciousness responses to the contradictory ways in which each character perceives the other character. That covers from the moment they meet them to the end of the story. The actors then divided those responses into 3 or 4 contradictory perspectives that they have of the other character. So a thumbnail description of how they see the other character. We also used images to flesh out what those perspectives are. We did lots of non-verbal work, practically looking at how the characters relate to each other, and how the endowments (assigning characteristics to another person) they have of each other create physically specific ways of making contact with each other. Also, with some of the ways in which they articulate what their perspectives are of each other, we found it useful to archetypes or symbols. So the idea that Bobbie sees his mum as a Princess or a Queen and he wants to at all costs look after her. Whereas from Hench's perspective, she's a witch coming back and invading the castle, invading his kingdom. Because she's been away for such a long time with very little explanation and then comes back and tries to act like it's all normal. It's about finding ways in which the actor can articulate their perspective of another character, which then really gets them in their gut. So it might be more useful for Jennifer at times, to see Bobbie sometimes as a rabid dog, and sometimes as a little

baby that needs to be cared for and mothering. We would then run sections of the play where they would switch which perspectives they were using as they were going along. But in quite a free flowing way rather than nailing down now it's this perspective or this one. And then we would use those sorts of exercises for warm ups.

The play is quite harrowing but also has some great comedic moments. What was it like finding that balance in rehearsals?

It wasn't so much that we identified tonally whether something was dramatic or comedic. We put a big emphasis in rehearsals onto the fact that the boys are 13 and 16. And they don't have any clear adult role models in their lives. So their big influences are each other and what they find on the internet. And so it was about looking at the playfulness that comes from these boys. And not just in a negative way. The way in which as young people their imaginations are fresher and more easily accessed. And I think inevitably what comes from that is a sense of fun.

How do you think you've developed as a director since being Trainee Director at the Royal Court?

Being a trainee here was such an amazing opportunity because I got to be in so many different rehearsal rooms. Sometimes the script was written in rehearsals, sometimes the script had been through ten drafts. Sometimes the script was an overtly political piece, sometimes it was a character driven piece. And that meant I was able to look at different ways of collaborating with the writer, and everyone involved, as well as different ways of rehearsing.

What do you hope audiences take from YEN?

I hope that they would leave caring for and understanding the characters in the story.

7. Practical Exercises

The following are rehearsal techniques used during YEN rehearsals.

Warm ups

Keepy Uppy

Have the group form a circle and begin each round by bowing and saying 'Wooha!' The aim of the game is to keep a ball in the air for as long as possible. They must remain in a circle and try to stop the ball from touching the floor. As the group progresses encourage them to increase the speed of their responses. When they have grown confident in the game introduce numbers. They must try and keep the ball in the air for 30 counts (this number can be higher or lower depending on the ability of the group). Each person who hits the ball must count. Increase the number of counts as the group grows in confidence.

Running on the spot

Before the group begins this exercise get them to loosen up by shaking their limbs and jumping around. For 10 counts get the group to run on the spot, whilst looking at the floor and moving their arms. For another 10 counts do the same but this time looking up at the ceiling with their arms by their sides. Then for another 10 counts do the same but with their arms over their heads whilst clicking their fingers. Repeat the whole sequence decreasing the number of counts by 2's, finishing at 1.

Character Exercises

Perspectives

Look through the script and make 3 lists of quotes from the characters point of view. What the character says about themselves, what they say about other characters and what other characters say about them. From these quotes get the students to think about what their perspectives are of each character. Ensure that the perspectives are all different. Depending on the characters relationships with others, they may be contradictory. Using their perspectives as their guides, get the students to write short descriptions for each character. Ensure that there is more than one description per character so that all perspectives are considered. Below are examples from Alex Austin's (who plays Hench) notes from the exercise.

Examples

How Hench sees Jen...Foreign Weirdo Freak

- Dresses like a scarecrow
- Weird accent – you can't understand it
- **Snobby**
- Looks down her nose at Feltham
- Posh. Thinks she's better than everyone here
- Scared when she hears sirens
- Pinched face – wrinkled nose like she can smell something nasty

How Hench sees Jen....Mirror/Drifter

- She's alone
- Behind her warm smile, she's lost.
- She reminds me of me.
- A ghost that is getting more and more invisible

- She's on her last life
- Grey. Loses her shimmer
- Has nothing to hold on to
- Rabbit in the headlights

How Hench sees Jen....Mother Theresa/Carer

- Glowing energy. Yellow and warm. Rubs off on you.
- Makes you feel everything will be alright.
- Arms that could hold the whole world in a hug.
- She's like a book that has the answer to everything
- Magic healer.

How Hench sees Jen....Girl of my dreams/Angel

- Fit. But not in a pornstar way. She's beautiful.
- Looks like she's just walked out of magical forest – Elven Queen – Her eyes are green and sparkly and full of light.
- There is like a shimmer around her, like near a plane engine or in the desert.
- Mirage – she can't be real
- Knows how to dream. Mind like a storybook from Primary School with mad pictures in it.



