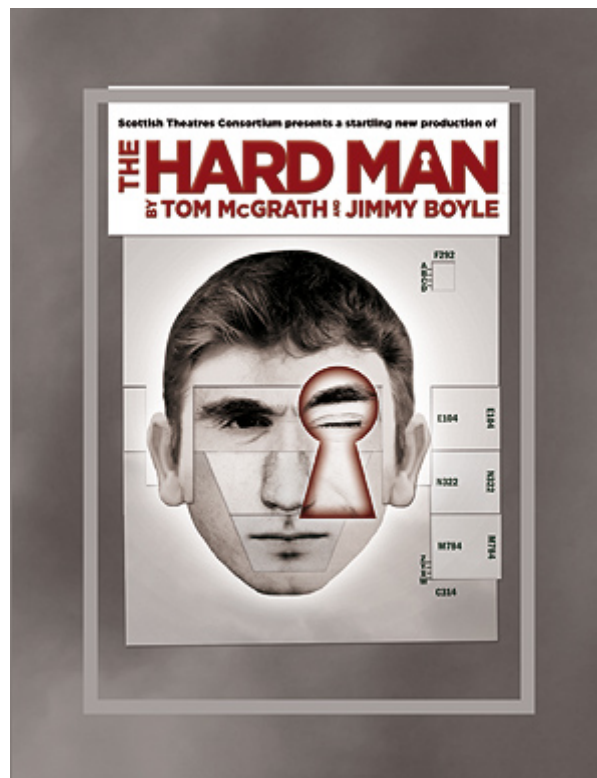


THE HARD MAN

By Tom McGrath & Jimmy Boyle

EDUCATION RESOURCE PACK



The Hard Man Education Resource Pack

Contents

Introduction to working with <i>The Hard Man</i>	Page 3
Tom McGrath	Pages 4 - 5
Including Discussion Points 1	
Jimmy Boyle	Pages 6 - 7
Including Discussion Points 2	
The Barlinnie Special Unit/ How <i>The Hard Man</i> was written	Pages 8 - 10
Including Activity 1	
Why this play now?	Pages 11- 12
Including Discussion Points 3	
The world of the play	
The Gorbals	Pages 13 - 14
Including Activity 2	
The Prison System	Page 15
The Play Text	Pages 16 - 17
Including Discussion Points 4 & Activity 3	
Staging & Direction	Pages 18 - 19
Including Activity 4	
Themes of Violence	Pages 20 - 22
Including Discussion Points 5 & Activity 5	
The Porterfield Prison ‘cages’ at Inverness/ The play’s ending	Pages 23 - 24
Including Activities 6 & 7	
Further Resources	Page 25

Introduction to working with *The Hard Man*

Welcome to *The Hard Man* Education Resource Pack. We are very excited to be staging this classic Scottish play in 2011, and believe that the piece will speak to young people as much today as when it was first staged at The Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh in 1977.

We have given our production of *The Hard Man* a 15+ recommendation, this is a guideline, and as such the decision of whether a young person would be able to cope with the production lies with the responsible adults. The play contains scenes of violence, swearing and full frontal male nudity.

I hope that in this pack, you will find the tools to enable you to delve into the play and work with your pupils to allow them to explore what the piece is really about, and how they can relate it to their lives and societal beliefs. The material contained is aimed at pupils studying Higher Drama, and the Contemporary Scottish Theatre module in particular. In addition, *The Hard Man* and its themes & genre would be of use to Advanced Higher Drama students. Note that many of the 'Discussion Points' could be used as stimulus for short essays.

As this document contains a substantial amount of background information and reading, it would be useful for all students to have their own copy, if at all possible.

Where script references/ excerpts have been used throughout this pack, I have quoted page numbers which correlate to the edition of the script that Capercaillie Books have printed to coincide with this production of *The Hard Man*. Copies of the script are available from me at a subsidised price of just £1 per copy for Edinburgh and Lothian Schools and £3.50 for schools in the rest of Scotland. Please get in touch if you'd like to purchase a class set.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any queries, or require further information about this production.

Very best wishes,



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Tom McGrath



Tom McGrath was born on the 23 October, 1940 and died, aged 68, from cancer on 29 April, 2009.

McGrath was a playwright, poet and jazz musician. He was born in Rutherglen (on the outskirts of Glasgow), but when he left school he moved to London. Living there in the 1960s he wrote and performed poetry, was the features editor of the radical anti-war journal *Peace News*, and later the founding editor of the seminal British underground journal *International Times*.

In the late 1960s McGrath was battling a heroin addiction; not helped by the circles of artists that he moved in. With his wife and three young daughters, he returned to Glasgow to begin a new life. He began to study English and drama at Glasgow University, and importantly, writing plays.

During the Edinburgh Festival of 1972, he became musical director of the legendary *Great Northern Welly Boot Show* which featured, amongst others, Billy Connolly. From this time McGrath began to focus more on theatre and his first play, *Laurel and Hardy*, was performed at the Traverse Theatre in 1976, transferring almost immediately to London.

“After the huge and unexpected success of his first play, Laurel and Hardy in 1976, Glasgow playwright Tom McGrath was asked by the Traverse Theatre what his next play would be. “It’s going to be about violence” he said. He was asked for a title; he quickly made one up. “It’s going to be called The Hard Man”. McGrath was concerned with his home city’s fetishisation of violence, and its prevalence in its working class culture. He had become fascinated by the violence in the work of Laurel and Hardy and began to imagine what the films would be like without the laughs. Or only with the violence.”

