

# **Let the Right One In By Jack Thorne**

## **Background 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 *Let the Right One In*. 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.

## 1. About the Production

*Let the Right One In* was first performed at the Royal Court, Jerwood Theatre Downstairs, Sloane Square on Friday 29<sup>th</sup> November.

### Creative Team

|                      |                             |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|
| Jack Thorne          | Adaptation                  |
| John Tiffany         | Director                    |
| Steven Hoggett       | Associate Director          |
| Ólafur Arnalds       | Music                       |
| Christine Jones      | Set and Costume Design      |
| Chahine Yavroyan     | Lighting Design             |
| Gareth Fry           | Sound Design                |
| Aileen Sherry        | Associate Costume Designer  |
| Jeremy Chernick      | Special Fx Design           |
| Justin Martin        | Assistant Director          |
| Vicki Manderson      | Associate Movement Director |
| Tim McQuillen-Wright | Design Associate            |
| Anne Henderson       | Casting Director            |
| Laura Donnelly       | Casting Associate           |

### Cast

|                    |                                |
|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| Rebecca Benson     | Eli                            |
| Graeme Dalling     | Jonny                          |
| Paul Thomas Hickey | Kurt, Jocke, Nils, Dad, Stefan |
| Stephen McCole     | Halmberg, Mr Avila             |
| Angus Miller       | Torkel, Janne, Jimmy           |
| Cristian Ortega    | Micke                          |
| Martin Quinn       | Oskar                          |
| Ewan Stewart       | Hakan                          |
| Susan Vidler       | Oskar's Mum                    |

### Production Team

|                  |                         |
|------------------|-------------------------|
| Chris Hay        | Production Manager      |
| Jessica Richards | Company Stage Manager   |
| Emma Skaer       | Deputy Stage Manager    |
| Greg Sharman     | Assistant Stage Manager |
| Niamh O'Meara    | Props Technician        |
| Martin Woolley   | Stage Supervisor        |
| Fergus Lockie    | Sound Supervisor        |
| Marianne Maxwell | NTS Producer            |

## 2. About The Writer

This is Jack Thorne's first play at The Royal Court.

### Previous work

**Theatre:** STUART: A LIFE BACKWARDS (Hightide Theatre, Sheffield Theatre Festival, Edinburgh Festival & UK tour), LET THE RIGHT ONE IN (National Theatre Scotland/Marla Rubin Productions and Royal Court Theatre), MYDIDAE (Soho Theatre, 2012 and Trafalgar Studios) THE PHYSICISTS (Donmar Warehouse), BUNNY (Edinburgh Fringe, UK and NYC tour, *Winner of a Fringe First, 2010*), RED CAR BLUE CAR (as part of Where's My Seat? Bush Theatre), WHIFF WHAFF (as part of Theatre Uncut at Southwark Playhouse, Soho Theatre, Latitude Festival and the Traverse Theatre), GREENLAND (National Theatre), 2 MAY 1997 (Bush Theatre / Nabokov), BURYING YOUR BROTHER IN THE PAVEMENT (National Theatre New Connections), TWO CIGARETTES (Bush Theatre), STACY (The Arcola Theatre & Trafalgar Studios), FANNY AND FAGGOT (The Finborough Theatre & Trafalgar Studios, 5065 Lift/Pleasance Courtyard, Edinburgh Fringe), WHEN YOU CURE ME (The Bush Theatre 5), STACY (Tron Theatre), PAPERHOUSE (Flight 5065), SOLIDS (Paines Plough/Wild Lunch at the Young Vic).

**Film:** THE SCOUTING BOOK FOR BOYS (Producers: Christian Colson & Ivana Mackinnon; Celador Films/ Film4/ Screen East)

**Short Film:** JONAH (Film4/BFI/Shine Pictures, *Selected for the Short Film Programme at Sundance 2013*), THE SPASTIC KING (IWC/Channel 4 for the COMING UP strand), A SUPERMARKET LOVE SONG (Moon Sundance 2006, *Special Jury Mention at the 2006 Prague Short Film Festival, Best Narrative Short at Atlanta Film Festival*), THE MASCOT (Eclectic Pictures/Film London).

**Radio:** A SUMMER NIGHT (BBC Radio 3. Broadcast live from The Free Thinking Festival, Gateshead), PEOPLE SNOGGING IN PUBLIC PLACES (BBC Radio 3, *Won the Best Drama award at the Sony Radio Academy Awards 2010*), THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME (Adaptation for BBC Radio 4 / Graeae, *Won the The Radio Award at Ability Media International awards (AMIs) 2009*), LEFT AT THE ANGEL (BBC Radio 4, *Nominated for the Imison Award 2008*), WHEN YOU CURE ME (BBC Radio 3).

**Television:** THIS IS ENGLAND '86 (Warp Films/ Channel 4, *Winner of Royal Television Society Award 2011 for Best Writer- Drama, Winner of Best Television Drama – South Bank Sky Arts Awards 2011*), THIS IS ENGLAND '88 (Warp Films/ Channel 4, *Best Mini-Series – BAFTA 2012*), THE FADES (BBC3, *Best Drama Series – BAFTA 2012, Best Youth Programme (13+ ) Fiction – Rockie Awards, Banff World Media Festival 2012*), SINBAD (Impossible Pictures/Sky, TX July 2012), CAST-OFFS (Eleven Film/ Channel 4, *Nominated for: Best Drama Series in the Royal Television Society's Programme Awards 2009; and, Most Groundbreaking Programme at the Cultural Diversity Network Awards 2010, Winner of Radar's People of the Year Human Rights Award 2010 for Fictional Media 3*), SKINS (US VERSION) (MTV/Company Pictures), SKINS (Company Pictures/ Channel 4), ROPE (Company Pictures), THE RED ROOM (Impossible Pictures), SHAMELESS (Company/ Channel 4).

