

**BRISTOL
OLD VIC**

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**MICHAEL
AHOMKA-LINDSAY**

REVERBERATION

**BY MATTHEW LÓPEZ
DIRECTED BY JACK SAIN**

KS5 EDUCATION PACK

PILOT

Reverberation revolves around Jonathan, an isolated, gay 30-something living in London. He spends his days and his nights in his flat, passing the time with drinking and anonymous sexual encounters. One day, the gregarious and chaotic Claire moves into the flat above Jonathan's and, after a rocky start, begins to insinuate herself into his life. Slowly, the two begin to find a kinship in one another.

Each of them still carries with them the aftershocks of violent trauma – against them and against people they love. Claire, who has been constantly on the move, ever since a violent attack by a male neighbour in a previous apartment building, and Jonathan, closing himself off to everyone around him – including his family – after witnessing the brutal, unprovoked attack that killed his boyfriend Gabe; both of them shielding themselves from the possibility of future harm.

Despite this, their friendship grows, and they begin to depend on each other for comfort and reassurance, even making plans to spend Christmas together in Vermont – the place Jonathan had hoped to move to with his boyfriend. But, at the apex of the play, the two of them face their greatest challenge, as they are forced to confront the thing they fear the most. For Claire, this is a chance at a real connection with Marcus, a man she's been distantly mooning over, and for Jonathan, it's the return of Wes, a hookup from the beginning of the play, who stops by with a book Jonathan lent him and an offer to be something more than just a one-night stand – an offer that would mean he has to move on from Gabe.

When it comes down to it, the echoes of the past are simply too loud for Claire and Jonathan to ignore. Instead of taking their holiday to Vermont, Claire flees once again, and Jonathan, having pushed Wes away, is left in his apartment building, alone.

This is the European premiere of *Reverberation*, which was first performed in Connecticut, USA in 2015, and was set in Astoria, New York. It has been reshaped by López, transposing the action across the Atlantic to London.

ABOUT THE WRITER

Matthew López (he/him)

Matthew López is an American playwright and screenwriter. His 2018 play *The Inheritance*, directed by Stephen Daldry, is the most honored American play in a generation, sweeping the ‘Best Play’ awards in both London and New York, including the Tony Award, Olivier Award, Drama Desk Award, Evening Standard Award, London Critics Circle Award, Outer Critics Circle Honors, Drama League Award, and GLAAD Media Award. He is the first Latine writer to win the Tony Award for Best Play.

In 2023, López’s directorial debut feature film *Red, White & Royal Blue* (adapted by López from Casey McQuiston’s bestselling novel) was released by Amazon Studios and has been nominated for a Primetime Emmy Award.



Matthew López (Writer) and Jack Sain (Director) | Photo by Geraint Lewis

WHAT IS AN INTIMACY COORDINATOR?

Reverberation contains many moments of physical and sexual intimacy. To support the storytelling of these moments and ensure the safety and comfort of everyone involved, the creative team features an Intimacy Coordinator: Robbie Taylor Hunt.

An intimacy director or coordinator is a choreographer, an advocate for actors, and a liaison between actors and production for scenes that involve nudity / hyper-exposed work, simulated sex acts, and/or intimate physical contact. In the context of theatre and film, intimacy is often defined as “nudity or hyper-exposed work, simulated sex acts, and intimate physical contact.”

What feels “regular” or non-intimate to one person may feel deeply intimate to another depending on both their personal, generational, and cultural histories. An important part of intimacy work is to acknowledge this and to support each individual to find their own way to define, for themselves, what is intimate and when they might want support or advocacy.

As well as liaising with other departments on a film or production, and choreographing the movement so it looks good and fulfils the director’s vision, they are responsible for ensuring that performers maintain agency over their bodies and have access to tools to advocate for their boundaries and needs. Additionally, they ensure that the performers involved in a scene of intimacy consent to the actions choreographed and stories being told.