© Phillip Breen 2010 – Director of the 2011 production.

Aside from his writing, McGrath played a huge part in nurturing new writing talent and supporting the arts in Scotland. He was instrumental in the founding of Glasgow's Third Eye Centre (now the Centre for Contemporary Arts), and was director of the centre from 1974-77. In the early 1990s he was the Scottish Arts Council's Associate Literary Director, and his work in supporting young playwrights led directly to the foundation of the Playwrights' Studio Scotland.

After his death, one of McGrath's daughters and his partner Ella set up a Trust Fund that will support emerging Scottish writers through bursaries and residencies.

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Other plays by Tom McGrath include:

- (1979) 'The android circuit' and 'Animal'
- (1981) '1-2-3' (comprising 3 plays: 'Who are you anyway', 'Very important business', 'Moondog')
- (1986) 'Kora'
- (1988) 'Trivial pursuits'
- (1990) 'The flitting'
- (1992,1993) 'Merlin' (adaptation)
- (1993) 'Buchanan'
- (1994) 'Kidnapped' (adaptation)
- (1995) 'Stones and ashes' (translation)
- (1999) 'DreamTrain'
- (2000) 'Safe delivery' and 'Electra' (new version)
- (2005) 'My Old Man'

Discussion points 1:

- How would you describe Tom McGrath's lifestyle in London?
- He was talented in music, poetry and playwriting. Could it be said that McGrath was an artist in the true sense of the word? What does it mean to be 'an artist'?
- McGrath did not go to University until later in his life (after being married and having four children). Do you think it matters at what age you study? In what proportions do you think McGrath's work was influenced by his 'life experience' and his 'academic studies'?
- McGrath is known for the support and guidance he afforded other writers. Do you think that people with talent have a duty to share their learnings with others?
- For most, the legacy that McGrath has left behind includes his plays and institutions which he built up and supported. What do you think the real meaning of the word 'legacy' is? Are there other things that McGrath has left the world?

Jimmy Boyle



Jimmy Boyle (born 1944 in Gorbals, Glasgow) is a Scottish sculptor and novelist who was formerly a gangster. He was brought up by his mother, who was a cleaner. His father was often absent, then died when Boyle was young.

Once reputed to be the most violent man in Scotland, in 1967 – at age 23 – he was sentenced to life imprisonment for the murder of another Glasgow gangland figure, William "Babs" Rooney, although Boyle denies that he committed this killing. During his troubled incarceration (including almost seven years of solitary confinement in the 'cages' in Porterfield Prison), he was finally moved in to the Special Unit of Barlinnie Prison where he was introduced to the arts. His talent for writing and sculpture shone through and he soon gained a reputation for his work. (For more info. on the Inverness 'cages' see page 23 and for Barlinnie Prison's Special Unit, see page 8.)

"[...] It was a time when I was bursting with rage and energy and incapable of doing anything positive. Art was something for the toffs, not people from my working-class background, or so I thought. One day I picked up seven pounds of clay that was lying around and did a sculpted portrait of Ben [another inmate]. It was the first real positive thing I'd done in my life and it was like a creative damn bursting inside me. In that one moment I had crossed over a threshold. As a result of this the arts began to play a big part in the unit."

Jimmy Boyle, 2004

In 1976, whilst still incarcerated, he designed the largest concrete sculpture in Europe; 'Gulliver' for The Craigmillar Festival Society. The following year he co-wrote the play *The Hard Man* with Tom McGrath. Around the same time, he was writing his autobiography, *A Sense of Freedom* (1977), which was made into an award-winning film in 1979.

In 1980, upon his release from prison, Boyle moved to Edinburgh to continue his artistic career. He married psychotherapist Sarah Juliet Trevelyan. They met in the Special Unit of Glasgow's Barlinnie Prison. Together, they set up the Gateway Exchange Fund in Edinburgh, where people with backgrounds of prison, drug abuse and mental health problems worked together to create a project, which emphasised the creative potential and human resource of everyone involved.

The Boyles had two children, though divorced in 2001. Boyle also had a son from a previous relationship who was stabbed to death in 1994.

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'The Boxer And The Princess'

Boyle continues to write and sculpt, his books include; *Pain of Confinement: Prison Diaries* (1984), *Hero of the Underworld* (1999). The latter was adapted for a French film, *La Rage et le Reve des Condamnes* (*The Anger and Dreams of the Condemned*). His sculptures have been sold for up to £20,000 (pictured).

In November 2003 Boyle sold Disney the film rights to his latest, unpublished book, for £2.1 million. The novel, *A Stolen Smile*, tells how the Mona Lisa ends up on a Scottish housing estate. Though, to date the film has not been made.

These days Boyle lives between France and Morocco with his second wife Kate Fenwick, a British actress whom he married in 2007.

"There is nothing glamorous about getting involved in crime and violence, and nothing glamorous about prisons..."