Annes Elwy as Jen © Richard Davenport

Physical Perspectives

This is a further exploration of the above exercise. This will help the students make more varied acting choices, depending on how their character feels about another character.

Form 2 lines with students facing each other from a distance. Put some background music on. Ensure that the students are facing someone their characters have a relationship with. Begin by asking the students to look at each other from top to toe. Allow their observations to shape how they feel about that person. Keep them looking at their partners and after a while introduce the perspectives they have created. Allow the perspectives to change naturally. Think of a symbol that sums up that person. During rehearsals, the actors used fairy tales to shape their perspectives. Annes and Sian (who played Jen and Maggie) were partners and Annes used the wolf to shape her perspective of Maggie.

Encourage the students to see their characters in their partners. Focus on the other person's eyes – who else do they remind you of? Students can switch pairs depending on their relationships with other characters. This can be introduced at any point in the exercise. During the exercise they may discover new perspectives. Allow this to shape how they think of and interact with one another.

Once the group are confident in the exercise, allow them to walk around the room. Change the music to something more upbeat. Allow their perspectives to fuel how they move around the room. Bobbie and Maggie, for instance, are quite close. This changes during the course of the play. So sometimes they will be physically close and move together as a unit. Whereas at another part of the exercise Maggie may distance herself from Bobbie and vice versa. Introduce physical contact.

Remind the group that the perspectives keep shifting depending on events in the play. For example, Jen and Hench have an intimate relationship so they may hug often. This changes later on in the play so Jen may then distance herself from Hench and would not allow him to touch her. Keep switching pairs to ensure the exercise remains active. Think about how the characters want to change the other person, allow this to influence the other person.

Once the group has explored all avenues get them to face each other where they're standing. End the exercise by asking the partners to think about what they love about each other. When thinking about this use back story and perspectives they discovered in the exercise to shape this opinion. Imagine they are the best person in the world. End the exercise on a hug.

Points of concentration

This is an exercise that helps influence an actor's decision.

Read the scene below with your students and get them to decide on different points of concentration for the scene. For instance, during this scene the actor playing Bobbie used bodies as a point of concentration. This influenced how he behaves in relation to himself and others. Moments such as wearing a girl's dress and wrestling with Jen become more emphasised. This is because Bobbie is thinking about his body and his relation to other people's bodies.

Divide them into groups and have them rehearse and perform the scene they have just read. Give each group a point of concentration. Share them back with the group and ask how each scene differed for the actors and for the audience. Perform the scene again but this time swap points of concentration. Share again and ask how changing the point of concentration changed their performance. Did it work having two different points of concentration? Which one did they prefer? Why? What felt comfortable and what didn't?

This exercise is very flexible. Each character has a significant focus. This may change from scene to scene or may stay the same for the whole play. With a more confident group use this exercise to help block scenes.

Extract from YEN:

Scene Six

Three weeks later. Bobbie and Hench's living room, late afternoon. The TV has been moved off the unit and the unit has been moved into the middle of the room. It has a sheet over it, providing a makeshift table. Bobbie and Jennifer are play fighting, a mixture of wrestling and tickling. They are having great fun; squeals and yelps of delight and laughter. Bobbie is dressed in his same trackie bottoms but with a different shirt – the sort made for a large businessman. As they fight Hench enters, wearing his scruffy jeans also with a similar shirt. He clocks them. He puts cutlery, ketchup and salad cream down on the unit and goes back out. Jennifer gets Bobbie to the floor and straddles him:

Jennifer: Feltham Hoodrat Surrender!

Bobbie: Never to the Country Bumpkin!

She proceeds to tickle him into submission. HENCH re---enters with a plate stacked high with nuggets. He puts them down.

HENCH: Um – there’s something happening out here.

Jennifer: Oh I forgot!

Jennifer gets up. Laughing and breathless she says to Bobbie over her shoulder as she exits:

That is *not* a win for Hoodratz!

Bobbie: Hoodratz forever!

Jennifer: *(from the hall)* Bumpkins forever!

HENCH goes out to the kitchen with Jennifer. Bobbie gets up. He pulls the front of his trackie bottoms out a bit and looks down them. He then re---arranges himself slightly as he has a hard---on. He strolls over to the table, grabs a nugget, throws it up into the air and catches it in his mouth. HENCH comes in with an upturned bin for Bobbie.

HENCH: Oi.

He gives the bin to Bobbie.

Bobbie: What’s this?

HENCH: Chair.

Bobbie puts it down by the unit. HENCH goes out again. Bobbie goes to a black bin liner full of clothes in the corner. He rifles through it, holds up a skimpy black boob tube dress. He puts it back, then finds a bow tie on elastic, which he puts on. HENCH comes in with a plate of oven chips.

Bobbie: Bruv come here.

Bobbie has a normal tie for HENCH. He puts it round HENCH’s neck and tries to tie it.

