

## PUNCHING JUDY

### CHARACTERS

JUDE, a 17 year old girl

AMY, her friend, another 17 year old girl

PETE, a 17 year old boy, Jude's boyfriend

[The puppets: Punch, Judy and the Policeman undertaken or worked by the cast.]

The play explores the issue of one teenage pregnancy and its tragic result. Jude gives up ideas of college to see her pregnancy through and her boyfriend, Pete, who dreamed of being a professional footballer, also gives up his hopes and takes a job in a factory to support Jude and his baby. Poverty, a crying baby, and the frustrations of a life that they are not really ready for wears the relationship down and shows itself in increasing violence from Pete, until he shakes the baby to death in one tragic incident.

Jude's friend, Amy, acts as a contrast to Jude, showing what Jude could have done with her life and as an appalled bystander to the tragedy.

The play is designed to be accompanied by projected images - movies would be best but still images could also be effective - which show scenes from Pete and Jude's past. The 'Punch and Judy' sequences work as recordings too or can be performed live. The cast could work the puppets, or 'be' the puppets themselves - see Production Notes for suggestions.

The play is a thought-provoking GCSE piece, lasting about 25 minutes. If the Punch and Judy sequences were also undertaken by the cast, then the piece could also be useful at a higher level.

EXTRACT 1:

### PROLOGUE

*The play begins with a short extract from a Punch and Judy puppet show. This can be prepared by the students and they should try to replicate the voices and mannerisms of the puppet characters. Alternatively, it is possible to perform this extract using a puppet booth on the stage, or it can be filmed and projected onto the back screen.*

*Enter the Judy puppet, carrying the baby.*

**JUDY** There. there. Don't cry. Rock-a-bye-baby on a tree top. Sshh! Shhh! [***But the more she tries to comfort it, the more it cries.***] Stop crying. Nice baby. Pretty baby.

There. There.

*Enter Punch.*

**PUNCH** Judy! Make that baby stop crying! Make it shut up! Stop this noise at once, I'm trying to work! I'm trying to rest! I'm trying to think!

**JUDY ignoring him** Pretty baby. Rock-a-bye-baby...

**PUNCH** Can you hear me?!

**JUDY** Come on, Mama's little baby. Don't cry. Sleep now, little lamb...

**PUNCH** Stop that thing from crying!

**JUDY** Stop it yourself!

*She dumps the baby into Punch's arms and storms off as the baby cries even louder.*

**PUNCH with barely concealed aggression** There... there... Sleepy weepy liddle baby waby... Be a good baby... Be a quiet baby for daddy...lckle babies should be seen and not heard... It's no good!! [**He drops the baby on the floor and covers his ears.**] Stop crying! Stop crying! [**He goes out and comes back in again carrying a stick, which he uses to batter the baby, which stops crying.**] That did it. That told him. That's the way to do it. Ahhh... a little bit of peace...

**Enter Judy.**

**JUDY** Why is it so quiet? Where's my baby? Where's... [**She sees the baby and screams.**] My baby! What have you done? [**Punch picks up the stick again.**] You've killed my baby!

**PUNCH** Be quiet, woman! Be quiet! [**She continues to scream.**] Take that! And take that! And that! [**The screaming and sobbing subsides.**] Peace at last!

**The Puppet show ends.**

## SCENE 1

*In this scene we see all three characters on stage. In the centre stands Amy having a conversation on a mobile phone. To the right, and upstage, Pete is sitting watching a football match. Although it is silent, it is obvious how his team is doing. He has a can of lager and holds the remote control, occasionally adjusting the sound to speak to an imaginary companion. If flickering lighting can be provided in this area to depict the TV set, that would be effective. To the left, close to the audience, Jude is sitting holding a glass tube and watching it as if she is mesmerised. Sometime during the telephone conversation, she sees what she is waiting for: her hands fall into her lap and she sits back in the chair, registering a*

*mixture of weariness and despair. Also, towards the end of the conversation, Pete is seen to celebrate a win.*