Jimmy Boyle

Discussion points 2:

- Do you think Boyle had a tough early life? He was born into a rough neighbourhood, but he had a good mother. Can parents keep a child on track if there are a lot of people/ reasons steering them in the wrong direction?
- Boyd was incarcerated at 23. Do you believe that at age 23 people should have the chance to turn their life around, no matter what crime they have committed? Is it ever too late to address your issues and change?
- Many people wanted Boyle sentenced to death for the crimes he had committed. Do you think that there are circumstances in which the death penalty is acceptable?
- Boyle came into education (in an informal way) late in life. The first book he read was *Crime & Punishment* (while in jail), he then of course went on to gain writing and sculpture skills (again, while in jail). Should 'the system' take some responsibility for people who they have never managed to 'engage' in anything at school?
- When Boyle was released from prison, he chose to set up an organisation supporting other underprivileged people – sharing the positive experience that the arts can bring. Does this prove that he 'recovered' or 'changed'?

The Barlinnie Special Unit / How *The Hard Man* was written

The special unit at Barlinnie Prison was opened in 1973 to provide a different approach to the treatment and prison experience of certain long-term male prisoners, and potentially violent prisoners. The unit operated like a community of staff and prisoners, and allowed the inmates to wear civilian clothes, cook their own food, to have constant access to communal areas (as opposed to being locked in a cell) and importantly engage in meaningful projects – often based around the creative arts. The idea was to ‘humanise’ prisoners who previously had had no or little experience of love, friendship, community & social responsibility. The prisoners had regular sessions with psychologists, to try and help them come to terms with, and work through their problems. They kept pets in a garden area, and - it is said - were even afforded visits by their wives/ partners in private.

In short, the Special Unit was very unlike an average 1970s prison experience. Revolutionary and controversial, there were those who condemned the practices of the Unit throughout its existence. The Unit was eventually closed down in 1994.



Arts projects still take place in Scottish prisons. Last year, seven men at Shotts Prison took part in a visual arts project (pictured left) where they ‘got what was in their head down on paper’. Because of the high rate of illiteracy in prisons, work that involves non-written expression is favoured. The project was part of *Inspiring Change* – a Scottish project that used the arts to reform prisoners.

Funded by the Scottish Arts Council, the £300,000 project’s aim was to educate and help rehabilitate prisoners using visual art, theatre, opera, singing and music.

While Jimmy Boyle was in the Barlinnie Special Unit in 1976, Tom McGrath was trying to write his newly named play *The Hard Man*. He began a letter correspondence with Boyle. These letters, and later face to face visits, formed the basis for the play’s text as it was written over almost two years.

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“I wanted to do a play about violence because I grew up in Glasgow and it’s one of the central problems we’ve always had. The way it’s been dealt with by the courts has done nothing to get rid of it.

I went to see Jimmy every week, and also to Peterhead and prisons all over Scotland talking to warders, governors, prisoners and lawyers, researching the topic.

Jimmy was able to give me an authentic account of how the criminal mind operated and what the criminal element is like. He was able to do this in some detail. I then developed characters on his descriptions, and re-worked them to fit in with the play.

Sometimes we’d get to a moment where he’d tell me that it would have been important to get a new suit, so I’d go away and let him write a speech about buying a new suit, and what it was like. Many scenes in the play are almost word for word Jimmy Boyle, through the descriptions he gave me.”

Tom McGrath

Excerpt from ‘Clyde Guide’ interview, June 1979

The character Johnny Byrne represents Jimmy Boyle in the play. In one of his first (direct to audience) lines he says: **“I’m speaking to you tonight from a Scottish prison, where I’m serving a life-sentence for murder.”** Imagine, as an audience member, how you would have felt in 1979 hearing this line. Boyle was still in prison, and his legacy of violence was still a point of contempt in Scotland.

“The play was derided in some quarters for adding lustre to the reputation of a violent criminal and convicted murderer. For others the play represented an attack on the corrosive influence of gang-culture. For others it was a poetic meditation on state violence and the question of who is criminalized and how they are punished. For others the play represented the rage of the indefatigable human spirit against the madness of the system – a Gorbals ‘One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest’. The politics of the play continue to be provocative in their ambiguity.”

© Phillip Breen 2010 – Director of the 2011 production.

Activity 1 Diary Entry

From the point of view of either Tom McGrath or Jimmy Boyle, write a diary entry from the day in 1977 when *The Hard Man* is about to be staged for the first time.

Consider how each man is feeling about:

- the public response to the play
- the revelation of hard hitting facts (possibly previously undisclosed)
- the artistic merit of the piece
- the future

These short speeches could be performed in class as soliloquies, set in:

- a) Tom McGrath's environment on this day: i.e. a theatre rehearsal
- b) Jimmy Boyle's environment on this day: i.e. a prison area

Why this play now?

The Hard Man was first staged in 1977. When plays are re-staged, the question to the producers/ company/ director is always 'Why this play now?' It is an important question, as new writing tends to reflect the times and society that it is written in; addressing culture, politics and issues of its time. So why produce a play that's 33 years old? Surely society has moved on and changed its perspective on issues such as crime and punishment?

Phillip Breen, director of our production, explains why *The Hard Man* speaks to us today.