# In Conversation: Let the Right One In's John Tiffany and Jack Thorne

Reporter: Charlotte Marshall, *Official London Theatre* Thu 28 Nov 2013

<http://www.officiallondontheatre.co.uk/news/backstage-pass/features/article/item207049/in-conversation-let-the-right-one-ins-john-tiffany-and-jack-thorne/>



Jack Thorne



John Tiffany

“The show’s really physically challenging,” John Tiffany tells me by way of explanation for the booming disco music reverberating throughout our interview. “They have to do warm ups, cardio and circuit training because they’re running up and down trees, jumping off lockers, submerged underwater, having big, big full-on fights...”

Behind that closed door to the left of where writer Jack Thorne and director John Tiffany sit talking to me are the cast of *Let The Right One In*, who, following its premiere earlier this year in Scotland, will bring the pair’s retelling of the cult Swedish book to life once again for a London audience. Playing at the Royal Court later this week it will be judged, no doubt, by the many fans of the novel and its two subsequent horror film adaptations, all drawn to its evocative snow-filled setting where murder and sexual awakening go hand in hand.

That the two people at the centre of the show are a vampire and a young teenager goes some way to explain why the theatrically challenging feats of running up and down trees and hanging people upside down come to play in this unusual love story. To discover more about creating this reality on stage, we talked to Thorne, one of the UK’s most in demand writers, and the director behind everything from hit musical *Once* to Iraq drama *Black Watch* about the importance of staying faithful to the story,

why the production could be a theatrical emancipation for teenagers and how high-profile movement director Steven Hoggett's involvement was imperative.

### **What is it about the story of *Let the Right One In* that you love?**

**Tiffany:** It's just such a wonderful fairy tale, set in Sweden in the 1980s in a snowy world where people walk through forests at night and can be victims of vampires. And it is that very powerful story of the bullied teenager and how he meets somebody who gives him the resources to try and fight back. It's a love story. With fangs!

**Thorne:** Eli equally needs rescuing from her life, so it's that thing that beautiful love stories have: two people who don't know they fit together discovering that they can. That's what I love about it.

**Tiffany:** For me it feels like an inverted version of *Peter Pan* with Eli as a kind of Peter, because she never grows old, Håkan is probably Wendy and Oskar's Jane.

### **How did the project first come about?**

**Tiffany:** Marla Rubin [a theatre producer] approached me. She'd acquired the rights to both the screenplay and the novel. I thought it was a brilliant idea. I started to think about someone who could adapt it and I immediately alighted on Jack.

### **How did you first meet?**

**Tiffany:** We go way back. You were an undergraduate at Cambridge...

**Thorne:** ...and you came and directed a rehearsed reading.

**Tiffany:** That you were acting in!

**Thorne:** Yes. You were the only person I wrote to after university and you were my first meeting and you were my first employer.

### **So I take it you're admirers of each other's work?**

**Tiffany:** No... [laughs] Yes very much so. And we've actually kept in contact, haven't we? Although I was working in Scotland so tended to work with mainly Scottish writers, we knew after a few years that if we matured we should be able to work with the best writers for the best projects, and Jack immediately came to mind for this. I knew he'd love the film, even though we'd never talked about it.

**Thorne:** He was looking for... [looks for the right way to say it], well it's a play about a weird lonely teenager.

**Tiffany:** Are you the go-to for that?

**Thorne:** That's my genre!

### **Are you suggesting you're a weird lonely teenager?**

**Thorne:** Yes, I am suggesting that. I am a bald, 35-year-old weird lonely teenager.

**Tiffany:** I'm getting hints that you want to move out of that period?

**Thorne:** Yes, this is the last thing I do. Well, Glue [a television drama Thorne has written that will be shown on E4] is the last thing I do about teenagers. I'll go back, but you reach a point where you write a sex scene between two teenagers and you feel weird about it because it just becomes inappropriate to write it. And there are also things that are happening... Snapchat, I don't understand Snapchat and you have to understand these things if you're going to write about them!

**Tiffany:** Luckily we're in 1983 where there is no Snapchat and no mobile phones!

**Did you have a vision of how it would be staged when you were writing it Jack?**

**Thorne:** The nicest comment we got on the script was that Vicky Featherstone [Artistic Director of the Royal Court] said that when she read it, [she felt] it was written by someone who had been watching John and Steven's [Hoggett] work for 15 years. This isn't a play written as a play, it's a play written for John Tiffany to direct and that's really important to me. What John's done with it is entirely not what I expected, but entirely what I expected in that it's very distinctive and beautiful.

**If you'd been doing this project with a director you hadn't known as well, do you think you would have found it harder to pass the characters over?**

**Thorne:** The script would have been entirely different. One thing John said right at the beginning was 'Don't write it like a stage play, set some challenges for us that we can solve'. It was written like a stage play with no real boundaries to how big the stage could be.

**Tiffany:** Which is how all stage plays should be written really.

**Thorne:** Yes, but I wouldn't hand in a play to any theatre really that looked like the play that I handed in to you.

**Tiffany:** Well then thank God for writer/director relationships, where you feel able to do that without feeling like you've not done your job properly.

**Was Steven Hoggett always going to work on the project?**

**Tiffany:** Yes. We were at school together and we work together on many things, not everything, but there are certain things that we go 'This is one isn't it?' Mainly for the physicality of Eli when the vampire becomes strong in her. Then we get to the practical challenges, like hanging people upside down from trees, having people submerged underwater and what is in the book and the film known as 'the swimming pool scene', which we do and he's [Oskar] underwater for a good long time [looks mischievous]. Very safely I should probably add, but it doesn't feel safe!