**AMY on the mobile phone** ... but you'll finish your exams won't you? ... Oh... it's only two months, I thought ... Oh, right ... I'm sorry, Jude, I'm just ... I know, but what about college? ... I suppose you could. People do do that.... Oh Jude, are you all right? ... I knew something was going on, but I never thought ... Well, we planned to go to college... Yeah ... You *are* lucky. [**Though she doesn't appear to be fully convinced of this.**] Yeah, you really are. Everybody in our year fancied football hero Pete - it's just that ... he's pleased? That's great ... yeah, anyway ... I'll see you at the weekend. Bye Jude... Bye. [**She looks thoughtful for a moment and then dials another number.**] Gemma, it's Amy. I've just heard something. It's Jude... yeah ... She's pregnant... I know ... I couldn't either... Of course it's Pete. Apparently he's really excited... they both are ... apparently...

**Amy looks doubtful as the lights fade.**

EXTRACT 2:

**The baby is propped up on cushions in the armchair and Pete is addressing him, giving him a demonstration on the technicalities of football. There is no sign of Jude.**

**PETE dribbling a soft ball around the chair** ... and you just touch it - lightly - with the left side of your boot ... like this ... Then you flick it onto the toe and ... [**He rolls the ball between the two armchairs.**] You score! Yes! And Pete Bridges scores the winning goal! [**He raises his arms to an imaginary crowd and punches the air.**] ... and the crowd is going mad! [**The baby begins to cry and he comes back down to earth.**] |

said *cheering* not crying. [**He picks the baby up and the crying subsides a little.**] I used to want to be a footballer, you know. I was good as well. Mr Clarke, the PE teacher, got me into trials for the National Youth Team. The coach said I had great potential and to try again next year. [**He pauses as we see a projection of himself playing football - preferably scoring the winning goal.**] And then ... well ... [**To the baby.**] You came along, so there was no more football. Just the factory. For ever more, I suppose. Between you and me, chum, for two pins I'd just walk out of there and never come back. [**Pause - the baby whimpers.**] I might have been a mega-star. David Beckham. [**Looks at baby.**] And don't you pull faces at me, because I can pull better faces. [**He does.**] That's Daddy's gorilla face. [**The baby responds happily.**] Perhaps you'll be a footballer one day. You've got the legs. Play for Man. United. Earn a fortune and buy your old mum and dad a nice big house. [**He studies the baby thoughtfully for a long time.**] When Jude ... when she found out she was having you ... she nearly ... Your mother nearly had an abortion. [**Holding the baby's face in front of his own.**] She nearly got rid of you... [**Suddenly holds the baby gently to his chest.**] But she didn't. She couldn't. [**A pause.**] Of course she couldn't.

EXTRACT 3:

**AMY** Oh, Jude, you *are* happy, aren't you? [**There is a pause.**] I can't help noticing ...

**JUDE** What?

**AMY** Your arms. Bruises. And Pete seems ...

**JUDE** We both seem tired, I suppose. That's because we are! Honestly, Amy, it's nothing. We had this row about Matthew - Pete just sort of grabbed hold of me. It was just an accident. It was really nothing.

**AMY** Grabbed hold of you?

**JUDE** Sort of shook me - [*She laughs.*] - to bring me to my senses! But, really, Amy, everything's fine. [*She suddenly hugs her friend.*] Thank you for caring. But it's good - it really is.

## INTERLUDE

*The puppet Punch enters, then begins to run backwards and forwards in an agitated way.*

**PUNCH** Judy! Judy! Get up now, Judy. The baby isn't crying any more. Come on - it's time for bed... I only hit you a little bit, Judy. And I only made the baby stop crying. Come on, Judy. Get up ... wake up ... please ...