Phillip Breen - Director

*"When I first read 'The Hard Man' two and a half years ago, I was swept up in its energy, frankness and jet black working class wit. It's zoetrope of violent imagery lodged in my brain like splinters of glass. It appealed to the adolescent in me that loves gangster films, the child that loved pantomimes, and laughing at dirty jokes. It appealed to the part of me that is fascinated by why we are fascinated with violence and its perpetrators; the part that is riveted by *Silent Witness* and *Macbeth*. The part of me that questions why I can check my phone while watching far off cities get bombed on the news.*

*The more I read it, the more I felt that 2011 was a fecund time to explore the play. The end of 2010 saw Manchester United's Rio Ferdinand campaigning for action to stop kids killing each other with knives in Peckham and the strangling of a young woman in Bristol. It saw Wikileaks reveal how British prisoner abuses at Abu-Ghraib has led to the radicalization of thousands of young Iraqi men, creating a foothold for Al-Qaeda where there was none. It saw millions being paid in compensation to former inmates of Guantanamo Bay. In each case 'them', 'the others' suddenly became people who had names and feelings and spoke on Newsnight. Johnny Byrne's sardonic spoken leitmotif "**the animal is thinking**", had an increasingly sonorous resonance.*

There is a theme of debt in the play too, which felt deeply contemporary. This is expressed on a figurative and moral level, as the actors who play the characters that Byrne betrays in act one return in the guise of his jailers and tormentors in act two. But the issue of working class debt and the problem of what happens when people have no-recourse to 'legitimate' credit is tackled head on also. Johnny Byrne says:

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“I was providing a social service...I’d been prepared to do business with them when you hadn’t. While you were sitting back pretending not to notice I had been there to care for their needs. My methods with defaulters were quick and to the point but they weren’t any different from your precious world just a bit less hypocritical and undisguised. Let’s face it the whole world is a money lending racket and if it takes a man’s whole life to kill him with his debts it doesn’t make it any the less an act of murder.”

The juxtaposition of moral law with written law and the troubling gap between the two is of profound interest to McGrath and Boyle. As is the issue of who society deems to be ‘criminal’. It was perfectly legal for banks to sell mortgages to people who couldn’t afford to pay them back. The illegal sale of toxic debt remains largely unpunished. Bankers continue to receive their bonuses, and the banks are bailed out to the tune of 13 trillion dollars in the US and counting. Tony Blair started what many considered to be an illegal war and now gets £1million per gig, speaking on leadership. Brutal prisons the world over, are crammed with the mentally ill and addicts of all kinds who do not have powerful friends, or happen to disagree with their government, or who had the misfortune to deal in sums society could comprehend.”

© Phillip Breen 2010 – Director of the 2011 production.

Discussion points 3:

What do you think of Phillip Breen’s viewpoints on:

- The parallels between Johnny Byrne’s illegal money lending and the illegal sale of toxic debt which ultimately caused the credit crisis. Is it ok for big banks to lend money to people who will never be able to pay it back, just because it’s ‘legal’? In the same vein, is Johnny Byrne doing a social service by helping those who could otherwise never gain access to cash?
- Celebrities campaigning for an end to knife crime – do you think Britain has a problem with this type of violence? How much do you know? (See page 21)
- The millions of dollars that have been paid in compensation to former inmates of Guantanamo Bay – is prison violence a thing of the past or does this action prove that behind prison walls, the same torturous atrocities that are seen in *The Hard Man* are still occurring?

The world of the play: The Gorbals

The Gorbals, in Glasgow, is a predominantly working class neighbourhood on the south bank of the river Clyde with a reputation for roughness and high crime rates. The name 'Gorbals' comes from 'Gort a' Bhaile', or 'famine of the farm'.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the area was home to large numbers of immigrants from Italy and Ireland, attracted by the industrial jobs and fleeing social problems and poverty in their homelands. It also housed the new wave of Jewish immigrants from eastern and central Europe. The Jewish population moved out of the Gorbals as it rose in education and economic class; although many decedents of the Irish-Catholic immigrants remain.



The Queen Elizabeth Square flats

Throughout the 1980s, the Gorbals was often referred to as the most dangerous place in the UK, as street gangs and violence were rife. The poor design and low-quality construction of the concrete, 20-storey flats, led to many social and health problems in the area. Many of the blocks developed mould and structural problems; the most infamous of the towers - the Queen Elizabeth Square flats - was demolished in 1993 to make way for a new housing development. In 2004, Glasgow Housing Association announced plans to demolish more of the decaying high-rise blocks, and to comprehensively refurbish and re-clad others.

Growing up in the Gorbals was difficult for many children. In the 1940s and 50s sleeping in the same bed as brothers and sisters and having no money for basics like food and clothing was common. Many families shared one outdoor toilet, and candles were often used for light when electricity couldn't be afforded.

Having shed a light on the tough aspects of living in the Gorbals, there are many who share fond memories of the community spirit that existed there, particularly in the 1940s-1970s. Ex and current community members share their thoughts and anecdotes here:

<http://www.gorbalslive.org.uk/>

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For the character of Johnny Byrne, the harsh environment of the Gorbals nurtures the dark side of his character. Feeling that stealing is his only option to obtain the things he needs and wants, he turns to crime at a young age. Later, he feels he cannot attain respect from gaining qualifications, getting a good job, and earning money through legitimate work, because of where he's come from. Instead, he measures his worth by the 'respect' he achieves through the amount of fear he can invoke in others.