Source: <https://www.idcprofessionals.com/blog/what-is-an-intimacy-director-or-coordinator>

THEMES

Themes

- Transience
- Isolation
- Loneliness
- Home
- Objects and materiality
- Physical touch and contact
- Reverberation
- Music
- Memory

ACTIVITIES

Movement: Think about the themes above. How might you use them to create a piece of movement?

- In small groups, choose a few and try assigning a gesture to each word and then running them together in sequence. Play with tempo (how fast it is), repetition, proximity (how close you are to each other), and scale (how big/small the movements are).
- Think specifically about ‘reverberation’, how might you create patterns of return or cyclical within the movement you make. Do the movements shift and change when you circle back to them? Do you all stay in sync?

Design: In the play, Claire and Jonathan’s wellbeing is reflected in the appearance of their apartments: the clutter of Jonathan’s space at the beginning versus its more sparse decoration after the interval; Claire’s camping chairs and airbed, and the appearance of one of Gabe’s paintings in the space.

- Create a character, or choose one from a book, film or play. Think about their past. What do they care about? How are they feeling? Using drawing, collage, or another medium that suits you (including writing!), design an apartment that reflects what you know about the character. Is it tidy or a mess? Do they have a lot of decorations or is it a more minimalist space? Are there any family photos? Pot plants?

ACTIVITIES

Writing: At the end of the play, the echoes of Jonathan and Claire’s trauma are too loud for them to move on. What might it look like for them to try and break this pattern?

· On your own or in groups, write a diary entry for Claire or Jonathan where they reflect on how they’re feeling. Think about their thought processes throughout the film, memories they share, and the ways they begin to heal themselves through connection with each other. Who else might they reach out to? What might they do to get help and support?

Theme: Think in particular about the theme of isolation. López’s script is prefaced by a quote: *“It’s a lonely city. I’m lonely. Aren’t you lonely, too? Maybe we can comfort each other for a night.”* It is from James Baldwin’s *Another Country*, which is the book Jonathan gives Wes in the play, and the city it mentions is New York, with a population of nearly 20 million today. London, too, can be a crushingly lonely place, despite its population of 9 million.

· **Freewriting:**

· In a group of around four people, spend 1 minute writing down words on scraps of paper. Decide in advance what types of words; for example, you could choose for each person to write: 3 x objects (such as a scarf, a road sign, a mirror), 3 x places (a mountaintop, a park bench, a crossroads), 3 x types of weather (fog, thunderstorm, heatwave). Write one word on each small scrap of paper, and when you’re done, put them all in a hat.

· Sit somewhere you feel comfortable and able to write. Set a new timer for 5 minutes. Pick a word from the hat, and beginning with the phrase *“Loneliness is [the word you picked]...”* write until you reach the end of the sentence. Then, pick a new word, and repeat. Do this four times.

· Then, begin a new page/paragraph. This time, when you pick words, begin your sentences with *“Community is [the word you picked]...”*. Repeat the exercise until you have done four more like this.

· In doing this you might end up with some examples like *“Loneliness is a scarf, threadbare and worn, with holes in that you don’t know how to fix yourself. Loneliness is a crossroads with so many different options to take but no-one to ask for help. Community is a mirror, reflecting the good parts of yourself back at you. Community is a thunderstorm, hot and loud and full of energy.”*

· You may want to spend some time editing and refining what you’ve written, or sharing it with others in your group. You could also swap papers with each other and have a go at developing each others’ ideas. It doesn’t matter if your writing is amazing - it’s about drawing connections between Loneliness and Community, and the thoughts that emerge when we think about them.

· You may want to discuss why people made the choices they did with their writing!

· **** This activity could also be adjusted to be done through drawing - visually depicting each each prompt on a poster assigned to ‘Loneliness’ or ‘Community’ - or improvised speech if it suits the group better. E.g. one person takes a word and says their sentence, the next person takes a word and says theirs, etc.**

· Additional discussion question: Think about the impact of social media today. Does the company of people through a screen combat loneliness, or is it an illusion? Is this dangerous?

Written and compiled by Elinor Lower

For more information about *Reverberation*, please visit:

bristololdvic.org.uk/whats-on/reverberation

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