## SCENE 5

*Jude, who looks much tidier and prettier than before, is arranging the baby and a large teddy bear on a white shawl on the armchair. Pete is fiddling with a camera. During this scene, each time a photograph is taken it could be flashed up on the screen.*

**JUDE *over her shoulder*** You'll have to hurry. He won't stay here for ever. Anyway, my dad wants his camera back sometime this week!

**PETE** I'm just trying to find the flash. Ah, here it is. Right. [*Takes a snap of the baby.*] He smiled! Look, he's smiling! He must know he's having his picture taken. Come on, Matthew, smile for Daddy. [*He takes another snap.*] Now you go with him, Jude.

Crouch down. That's right. Smile! [**Takes photo.**] Brilliant! Even the teddy bear looks happy!

**They both laugh.**

**JUDE** Of course he is. Teddy bears are always happy. Especially this lucky bear. EXTRACT 4:

***The room is empty but the baby can be heard crying in another room. Pete comes in, obviously from work, and kicks his shoes off. He throws his coat over a chair and goes out again - he returns carrying a can, which he flips open as he flops into the chair. The baby keeps crying as he takes a pull at the drink.***

**PETE shouting** Jude! [**Pause.**] Jude! Where are you? [**No answer.**] Jude! [**He begins to talk to himself over the noise of the crying baby.**] Hello, Peter darling. Had a nice day? Enjoyed your day at the office, darling? I hope you haven't been chatting up that gorgeous blonde secretary again. [**Pause.**] Fat bloody chance. I've had a lousy day at the hell-hole. [**The baby's cries get louder.**] Jude! [**He gets up and goes out. We hear a muffled conversation and he returns. Soon afterwards, Jude enters, looking sleepy and dishevelled and holding the baby.**] I don't know how you managed to sleep through that racket.

**JUDE yawning** I could sleep through an earthquake.

**PETE** You shouldn't go to sleep in the daytime. You never know what Matthew might get up to. You wouldn't know if something happened to him. [**The baby is still crying.**] He might be poorly or something.

**JUDE** He isn't poorly. He's always like this. He cries a lot. Mum says some babies are just like that, but they grow out of it.

**PETE** Well, let's hope he grows out of it soon, then. It'd be nice to come home to some peace and quiet.

**JUDE** I'd like some peace and quiet as well, Pete.

**PETE** Give him here. [*He goes to take the baby.*]

**JUDE** *handing Matthew over* Be careful.

**PETE** Of course I'll be careful. [*A pause.*] You won't forget it, will you? You won't let it lie. That 'accident' you like telling everyone about.

**JUDE** Pete ... don't.

**PETE** Makes you look a right little goody two-shoes, doesn't it? Poor Pete got a bit fed up so he pulled the poor little baby's arm right out of its socket.

**JUDE** I never said that!

**PETE** *mimicking* It was just an accident. An accident. [*He shouts.*] Because the clumsy git doesn't know how to hold his own baby.

**JUDE** Don't shout! Of course you know how to ... Look, you've made him cry even more. Give him back to me. I'll try to quieten him down.

**PETE** I'll do it. [*Holds the baby in front of him.*] Grr! Grr! [*The crying subsides a little.*] Daddy's mad dog face. [*Jude smiles as he pulls another face.*] Daddy's gorilla face. [*He holds the baby closer and the crying gets louder.*]

**JUDE** Pete ...

**PETE** *holding the baby up again* Daddy's 'fed-up-with-the-fucking-factory face. [*He shakes the baby, causing it to renew its crying.*] Daddy's 'fed-up-with-everything face. [*The crying is ferocious now. Jude stands up alarmed.*] Oh, for God's sake!



## **PRODUCTION NOTES + TECHNICAL CUES, ETC.**

### **INTRODUCTION: THEMES, THE PLAY'S INTENTIONS**

The play is almost a morality play in that it serves as a warning against saddling oneself with an infant too young. From the first, the warning note is sounded through the use of the puppet Punch and Judy, where Punch kills the baby and then Judy. The Punch and Judy tale is familiar to many children, but in context of Jude and Pete's situation, the old story takes on somewhat grimmer resonances.