Activity 2 The Present

At the beginning of *The Hard Man*, (p. 15) Johnny's Mother speaks to the audience about her son and their family money woes. She confesses that they "**[...] wur lucky if we hud enough tae keep us in food from day to day.**" She tells us "**[Johnny...] used tae come home wae presents fur me – things fur the hoose an' sometimes even a bit of money - and he'd pretend he'd worked for thaim.**" She confesses that she knew how he'd come about the items, but accepted them anyway.

In pairs, act out a scene where Johnny brings his Mother a gift. Both know it's stolen. Consider: Is Johnny a good liar, does he feel guilty at all? Does his Mother hint that she knows? Do they think that if they both believe he's bought it, it will be true?

You should have a small amount of time to plan the scene, deciding on important details (location, time, what the item is etc.) and rehearsing the blocking/direction. The scene should last about two to three minutes and you should share it with the class.

The world of the play: The Prison System

At the end of Act I, we hear how Byrne spent 2 years in the 'Bar-L'. He says it was like "[...] *going to University*" (p.44) and speaks of the connections he made there. When he gets out, Bandit says "*Mr Byrne is going places*" (p. 46), as he enters the world of organised crime. All of this changes however, when he's sentenced to life imprisonment (15 years) for murder at the end of Act I.

In Act II we see him transported to a world where Boyd is no longer in charge, firstly back to the 'Bar-L'; but this time in solitary confinement. After assaulting a senior prison officer (because he refused to let him interview his own witnesses for his appeal) he had another 18 month added to his sentence and was sent into solitary confinement to Peterhead (*Peterheid*) Prison in Aberdeenshire, where he was tortured by the prison guards. When he struck back at them and 'misbehaved' he had another 4 years added to his sentence, and this is when he is sent to Porterfield to 'the cages'.



Barlinnie Prison, known as the 'Bar - L' to locals, is located in the north east of Glasgow. It received its first three prisoners in August 1882 and now holds over one thousand prisoners, making it the most over-crowded jail in Scotland.

The in-cell bucket-as-a-toilet routine known as 'slopping out' was still in practice in Barlinnie as late as 2003 as the facilities did not have adequate plumbing to allow for in-cell toilets.

Internal corridor of Barlinnie

A total of 10 judicial executions by hanging took place at Barlinnie between 1946 and 1960, before the final abolition of Capital punishment in the United Kingdom for murder in 1969. Boyle was at one stage very close to being added to this number. All of the men hung had been convicted of murder.



Peterhead Prison

Peterhead Prison in Aberdeenshire was opened in 1880 and today can house approx. 300 prisoners. It is a national resource for convicted, long term sex offenders offering a range of programmes designed to challenge offending behaviour in order to reduce the risk of re-offending on return to the community.



Porterfield Prison

Porterfield Prison in Inverness was built in 1902 and was home to the infamous 'cages' depicted in *The Hard Man*. (See page 23 for more information.)

The Play Text

Theatrical styles

The Hard Man gives us an eclectic mix of theatrical styles. We get realism in the dialogue (due to the fact that much of it is based on real conversations from Boyle) and also in the violence depicted. In contrast we see a panto-esque, direct-to-audience element when the characters breakdown the 3rd wall. This convention affords us insight into different character's stories; but what and who can we believe? The play also has elements of slapstick, often allowing us to laugh, even in dark moments. The two gossiping women: Lizzie and Maggie open the play. They shine a light on what the community is thinking and feeling from fearing the debt collection man to condemning local 'baddies'. The women are of course stereotypes of Gorbals women and are used as a clever tool: They are in effect the play's Greek chorus. They remind us how tales can become embellished, facts distorted and rumours spread.

The interplay between theatrical styles in *The Hard Man* ensures the audience is unsettled throughout, and works to remind us that we're in a theatre watching a play. McGrath does this to ask us to think about the bigger picture – outside of this story – out there, in our lives. Johnny Byrne is not a unique case, and the Scottish Prison system is real. *The Hard Man* manages to be stylish, funny and shocking all at once. It is not a straightforward play; offering more questions than answers.

Discussion Points 4

- Is Johnny Byrne a 'bad person' or is he a product of his environment? This is the age old 'Nature v's Nurture' question. Do people behave in certain ways because it's in their genetic make-up, or because of their environment and upbringing?
- The question that is asked when the play is over is 'It is possible to change yourself?' When you consider the things that Boyle has achieved during his prison sentence and since 1980 as a free man, one would be inclined to say 'yes'. However, there are those who believe that when humans commit horrendous acts - like murder - they can never truly 'change'. What do you think?

Growing Up

As the play takes us from Byrne's school life to his adult life there are text motifs that are carried through, like this one (p. 11):

"Rats

Chasin' rats.

Chasin' rats roon the backs.

Chasin' rats roon the backs wae a wee dug...

Chasin' rats roon the backs wae a wee dug that wus rerr ut brekkin their necks.

It even goat a mention in the papers that wee dug, because it kilt that many rats."

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The first time we hear it, it sounds like an innocent school boy chant – a fascination with a clever wee dog that was helping with a rat problem! However, later in the play, when this motif is repeated (p.43) it is when Byrne has been arrested and you start to wonder if maybe he's the dog: Considering himself to be doing good and achieving 'stardom' for his work. This convention helps the audience visualise Byrne through the transformation of an 'innocent' school boy to a dangerous criminal and leaves us wondering 'how did it all go so wrong'?