**It feels like there's almost a magical element to the show as to how you do all that.**

**Tiffany:** I think there's a double-edged sword there. I would hate people who came to leave thinking 'How did they do that?', because then I think I would have let Jack down. But at the same time you want to disappear into the story so much that you go [draws in breath tensely].

Of course we can't have a full length swimming pool on stage like a novelist can get

you to imagine in the book or like you can have in a film. People have said to us it's even worse [for that] because we're live and we're all sat watching it, and there's somebody under the water for too long [laughs]. There's a sense we're all sat being complicit in something. All it would take is one person to stand up and say 'This is irresponsible'. It's like those Nazi experiments isn't it?! 400 people sit there at the Royal Court and go 'They must know what they're doing?!' No, I would never put an actor in any danger at all. It's the climax of the show though, so you have to go for it.

**How did you feel the first time you saw who they'd cast as Oskar and Eli, Jack?**

**Thorne:** I was there for Martin's [Quinn, who plays Oskar] audition actually and it was so interesting. I remember Martin very clearly because he just had these shoulders that didn't quite look like the other boys'... You expect Oskar to be cowed and inward looking and Martin [as Oskar] just looks at the world and smiles, and it's this weird thing where you've got this boy who smiles at the world and yet is treated incredibly badly by it. It's really been exciting watching that grow and watching him grow as a performer because it's his first professional engagement. Rebecca [Benson, Eli] has worked with Steven and John before.

**Tiffany:** She's quite small [she's 4 foot 11], but she's got an incredibly timeless quality. She's a perfect actress for theatre.

**Thorne:** There's a moment when she feeds that's just deadly, isn't it?

**Tiffany:** It's like a little leech isn't it?!

**What do you think it is about vampires that holds so much intrigue for people?**

**Thorne:** I don't know. When I was growing up, it was all about aliens and aliens coming from outside and bringing warmth into the world, and now it's about these creatures that have lived forever that have to live off us. With The Hunger Games too, that level of brutality seems to be what's drawing kids, I don't quite understand it. I think it's very hard being a kid these days. That might be it.

**Are you hoping for a West End transfer?**

**Tiffany:** We've been told it's going, which is brilliant. They think there's an audience for it, which is fantastic. It's sold out incredibly quickly at the Royal Court and I'm really glad that they've kept back some teenage tickets [so] the only people that can now get in to see the show are teenagers on the £10 tickets, it's superb. It really emancipates that audience, rather than being dragged along by your mum and dad!

**If you could do another stage adaptation of a book or film together, what would you do?**

**Thorne:** It's tough, they come along once in a while but I feel a bit fraudulent at the moment. Having your name in lights on Sloane Square is nuts and amazing, I feel incredibly grateful for it, but this isn't by me. I would like to write a play that the Royal Court put on that I can say is by me. I've been trying to write that and it's about councils; it's not about teenagers at all. [Both dissolve into laughter.]

**Tiffany:** I think the time is due that we work on an original Jack play. This was a nice way to bring us back together, but that's the future.

### 3. Introduction to *Let the Right One In*

*Let the Right One In* follows the story of a teenage boy named Oskar, and a 200 year old vampire named Eli, who is stuck in the body of a teenager. Set in 1980's Sweden, the story surrounds the love story between the two.

Oskar lives with his mother in their flat in Blackeberg. He is bullied horribly by Jonny and Micke, two boys in his class. Hakan (who lives with Eli) kills a local man in the woods to secure blood for her. However, his plan is ruined when he is interrupted by some local boys playing in the woods. He isn't able to drain enough blood, meaning that Eli is left hungry. Police Commissioner Halmberg does a special bulletin, on the television, to alert the locals that there is a murderer on the loose, which Oskar and his mother watch at home. Oskar's mother is an alcoholic who relies largely on Oskar. After warning him not to go into the woods, she allows him to go and play in the courtyard of their estate; where he meets Eli, who has just moved in next door. Although they engage in conversation, she tells him that they can't be friends. After being forced to eat sand by his tormentors, Oskar goes to the courtyard to be alone. However, Eli is there again on the jungle gym and he shows her his Rubik's cube. She asks to borrow it and they agree to meet again the next day.



In the woods, Eli pretends to be hurt to lure a local man to feed on. He picks her up and she feeds on him until he dies. Hakan appears and is saddened by his failure to procure blood for her. It is revealed that Hakan has feelings for Eli when he says he loves her, and he is jealous of her growing relationship with Oskar. It seems as though Eli wants to distance herself from Hakan. As when he says he loves her, she replies, 'I'm just not sure that's enough anymore.' The next night Eli returns to the jungle gym, where Oskar is waiting for her. She sees he has a new cut on his face and tells him to stand up to his bullies. Oskar is reluctant at first, but Eli assures him she will help him. Oskar teaches Eli Morse Code so that they can send messages to each other, through the walls in their homes. To keep Hakan happy Eli agrees she



will lie with him (in a platonic way) and allow him to hold her. Oskar decides to attend strength training classes in a bid to help him stand up to his bullies.

Oskar sends a message to Eli via Morse Code that he is going out, she reluctantly leaves Hakan and goes to the sweet shop with Oskar. They share their first affectionate moment when Oskar hugs her. She then reveals she may not be all she seems when she asks Oskar if he would still like her if she wasn't a boy. Before strength training class Oskar is getting ready in the changing rooms along with Jonny and Micke. The boys tease Oskar before leaving to join the rest of the class. Hakan sneaks in, unseen by Oskar, intending to kill Oskar to feed Eli. However, he is interrupted by the teacher, Mr Avila, who encourages Oskar not to let the bullies bother him. They both leave, not realising Hakan is in the changing room alone. Micke re-enters and sees Hakan who attempts to kill Micke for Eli. He is interrupted by Mr Avila, and Hakan pours sulphuric acid on his face to disguise his identity and thus protect Eli.