Jude and Pete's attitude that everything will be all right; they can cope with their child and that it does not matter that they do not finish their education is contrasted with Amy's concerns. Her role underlines what particularly Jude is missing - college, easy friendship, liberty, time to explore being young and learning about the hardships of the world at a normal pace. With Jude and Pete, their learning curve - responsibility and parenthood - is accelerated abnormally and it is this that brings about the disaster.

The writer shows both teenagers in a sympathetic light. There are no real baddies here, just young people pushed to an extreme. Though we lose sympathy with Pete at the end and there are no excuses for what happened, it is still clear that Pete is a basically decent young man who crumbled under the weight of responsibilities taken on too early and without enough thought.

### **CHARACTERS**

**JUDE**, a 17 year old girl. Jude was obviously a fun-loving 'normal' teenager, bright and looking forward to going on to further education. This aspect of her - the fun-loving side - is shown through the photographs flashed up on the screen and in the one scene where Pete, Judy and the baby are seen as a loving family, the camera scene where they end up in a laughing heap on the floor. Most of the play we see Jude shouldering the responsibility of the baby with tired determination. She has let herself go rather; her tiredness and the baby have taken priority over her appearance. But it is clear that, whatever the difficulties, Matthew will be looked after to the best of Jude's ability.

We know from the photographic flashbacks that Pete and Jude truly loved each other. This love is what is making Jude defensive now. She knows that Pete is cracking up, even becoming dangerous in his violent moods, but she is in denial and protects Pete right until the moment it is too late.

**PETE**, a 17 year old boy, Jude's boyfriend. Care must be taken to balance the character of Pete so that we don't condemn him for his actions without seeing too the fun-loving, caring young man he really is. He is much younger in attitude than Jude - something that tends to happen in these situations. The act of giving birth to a baby seems to bring out the grown-up in girls, but Pete is still a resentful kid. He feels big, taking on responsibility for earning money for his family, but work and the daily grind gets him down. He does not see that looking after a crying baby is just as debilitating for Jude as a factory job is for Pete. Unlike Jude, who breathes deep and shoulders the responsibility, because now the baby is born it has to be done, Pete harbours growing resentment against the baby for spoiling love's young dream and his life.

Because Pete suppresses these thoughts, keeping up the veneer of being a family man, the violence growing inside him is the more dangerous. Flashes of it come out at both Jude and at the innocent Matthew and we should be aware of this edge in him throughout. This can be conveyed in a sort of body tension and a suppressed violence that spills out into his action, so that even sitting becomes larger than necessary - throwing himself down in a chair, for instance - and walking, standing, etc., convey this inner tension. His voice can be too loud, or too sarcastic - even his cheeriness and his laughter can be too much.

AMY, Jude's friend, another 17 year old girl. Amy's role is to show what Jude should be. She is a normal, cheery bright teenager, looking forward to getting her A levels behind her and moving on to the next stage of education. She is also there to expose how much Jude is concealing about the truth of her situation - from the doubt she shows at the rightness of Jude's decision to have the baby to her concern for Jude which gives her the perspicacity to see the bruises on Jude's arms and to guess at the violence which her friend is hiding.

Amy too does a fair bit of growing up. Her love for Jude gives her a strength and sensitivity which adds more depth to the character.

## **SETTING**

This ought to be kept simple, since the set has to show Jude and Pete's flat, but also be used for the puppet scenes, for the funeral at the end and Amy's 'elsewhere.' Since the convention of projected images is used often in the piece, this could become an integral part of the set.

I would have a back-cloth of a large white screen, which can also be used for characters to exit and enter from behind. In front of the screen could be the puppet shelf, if you are using actual hand puppets. These can then be lit to create larger shadows on the screen. Even if you are not using puppets, but the actors dressed as the puppets, their puppet scenes could take place in front of the screen and be thrown up into large shadows for extra ominous effect.

The apartment furniture needs to frame this screen, not mask it in any way...