Also part of this 'growing up theme' is the fact that the same actors who play Slugger and Bandit, play Renfrew and Johnstone, the two prison wardens who abuse him alongside Paisley. This could be discarded as a cost cutting exercise; having to pay fewer actors. However, there could be something more meaningful in the double casting. Perhaps those who Byrne considered friends were not really friends, perhaps the people he associated with 'good times' in his youth came to symbolise all that went wrong for him in adulthood. You decide.

Language

In terms of Language, *The Hard Man* is written in a distinctive Glaswegian brogue. It has been said to be a 'very Glasgow play'. The vocabulary used helps to paint a picture of the community in which Byrne grew up. If you aren't used to reading Scots it can take a bit of getting used to. As with any script, it's always better to read it aloud. This was you can hear the words and the rhythms and make sense of them off the page.

Activity 3: Translation

In small groups, pick a scene from the script and double cast each character, eg: 'Byrne A' & 'Byrne B'. 'Byrne A' is the Byrne that speaks the lines from the script. 'Byrne B' is the Byrne that 'translates' the lines into 'plain English' eg: the English that you would use when writing an essay!

Play the scene so that each line of dialogue is said twice (once as written, and once as a 'translation'). You should have some time to rehearse your scene (add in a bit of blocking – try to be imaginative!); then share it with the class. It will probably be pretty funny!

Once you're done, discuss:

- Did you feel that you understood the text more when you read it aloud?
- Did you come across any dialogue/ words that you found it hard to 'translate'? What were they?
- What effect did it have having two people play the same character?
- The two actors playing the same part were essentially saying the same thing, but in different words. How did the words they used affect how the character was acted?

Staging & Direction

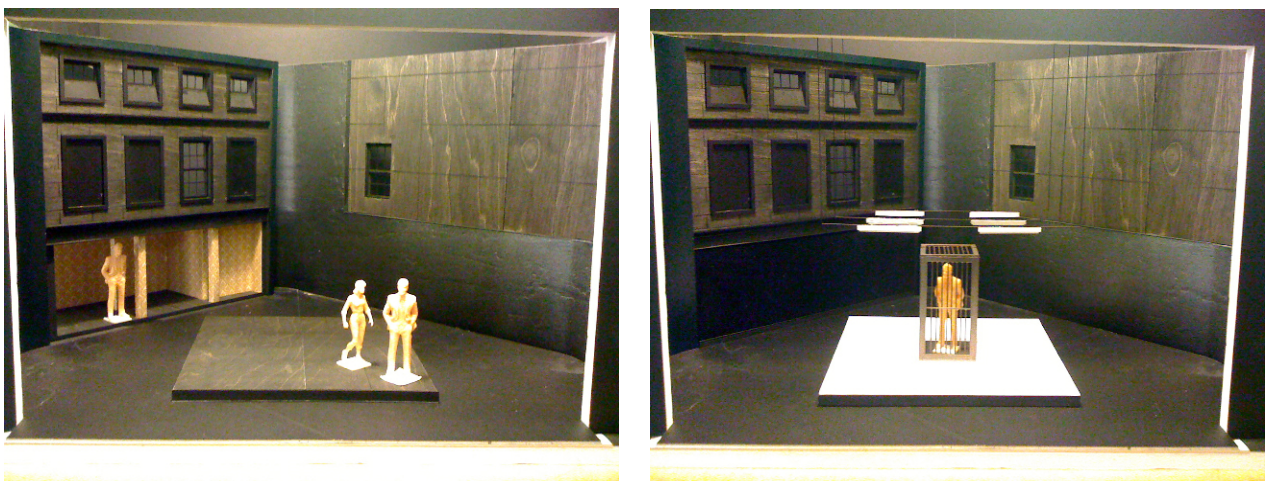
Stage layout & Design Theories

The original production of *The Hard Man* was performed in a small studio space in the 'traverse' staging style; where the audience are on two sides of the stage, facing each other. The audience were close to the action, intensifying their 'live' experience during the scenes of violence and giving the actors no place to hide! The set used corrugated iron to represent locations in and around the Clyde.

Our production of *The Hard Man* will be staged in theatres with proscenium arches and end-on stages. This calls for a different style of design and direction...

The play has approximately 85 small scenes across two acts which are fluid and keep pace. The idea behind our design is that in Act I the stage space feels open and dream like, the air is full of excitement and possibilities for what the young boy's futures could hold. There will be dark places where characters could be 'hidden'. In Act II this atmosphere changes and we are taken to a place lit by harsh florescent lights, with no places to hide. In essence the play will go from darkness, to unwelcome light.

Max Jones is the designer for our production of *The Hard Man*. Below are a couple of photos of his set model. It has been made to scale.



Activity 4: Staging Design

Considering what you know about *The Hard Man* already, make a rough design sketch for the type of staging and design you would opt for if you were directing the play. It may be wise to concentrate on the set up for just one scene that you're familiar with. You could use A3 paper to give yourself space for explanations and it would be good if you could represent the staging in a 3D drawing. The sketch does not have to be to scale, but should be labelled appropriately. e.g. state where the audience will sit and what each item of set on the playing area is. Consider the time period and the world/ genre of the play to influence your ideas.

The Hard Man Education Resource Pack

You should also make a note of any colours and materials you'd like to use. These could be used to express your ideas about the feel of the location i.e. dark colours & rough materials may reflect the characters personalities that inhabit the space. Also, don't forget to think about using different levels in your staging!