HENCH: Bobbie what are you doing?

Bobbie: Bruv you need to dress to impress!

Jennifer comes in with a plate of fish fingers. HENCH knocks Bobbie’s hand away.

Jennifer: What are you two up to?

Bobbie: Nothing!

She smiles and exits.

HENCH: Dick!

Bobbie giggles. Hench sits on the end of the sofa at one end of the unit. Bobbie sits on the upturned bin – other end of the unit.

Bobbie: JEEESUS! This could feed the whole of Africa! Imagine if the girls and boys with flies in their eyes could see this. Do you think we should send some to Comic Relief?

Hench: What do you reckon?

Bobbie: nah fuck ‘em.

Bobbie takes a chip and puts it straight in his mouth.

Let ‘em starve.

Bobbie takes a handful of chips. Jennifer enters with a large steaming saucepan and puts it down on the table. She smiles at Hench excitedly and flicks Bobbie’s ear and exits again. Bobbie stands up and peers into the saucepan. He looks at Hench.

Uh oh.

Hench: Shhh.

Jennifer re---enters. She holds a lit tealight which she puts in the centre of the unit.

Jennifer: There.

(She points to Bobbie’s bowtie) This is very smart!

Bobbie beams. Jennifer sits on the armchair in the centre of the unit. Beat.

Hench, would you...

Hench: What?

Jennifer: Would you do the soup?

Hench: Oh, yeah, yeah...

Hench gets up and using a ladle inexpertly dishes some of the soup in each bowl. Bobbie and Jennifer wait and watch. Hench feels himself being watched. Bobbie smirks at him.

Bobbie: What’s this?

Jennifer: It’s leek and potato soup.

Bobbie: Looks like snot.

Hench: Shut up Bob./

Bobbie: /Hope it doesn’t taste like snot.

Jennifer: Well you’d know what snot tastes like.

Bobbie: Jokes!

Jennifer tickles Bobbie under the arm and Bobbie yelps but enjoys it. They taste it.

Can I have a fish finger now?

Jennifer: Don't you like it?

Hench: Ignore him. It's nice.

Beat. They eat. Bobbie has an idea and a big grin.

Bobbie: Jenny.

Jennifer: Yeah?

Bobbie: *Bore da.*

Jennifer is really pleased about this. Bobbie is very excited.

Jennifer: *Bore da. Sut wyt ti?*

Bobbie: *(struggles with the Welsh but ultimately manages it) Dwi'n dda... iawn, Diolch.*

Jennifer: Yay!

Hench looks on – open mouthed.

Bobbie, bore da!

Bobbie: *Bore da. Sut wyt ti?*

Jennifer: *Dwi'n dda iawn, Diolch!*

Hench: What the fuck is that?

Jennifer: I've been teaching Bobbie Welsh.

Hench: Is it?

Bobbie: Go on bruv –try it. *Bore da* means "Good morning".

Hench: Na.

Bobbie: Just try it! *BOH---REH---DAH.*

Hench: No.

Bobbie: Why?

Hench: *(Hackles rising a bit)* I just ain't bothered, OK?

Bobbie: OK bruv. Don't have a period.

8. Useful Links and Research

Get to know... Anna Jordan, Interview on the Royal Exchange YouTube channel:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QCfs7I3vZpk>

Redrafting your play, Live Workshop with Anna Jordan:
<http://www.writeaplay.co.uk/live-online-workshop-with-anna-jordan/>

Huffington Post interview:
http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/anna-jordan/what-keeps-me-up-at-night_b_4378148.html



Sian Breckin as Maggie and Jake Davies as Bobbie © Richard Davenport

9. About Young Court

Young Court is the Royal Court's inclusive programme of activities by, for and with young people up to age 21. Through our participation projects, young people have the chance to learn from the foremost artists and facilitators in current theatre practice, encouraging them to investigate the craft of making theatre. Young people can experience unique learning exchanges, across all departments, opening up the world of the rehearsal room as well as backstage, offering a fascinating insight into the professional process of staging Royal Court productions. Young Court aims to encourage young people to discover their power to influence and change theatre, giving them a platform to experiment, question and innovate, placing young people at our centre and fostering a live dialogue in which their views and ideas are valued and can inform our work.

Young Court offers a wide-ranging programme of activities including:

Youth Board

Young Script Panel

Primetime

ReAct

Art on Stage

Insight workshops around productions

INSET workshops for teachers

Post-show talks

Royal Court in a Day Study Day

Performing Arts Business Study Day

Bespoke workshops

A full description of all Young Court events can be found on the Young Court page of the Royal Court web-site, www.royalcourttheatre.com if you would like more information, please e-mail Lynne Gagliano, Head of Young Court, at: lynnegagliano@royalcourttheatre.com or phone 020 7565 5174.

The *Yen* Education Background Pack was compiled and written by Maia Clarke, Young Court Assistant with the kind assistance of Ned Bennett, Anna Jordan, Sarah Hellicar and the creative team of *Yen*.