After the incident Eli, goes to Oskar's house and lies in his bed with him. Oskar asks Eli to be his girlfriend and she agrees. Eli goes to visit Hakan in hospital the next day, where is under police supervision. Eli realises that Hakan was planning to kill Oskar for her. She forgives him and he offers his blood to her. She drinks from him and then kills him to protect him from prison. Oskar and Eli meet again at the jungle gym, and Oskar slits his hand so they can make a blood bond. Although she tries to resist, Eli ends up licking a drop of Oskar's blood that falls to the floor. Eli warns Oskar to leave, and he runs away confused and upset. During a school ice-skating trip to a frozen lake, Oskar is again tormented by Jonny and Micke. Deciding to stand up for himself, he hits Jonny with a stick, which causes his ear to split. Oskar's mother decides to send him to visit his father, for a while to calm down. Before he leaves, they argue and his mother ends up slapping him.

At his father's house, Oskar's relaxation is interrupted by his father's friend Janne. His father neglects Oskar to drink vodka with Janne. When Oskar returns home, Eli visits him and reveals she is a vampire. Oskar is reluctant to invite Eli in, because of what she is. She comes into the house without an invite, and begins to bleed profusely. Oskar, horrified, tells her she can come in, and she stops bleeding. Later, Oskar goes to Eli's house, where they dance together and share their first kiss. While Oskar and Eli are asleep, Officer Halmberg visits the house. He opens the trunk, and seeing Eli asleep, assumes she is dead. Oskar distracts him and Eli jumps onto his back and drinks from him until he dies. Eli leaves as she knows there will others coming to the house to look for Officer Halmberg. Oskar is now alone and visits the sweet shop, and the jungle gym to try and fill the hole Eli has left. At the jungle gym Micke approaches Oskar and encourages him to rejoin the strength training class.

Oskar decides to go back to strength training class, as he wants to do good things. Oskar arrives early and swims some laps. Unbeknownst to him, Micke, Jonny and Jimmy (Jonny's older brother) have knocked out Mr Avila and locked all the doors. Jimmy insists on taking revenge on Oskar for hurting Jonny. He tells Oskar if he can hold his breath for three minutes underwater, he will nick him with a knife. If he can't, Jimmy will stab him in the eye. Jimmy pushes Oskar under the water where he is desperately trying to hold his breath. When everything goes quiet Oskar realises he's been saved. He resurfaces and sees Eli, who has killed Micke, Jonny and Jimmy. Oskar gets on a train, with Eli hidden in her trunk. In Morse Code he taps 'I love you' and she replies 'Good'.

#### 4. About the Design



During the interview in Section 6, the Assistant Director, Justin Martin talks about how the design of *Let the Right One In* has a large focus on finding a commonality between Sweden and Scotland. During a visit to Tentsmuir forest in Dundee, the designer was inspired to use the set to create an atmosphere of loneliness. The trees used in the set have no leaves to emphasise a feeling of winter, which denotes this loneliness. The image on the left is a picture of the forest, taken during the creative team's visit to Tentsmuir. Looking at the layout of the forest you can clearly see the comparisons between the set, and how it has largely affected the design.



## DESIGN ACTIVITY

1. Imagine you have to design ***Let the Right One In*** to fit in a black box space. Where would you put your audience? What would be your focus? Think about how the set will tie in with the story.
2. The set of ***Let the Right One In*** is mostly outside with inside scenes incorporated using props, sound and lighting. Imagine you had to design it inside a room. Which room would you choose and why? Think about why this room is important to the play and how it will work as different locations.
3. Using the first stage direction below, think about the challenges this would present when designing a set. For example:
  - How would you ensure Hakan is unseen by Torkel but seen by the audience?
  - Where would you place the entrances and exits, and how many would there be?
  - What different elements of design would you use to create a woodland? For example, projections or fake trees that could be wheeled on and offstage?

*A man walks through the woods along a distinct path. He is Torkel. He's drunk but concentrating very hard on seeming sober.*

*Hakan emerges from the woodland in the opposite direction. He stands looking at the man. Hakan is wearing a rucksack and in his hands he carries a gas cylinder. He thinks and then withdraws from the light again.*

*As Torkel walks past, Hakan steps out in front of him. Torkel looks at Hakan, who looks back with a steady intensity.*

## 5. Interview with the Assistant Director, Justin Martin

### **What was your initial approach to *Let the Right One In*?**

The initial approach was try and find a world that would fit in with NTS; within Scotland. John initially approached Jack Thorne. Marla Rubin had a draft from another writer, but it didn't work. So John approached Jack. They decided to work to find a place to locate a world in which it would work and Jack thought Dundee would work, because of the similarities in climate.

### **What was your rehearsal process like for *Let the Right One In*? What kind of techniques and exercises did you use during rehearsals?**

We did a workshop initially last year (2012) in November. And what we were looking at during that time was finding the physical language. Steven Hoggett was looking at the physical language of it, which was how the movement might work within the context of the show; and really looking at the script. Steven's work is fairly improvisational to begin with. And John puts the show up on its feet fairly quickly. As does Steven, they put it up and look at it. So it was fairly quick in getting it up to a run stage. And then they tweak and work, and find out how it looks. I like to think of the way they do it as; they take as many bites out of the apple as they possibly can. So they can keep looking back and going 'oh okay!' Which is great because then you can see what you've got and see what you need to work on. The specific exercises in terms of Steven's work; he tends to use the actors' time to find the movement themselves. All the movement you see on stage has come from the actors and he's adapted it.