Music

The Hard Man has music scripted throughout. Our production will use one live musician – a drummer – alongside pre-recorded sound.

There are 2 or 3 music moments in the script where a recorded song is requested. One such time is (P.35) when Byrne slashes Danny – Nat King Cole's 'Too Young' is to be played. The reason for underscoring this violent scene with this music is to highlight that Byrne and his friends are really too young to understand what it is that they're doing, and how they are mapping out their futures at just 15 years old. As an audience member, you are also given the juxtaposition of seeing something that is difficult and ugly to watch, while listening to something that is beautiful.

The rhythm underscore throughout the play helps to drive the action and mirrors the fragmented storytelling in the piece. It is used to highlight moments of intense drama and to create atmosphere. Sometimes the percussion is ordered and sometimes it sounds very freeform – shadowing the erratic nature of Byrne's behaviour.

In Rehearsal & Directorial Style

Phillip Breen tells us how he's approaching the direction of the play...

"The more I direct, the more I think of myself as a conductor. I get to co-ordinate the specialised talents of others. I work very much from the text and from the rhythms that it produces. McGrath was a musician and a poet at this comes across in the rhythm of 'The Hard Man'. As a director, you must serve the writing, be true to the sentences; play the music score as it's written. Often in rehearsals I'll just listen to the spoken rhythms, I don't need to watch to know if it's good – I'll hear it. I think if the rhythm is right then the acting will be too.

Our rehearsals for 'The Hard Man' will be very ensemble driven – it's about building a team. The blocking and direction will involve everyone there, as the whole company will be on stage most of the time, creating the environment. We will not be working on abstract external notions of the characters. We'll be asking 'What does the language make you feel?', 'Why does your character need to say those things?', 'What do they want?' It's all there in the writing; we don't need to make it up! Every choice we make as an artistic team comes from the text – everything must have reason. My job is to 'make the play more like its self'!

Phillip Breen, director of the 2011 production of *The Hard Man*.

Themes of Violence

Today, interpersonal violence is the third leading cause of death and a leading cause of disability among people aged 10–29 years in the European Region. Interpersonal violence disproportionately affects young people from deprived sections of society, and males, who account for 4 out of every 5 homicide deaths.

It seems that violence towards one another is a curse of society. No matter how 'civilised', 'modern', and 'advanced' we become, we cannot shake the animal instinct to fight. Our society is saturated by violence. We watch it as a sport – boxing – and we see it reported on the news constantly, in the form of both war and 'personal' stories. It seems that as we see violence everywhere, we begin to become immune to it, and accepting of it.

The Hard Man shows what happens when violence begets violence begets violence: It leads to a human being becoming a caged animal. In this way the play (as art) can open our eyes to what's around us as it highlights the extremes that violence can take us to.

The Prison Warders

It has been said that there are two representations of 'hard men' in *The Hard Man*: Firstly, the brutal bully of a prison warder (Paisley) and secondly, the defiant prisoner; imprisoned for terrorising the community in which he lived (Byrne).

On page 74 Paisley speaks directly to the audience and tells us **“we’re the garbage disposal squad for the social sewage system”**. Later (p. 82) he tells us **“if you can excuse him [Byrne] on the grounds that he’s a product of this shit heap system, then you’d better excuse me on the same grounds.”** Again, we are asked the question; is Paisley inherently a 'bad person', or has he become so through the environment that he works in? 'Sentenced' to take care of the thugs society needs out the way. It can be said that both Byrne and Paisley had choices, they could decide whether to become violent.,, but maybe they enjoyed it too much, it was a drug to them.

Discussion Points 5

- Byrne says (p.21) **“Violence is its own reason. Violence is an art form practiced in and for its self.”** How does this make you feel? Can you relate to it at all? Do you think that violence can ever be an 'art form'? Where does it come from?
- How do you feel about the character of Paisley? Can you make sense of his statements, justifying his behaviour? In terms of empathy, can you compare your feelings about Byrne and Paisley?

The Hard Man Education Resource Pack

Knife Crime

In *The Hard Man*, the weapon of choice is a knife. In Scotland today, we still have a huge problem with knife crime. In 2009/10 there were 3,839 crimes of ‘possessing an offensive weapon’. Though this does represent a 22 per cent decrease on the previous year. The decrease could be attributed to nationwide initiatives; like the Scottish Government Community Safety Team’s current ‘*No Knives, Better Lives*’ campaign. The initiative aims to teach young people about the facts of knife crime, without preaching, so they can be informed enough to make their own choices. You can get all of the info. (including short videos) here: <http://www.noknivesbetterlives.com/>

Did you know?

- One in three people convicted of a knife crime go to jail
- For injuring someone with a knife or murder can result in life imprisonment
- For carrying a knife or threatening someone can result in 4 years in jail

Gang Crime - ‘We’re aw in it thegither’...

In June 2009, The Scottish Crime and Drug Enforcement Agency (SCDEA) announced that there were 4000 criminals, belonging to 367 gangs operating in Scotland. The gangs were engaged in a range of illegal activities such as drug dealing, murder, money laundering and human trafficking. Many were classified as white Scots men in their late 20s, but the total also included foreign nationals, mainly from Eastern Europe and the Far East. This may sound like the plot of a Hollywood movie, but it’s real life; a very current issue.

In *The Hard Man*, Johnny convinces Bandit and Slugger that they’re “***aw in it thegither***” (p.10), it’s their mantra. By acting as a team – a gang – they think that they are invincible. They’ve got each other’s backs. Ultimately, we know this doesn’t work as each individual must be held accountable for their own actions.

Activity 5

Take a Stand

In groups of 3, begin to act out the scene on page 8. However, on Byrne's line "**Huv you goat me?**" either Bandit or slugger should take a stand. It's clear that they're both uncomfortable with what's happened at the party, so one of them will find the courage to say something about it. No "**We're aw in it thegither**" this time!

Explore, through dialogue, the outcome of one of the characters taking a stand against Byrne. The improvised section should last approx 2 mins, Your scene may end on a cliff-hanger, if you feel that closure cannot be achieved on the issue so quickly.

Once your scenes are made & shared with the class, discuss:

- Was it easy for Bandit/ Slugger to take a stand?
- How did the 'middle person' react? i.e. the person in between Byrne and the person 'taking a stand'.
- How would the play have been different if Byrne didn't have his gang to support him?
- What do gang leaders depend on?
- What do people gain from being a gang member?

The Porterfield Prison 'cages' at Inverness/ The play's ending



Porterfield Prison in Inverness was home to the 'cages'. Five (four by four-foot) cells, with a ceiling height of seven foot, and a concrete floor and surrounded by bars. The cages have been deemed 'more appropriate to the containment of wild animals than to any civilised penal system'.



The cages - cells within cells, as the actual metal cage sat within a concrete cell - operated between 1966 and 1972 when they were closed following one of the most violent disturbances in a Scottish prison (which Boyle played a part in). During this riot, five prison officers were wounded. Four prisoners were injured: murderers Howard Wilson, Larry Winters, and Jimmy Boyle, and armed robber William Macpherson. The cages reopened in 1978, prisoners are said to have been kept in them as late as 1991, and they were only just dismantled in 1994 to make room for 12 'secure' units.

The Hard Man ends with the Johnny Byrne character in one of these 'cages'. Where Jimmy Boyle was in fact to spend the next 6 and a half years of his life...

Pictured: Peter Kelly as Johnny Byrne in the original production, 1977.

"The closing moments of the play are dramatised from a letter Jimmy Boyle sent me describing the moment to moment reality of his existence in the cage at Porterfield. They portray a situation of total impasse, the violence of authority, a situation of total despair."

Tom McGrath

Excerpt from 'Time Out' interview, November 1977

"The idea of ending the play there, without suggesting that there is any thread of hope, is to highlight the pointless violence of the prisoners and the pointless violence of the authorities at the same time. The play offers no hope at all, and the idea is that from this low point the audience will appreciate anything positive that follows – like the Barlinnie Special Unit, where Boyle went after Porterfield."

Tom McGrath

Excerpt from 'New Society' interview, December 1977

Activity 6

The Cage

With masking tape, mark out a four-foot, by four-foot square on the ground. Members of the class should surround the square (backs facing inward, leaving tiny gaps between each person and remaining as still as possible) and give each person 2 minutes or so inside the square. Try to lie down (there was no bed) or get comfortable and imagine spending years confined in such a space, with no glimpse of the outside world. Try not to talk during this exercise, unless you are the person inside the square and you want to have a vocal reaction to your environment.

Once everyone in the class has had a turn, discuss:

- What were your impulse feelings while you were in the square?
- Was there an object or person that came into your mind?
- What coping mechanisms do you think you would have had to develop to survive?
- What psychological issues may have arisen as a result of living in a 'cage'?
- What physical issues may have arisen as a result of living in a 'cage'?
- Are there any crimes that you think justify keeping people in such confinement for years and years?

Activity 7

What comes next?

Boyle's life to date has been dramatic. *The Hard Man* addresses the first section of Boyle's life – pre-prison, then into prison, and ends at the lowest point of his life. Boyle then:

- spent time in the Special Unit, learning new 'life-skills', then:
- put those skills to use in Edinburgh, then:
- later moved abroad, continuing his life as a writer & sculptor and distancing himself from his past.

Pick a 'section' of Boyle's life and improvise a short scene in which he appears. The scene should give an idea of how his life changed and can include any new characters (i.e. those not in *The Hard Man*) or may include some of the characters from his early life. Try to do this in groups of 3 or 4.

Further Resources

The Hard Man, Tom McGrath & Jimmy Boyle, Capercaille Press, 2011

Available from Emma Robertson at the King's Theatre, Edinburgh

emma.robertson@eft.co.uk

A Sense of Freedom, Jimmy Boyle.

Available on www.amazon.co.uk

The show's 2011 tour website:

www.thehardman.co.uk

National Library of Scotland:

<http://digital.nls.uk/scottish-theatre/>

(Major Scottish Plays of the last 40 years, including *The Hard Man*)

Scottish Prison Service:

<http://www.sps.gov.uk>

Scottish Government:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/>

(For statistics and policies)

No Knives, Better Lives:

<http://www.noknivesbetterlives.com/>

(Including Youth Workers Resource Pack, and soon one for Teachers, linked to the CfE)

Gorbals Community Site:

<http://www.gorbalslive.org.uk>