### **So it was obviously really important there was a lot of movement in the show.**

Steven is amazing and John is the same as well. John finds a language in terms of the images in the show. And Steven finds the language which is the movement within the show, which enhanced Jack Thorne's text.

### **It's a really interesting script because it's not a conventional love story. What do you think draws audiences to it?**

I think the reason people relate to this story is because it's about a kid coming to terms with the monster inside. How do you fall in love when you have to accept the things in yourself that you don't like? Or that are scary? And I think that we've all felt that, when you fall in love for the first time that fear and terror. And ultimately the acceptance of yourself. So I think that's why people relate to that story. And the clash of the innocence and the horror in a way makes it more terrifying. If you take the element of the supernatural out of it, it is about a boy who is coming to terms with what it's like to be lonely and accept himself and realise that he is worth something.

### **It's a fascinating vampire based story as well because it doesn't follow the path set by things like *Twilight*. Especially because it's about younger vampires.**

I agree with you. It's more real. John Lindqvist has written another book which is all about zombies and it's the same sort of thing. It tries to work out the logistics of what the reality would be. His zombies are not flesh eating zombies; they're just people returning from the dead. And what would you do if you remarried and suddenly your ex-partner turns up wanting to be back in your life but they're not the same. He poses

the moral and human questions, (which is what he does in this) of what would it be like? Which ultimately uses the supernatural as a way of exploring what it is to be human or what it is to be a teenager falling in love.

**Another thing that makes it interesting is its relatability. For example, Jonny and Micke, although they're really horrible, you can imagine that there people like that. Because unfortunately there are. What sort of work did you do with the actors to create that level of reality?**

Well I think one thing that helps is Jack's script. He's very good at fleshing out this idea that there's a duality. So working on Micke, for example, and John's been very clear at getting this out too, we'd try to find the other elements to the character. There's a reason why they're bullies. They are horrible but there's a reason and it comes from somewhere and they make choices along the way. Micke could make the choice to be Oskar's friend but decides not to be. And Jonny we see has his family history. And that's partially Jack and partially John, and it's also it's the actors. The new actors we've got for the Court for example, with Jonny, the previous actor was fantastic, but the new actor [Graeme Dalling] really has found a third dimension to him. Which is fantastic and a testament to the casting of the show.



**Eli is a really interesting character because she's so young as she's trapped in a teenager's body. But in reality she's so old, how did you work with Rebecca to create her character?**

I think part of it is in the casting of Rebecca, because she has the sense of an old soul within a small frame. During the rehearsal process we did a lot of research into vampirology and the history of that, and what has come before. Steven worked in terms of movement, it's a sense of a jagged form of movement. And I think also, the fact that it comes back to her. The fact that Rebecca is 24 and Martin is 18. You feel the years that she's lived are very different from Oskar's. The character is an adult in a teenager's body essentially. She's been like that for 300 years. But, we call her Eli [pronounced E-li] it means God. It has that otherworldly element to Elias.

**We're never really sure of Eli's intentions, especially at the end when Oskar says 'I love you' and she says 'Good'. In a way she swoops in when he's at his most vulnerable. Is he on his way to becoming the next Hakan?**



When Lindqvist wrote the screenplay for the Swedish film, he watched it back and he realised that it was a possibility that he'd never thought of. And so subsequently he wrote another shorter book, and in that he makes clear that these two are meant to be together. And it's not actually a story about them. It's a story about another couple, the ticket inspector and the police officer investigating the disappearance of them. And they fall in love, and they go on this lifelong search to find these two and you find out that they're still together. Because ultimately, in this story he is a romantic, and did believe that they end up together. We had a sense of ambiguity; I think it's truthful that she says 'Good'. I think it's truthful when she says 'Are we still in love?' and he says 'Probably'. I think there is a sense of the unsurety of love, but the surety of each other. And I think her

commitment to him comes when she saves him from the bullies and they go off together. I think it's more real than idyllic in that way. That's why I quite like that it's not as neat as "I love you. I love you too" and I think that's Jack's intention. Does he become the new Hakan? I don't know. Obviously we have the history ourselves which we've made up, that she and Hakan did meet each other as children. Which is different from the book, because in the book they met later. It's nice to have that history just in terms of looking at that relationship, because it's a relationship that comes out of a long history together. And the tragedy of that relationship is that she can't grow old, and that they did at one point love each other.

**Did you have to change much about the show, to make it fit at the Royal Court?**

Bits and pieces. When you go back on a show you get to make it better, and make it deeper. And then fix things that you always wondered about, which is lovely. The stage up North was much wider, which meant that there was much more of a filmic sense of it. In terms of it's breadth (it's almost twice as wide as the stage here), so what we did here was, we had to bring it down. And also the wing space there is different so we had to mirror it so it's switched back to front, which is a challenge, because it's different enough to be frustratingly difficult. But then at the same time the actors sometimes found that they're like, 'I remember this but I don't quite...' The good thing about it is that it feels fresh for us. Jack came in and watched it last night, and he said, 'I didn't recognise it.' He feels like it's a totally new show, which is really exciting! And because it's now less of a wide set, it's less filmic but it's more intimate. You feel like you're in the forest more. And I think that's a really nice thing, in the way it feels more at home here, which is really interesting.

**A few audience members have actually complained about the cold, because the psychological aspect of the set really impacts them, that they believe they really are cold.**

This stage involves people so much too, in the way that it's built. It just sucks you into the stage. So you do feel like you're the other half of this clearing within the forest, which is really nice.

**Apart from looking at vampirology, what kind of research did you do?**

Well, obviously we all read the book. And watched both movies, because there are two movies. The original Swedish film and the American retelling. As I said before we went out and did a site visit to Tentsmuir forest in Dundee. So we went and had a good look and spent a bit of time out there having a look around. Christine did a lot to do with textures, and research into that and what sort of trees she wanted. We never wanted to recreate the films, or make it Swedish but we didn't want to lose that feel. And the other thing is lots of period costume, and there's all sorts of research that went into that. And all of us trying to rack our brains back to what it was like, what we were wearing in the Eighties! So we did quite a lot and once you've done it all it's so useful, it's all in us now.

**Is there a lot of Swedish influence in the play?**

Some of the names we obviously used. And we used some of the Swedish pronunciations of those names like Jocke and Janne [Pronounced Y-ocke and Y-anne]. But also, I think that there's something about the tone. Christine, who did the design, wanted to find a language that suited both and John was very clear that that's what he wanted. So we went out to Tentsmuir forest which is near Dundee, and we had a look around. And the feel of that forest felt to us, that it had a sense of that Swedishness that we read in the book. So in a way we found a commonality between the locations. And Jack did too. I think Jack was trying to find a language for the location of where this place was; he's based it on a series of flats that he knows quite well. So there's a sense of isolation. It's poured through, through the book and the words and then through the design is the main way. It's lodged very much in Scotland too which I think is a good thing.

**There are so many great special effects in the show, how hard was it to work them in?**

It took a while. We brought someone over from the States, Jeremy, and he's done a lot of special effects. A lot of it is trial and error, and a lot of it looks a lot more complicated than it actually is. It is about trial and error and finding the right way to do things. And they tried things out a lot and spent a lot of time in the room with us and we used a lot of blood, which is fantastic and so much fun! But we got the best and then we gave them time to do it and that's the main thing.

**What made Christine choose Silver Birch Trees?**

One reason is the colour and also it relates back to that forest. The Tentsmuir, because a lot of the trees out there are Silver Birch. It comes back to a sense of just lodging it within that world. What's great about what companies like the National Theatre of Scotland do, and what the Royal Court is embracing too, is that they build shows for a community. That show was really built for that Dundee community, so we're now bringing a piece of that community here, which is lovely.

**The trees are leafless which creates this lifeless quality. Was that done on purpose?**

Yeah. I think the sense is that, it's winter and the colour of those trees within the context of that winter. But what you'll notice is weird, is that the trees are starting to grow buds. And it happened during the previous season, and it's already started now and so you have this new life coming through. But I think that the environment of the play, which is also seen in the film, is such that it matches Oskar's sense of loneliness and who he becomes friends with. So I think as much as a literal sense of the fact that it's winter is also an emotional or metaphoric sense of what the character is going through. He feels very isolated and all these doors shut except for this one girl who is going through the same thing. All the doors around her are shutting and they end up needing each other. It's funny but you will see the little buds growing and it's lovely as the history of the show goes on, as it runs, you get more buds and you also get more of the snow, that catches itself on the trees. So they have a life of their own and they are real trees, which is what's so nice about them.

**The style of the show is very filmic. Especially in terms of it visually, but it still works in a theatre setting.**

Absolutely. It does feel, and John's always been very clear about this, and Christine feels the same way, it's sort of like a Swedish fairytale in that way. We never deny that fairytale element of it.

**Are any of The Infected coming to see the show? What has their response been like so far? [The Infected are what fans of the book and films call themselves].**

The response has been good, only a few got to see it so far, but more will see it now. But they did this great thing in Scotland, where they bought tickets and then gave them away to people who couldn't get them. The deal was they had to be sent the ticket because a lot of them are in America. They were so excited and they are so excited. It's funny because you can go either way when you've got die hard fans. Because you can create something where they go, well you've completely lost it, the plot of what they've expected it to be. I think what's great about this is that it's not the film, it's not the book, and none of the films of the book are the same either, it's another version. And it's not trying to be anything else, which is great. I think enough of the moments have stayed for them to be pleased. And I think their big question will be how did you do the special effects live? Hopefully we don't disappoint them! I don't think we will!

**What are your expectations for the play?**

Hopefully it sells out! The big expectation is that it gets people in, who don't normally come. What we found in Dundee is that lots of young people came, of all the shows at NTS, it's one of the shows that got the most young people in. Because it is exciting and it is about them and going through those things. And hopefully we get them in again. The Royal Court has geared it in a way towards that. So fingers crossed that they come, because theatre tickets are so expensive in London now. It's so nice to get those people into the theatre. It's exciting when they see it because they see it in a different way, to the way your regular theatregoer does. So hopefully that will happen! I do think it's a more emotional and intimate show, so I think it will connect with the audience even more than it did. But it just feels like it will more and more. I think it's going to go really well.





## 6. Rehearsal Diary by Assistant Director Justin Martin

### Week Commencing November 11th: - Clapham Rehearsal Studio

We all meet on our first day of rehearsals at a studio in Clapham. It's like the first day of a new year of school. It's great to see all the familiar faces but also a host of new people from the Royal Court and three new cast members.

Straight off the bat, our director, John Tiffany, gives an introduction about how the play came to be. He first saw it at a friend's house one lazy Sunday in the summer of 2009 but never for a second thought it would be the source for a play. He recounts similar memories to my first experience of the film when I saw it while working in Chicago. It was full of images I'll never forget: bodies frozen in coffins of ice; blood spilling on to white snow; a patient in a hospital bed bursting into flames.

John then introduces producer, Marla Rubin, who had acquired the rights two years prior and approached John to direct. Marla talks of the brutal love story between Oskar, a lonely bullied teenager, and Eli, a young vampire whom he befriends.

The film is set in Sweden and there are strong links between Scotland and Scandinavia – from Norse settlers in the past to the fishing and oil industries today - and so the National Theatre of Scotland, where John at the time was the Associate Director, seemed a fitting place to create the original production. John brought on board his long time collaborator Steven Hoggett and writer Jack Thorne. He knew the physicality of a young female vampire – hunting and drinking blood – would appeal to Steven and he felt that Jack Thorne, writer of such pioneering TV dramas as *Skins* and *This Is England*, would be the man to adapt this story for the stage. I came on board as part of the directing team for workshops prior to our rehearsals in Glasgow and our season in Dundee and knew, from the outset, I was amongst a team uniquely skilled to tell this story, a story I had read and loved as a book many years earlier.

The show was originally shown by The National Theatre of Scotland at Dundee Rep earlier this year to a fantastic response with 60 percent of the audience being first time theatre goers. We're all very excited to show what we've been up to in Dundee to London and the Royal Court.

Post introductions, we read through the script with the new cast, who already feel like they are going to be fantastic additions to our story. There is something about the Scottish accent that enhances Jack's intelligently sparse adaption.

In the afternoon we start the first of our daily warm-ups this time with Vicky Manderson who is Steven Hoggett's movement associate. Vicky makes Steven's warm-ups in Dundee look like a walk in the park. The intense workout, ranging from yoga to Pilates and the dreaded circuit training, will help prepare the cast for the physical demands of the show and as a bonus get us all in shape in the lead up to Christmas mince pies. We all need to get our strength and stamina back after many months away from the show but unlike preparing for Dundee we have half the time to do it.

That afternoon John announces that not only do we have to remount the show with three new cast members but that because the wing space at the Royal Court is on the opposite side to where it was in Dundee, we're going to have to flip the whole production from left to right. Thank gosh we've got a rehearsal set in from the start! We spend the afternoon working through the show realising how difficult it'll be.

The rest of the week becomes about reacquainting ourselves with the material as well as bringing the new cast members up to speed with what we learned in Dundee. There is much talk about vampire mythology and how vampires crop up in all civilisations and cultures, and that sucking milk from your mother's breast while she's asleep is a sign you'll develop a taste for blood. The returning cast struggle with the subtle difference of doing everything back to front for the shifted set.

There are lots of things to remember: Rebecca Bensen who plays Eli is trying to remember how to solve a Rubix Cube which she has to complete onstage. I remember how we spent ages trying to figure it out the first time until we recruited a Glaswegian Rubix Cube champion (who can do it in 90 seconds) to help. Martin Quinn who plays Oskar heads back to the pool in preparation for one of the most iconic scenes in the film when Oskar faces a terrifying trial in a school swimming pool at the hands of the brother of one of his bullies – payback for hitting out during an earlier attack. We'd decided to go all out for this particular scene, and thus have a large volume of water on stage deep enough for Oskar to be submerged in for up to three minutes. It's always important that Martin feels 100% comfortable. Initially we sent him to a diving instructor, who worked with him on sustaining his breath and keeping his eyes open underwater. This time around and with that knowledge, Martin takes cast mate Angus MacDonald along to show him how it's done, but when they come back in the next day it seems they spent a large portion of their time in the sauna!

At the end of the week we do a rough stumble through of the show.



## **Week Commencing November 18th: Clapham Rehearsal Studio**

The pressure's on: I can't believe it's the last week in the rehearsal room already. It feels like we only started last week. Wait a minute, we did!

During the week we take apart scene by scene and put them back together. There's an amazing thing that happens when you re-stage a show after time away from it. The performances all feel more lived and more effortless. Most days we warm up and work scenes in the morning, leading to a run in the afternoon. The new cast are folding in nicely and getting a sense of how the show fits together as a whole.

We begin to feed in all the costumes into the runs. The play is set in 1983 at the height of the Rubix Cube and it was important to us all that it was as authentic to the time period as possible. As a child of the 80's I'm getting déjà vu to particular shades of brown. I keep thinking 'Gosh! How did we ever get away with wearing that?'

We have a blood day where we test out a series of blood bags and special effects. Back in Dundee we spent days with our special effects designer, Jeremy Chernick, trialling different versions of arterial spray and sulphuric acid face-melts as well as tackling the more traditional blood-drinking. In one scene, Eli has to throw up after eating a foam banana sweet. We couldn't get the consistency of the vomit right until Jeremy discovered Steven Hoggett's porridge in the fridge. John announced proudly to us all: 'Result!' This time around we have the systems in place but it still takes time as we bring the new cast up to speed and get the returning cast back in sync.

Later in the week, John starts going on a winter prune and cuts a couple of trees from the set. It's not an easy process but a necessary one given the width of the Royal Court stage.

On Thursday the owners of the venue we are rehearsing in bring us two large tarts to say thank you for the many years The Royal Court has used the space. So much for the pre-Christmas mince pie preparation!!

## **Week Commencing November 25th: Tech Week - The Royal Court**

We arrive at the theatre and there is a real sense of excitement creeping in amongst us all. Technical rehearsals are always my favourite time in preparing a show, as it's when the whole world of the play starts coming together and you see the magic woven. John is amazingly relaxed. He looks in his element. The lights have all been rigged, the set is in place. Sound cues have been loaded. John talks about it in terms of painting the show.

It's also time to say hello to our old friend "the fake snow" (from a company called Snow Business!?!?!?) which covers much of the set. I can see it's already made it's way up into the offices at the Royal Court and in and around the dressing rooms and foyer bar. I can't help feeling we may have already left our permanent mark on the Royal Court forever.

One of the big things we need to look at is the sight lines as the Royal Court stage is much narrower than Dundee. John has me sit in just about every seat in the theatre and we change things slightly to accommodate the best view for the maximum amount of seats possible. Also because of the width and the distance between trees, the precision needed to get set pieces on and off intensifies and the process of pushing beds and sofa's on and off with out hitting something comes into play. It becomes instantly clear that, while the show in Dundee had a lot more width, the stage at the Court affords us much more sense of height. The play itself in a way has become less filmic and more intimate. Where as before you could sense Oskar's

isolation through the sheer size of the forest, now it gives off an equally valid sense of claustrophobia.

At the end of the week we open to our first preview. Those pre-show nerves are back again. The early nerves settle into a familiar rhythm and the audience and cast warm to each other. In this theatre, the play feels much more immediate. The show is going amazingly given it's the first time through with an audience. Suddenly a sound cue doesn't trip at one of the critical moments of the play. John buries his head in the back of my shoulder unable to watch. All the action is the same but it's suddenly without sound. The cast click into overdrive and the bullies add sound effects to their movement scene creating a chilling feel to the usually heavily underscored section. The audience haven't noticed but stare transfixed. Those of us who know the show are all transfixed but in a different way. Our stage manager gets the sound going again and all returns to normal as if it never happened. Ah the joys of live theatre. No one would have known if they hadn't seen the show before.

### **Week Commencing 2nd of December: Previews - The Royal Court**

It's our final week leading up to opening night. We are yet to finish our work though. There are still lighting and sound cues we're honing in order to tell the story in the best possible way. The actors are becoming less nervous and more free with an audience. Every show John, Vicky and I take notes. Straight after the show we meet with the technical team to work through any big notes so that they have the night and the next morning to sort them out. The next day we do notes with actors in the Royal Court's rehearsal studio followed by our warm up (yes it never ends!!) and then head to the theatre to work through bigger notes. John is still moving trees around in the space to accommodate sight lines and the performances. We've got a rattling light fitting which makes itself known whenever the bass kicks in. It's an ongoing saga which is ultimately resolved the day before opening.

During the previews a host of people come to see the show as excitement and word of mouth begins to build. Tim Minchin comes to see the show and tweets about how amazing it was. I make an observation about how we may well have used his hair as inspiration for Eli. Tim smiles and nods (I'm such a dag!)

OPENING NIGHT: It's here. Finally we've reached opening night after a very fruitful but intense 4 weeks. Before the show everyone not involved in the direct running of the evenings performance starts getting dolled up. There is an air of excitement amongst us all. Rebecca's brought in a box of Krispy Kreme donuts for us all. I jump out of my chair far too quickly when she asks 'Who wants the last one?' Many of the people from the National Theatre of Scotland are down from Glasgow for the night. It's lovely to see old friends who are the engine behind the production. We go through all of our pre-show technical and safety checks. Before every show the cast do a fight call on stage to mark through all the parts in the show that require physical precision. It's always a fun time as it brings us all together. Today people are giving out cards and chocolates. As an Australian ex-pat I introduce the word "chookas" to the proceedings which is the equivalent of "break a leg" back home. Everyone looks at me like I'm a freak until it starts to catch on!

Not long later, the ushers open the doors and people start to fill the theatre. Everyone's chatting and there is a real sense of excitement as the first actor crosses the stage for our pre-show. The set looks amazing under the lights. Slowly the audience start to quieten as the music starts to kick in. Then suddenly the house light's fade, and we're off. Chookas!

## 7. Practical Exercises

***Let the Right One In*** uses a lot of movement to bring the story to life. During rehearsals Steven Hoggett used movement to help the actors get to grips with the story. The actors would have to design pieces of movement to sections of music, some of which were then used in the show.

Put on some music to have on in the background; this can be used to inspire movement or can be a simple starting point. Put them into groups; ensuring that your students have enough space to move about freely. Give them a theme, idea or provocation and ask them to create three still images around this. Examples of themes surrounding ***Let the Right One In*** are as follows; love, trust, fear, isolation, neglect and fun.

One provocation used in rehearsals was showing the opposition between two things, such as clean and dirty. A movement sequence they used in the show was called 'tree boys'. It involved the actors reacting to the murders that had taken place in the forest. In particular they focused on how the same space could look different on an emotional level, while physically looking the same; because something had happened in that space to change the way people felt about it. One large moment of focus during this sequence was looking for blood trails. This was used to focus on how the murders had engulfed a small town, where not much happens.

Alternatively if they are working on a particular show, have a discussion with the students about the themes of the show. Ask them what they think the themes are and why? Establish which themes are deemed the most important, and use them as a basis for the exercise.

Ask the students to share their different images with the group. Get the rest of the students to analyse and discuss what they see. What do they think is going on and why? How does it make them feel about what they are seeing?

Taking on the comments from the rest of the group, as groups or individuals, ask to them to use the same or a similar idea as a basis for creating a piece of movement. When the students are creating pieces of movement, they should think about the provocation and how it affects their movement.

Ask them questions such as: why have you chosen to move in a certain way? How did your initial reaction to the music and provocation affect how you moved? Will you portray your emotions in a subtle or over the top way? Why? Did you find any of your movements emphasised your emotions? If so, why?

An alternative for individual work is improvising a two minute non-verbal piece depicting key moments in a day in the life of their characters. Ask them what they have noticed and what worked and what didn't. And what it revealed to them about their characters.

After they have completed this exercise, ask them to share their work. Again ask the group to discuss their response to what they have seen.

This exercise can be used as a starting point to devise work, or to work out a sequence to put into a show. It can also be used purely as a rehearsal technique to help students discover new ways of establishing emotions non-verbally.

## 8. Useful Links

During the run with the National Theatre of Scotland, the company created some video content surrounding the conception of the play. Please see below for the links.

Interview with Jack Thorne:

<http://vimeo.com/channels/lettherightonein/68610418>

Bringing the story to life:

<http://vimeo.com/channels/lettherightonein/67130770>

Bringing the show to life:

<http://vimeo.com/channels/lettherightonein/67130769>

## 9. Education at the Royal Court

The Royal Court is a centre for excellence and innovation in theatre-making, and the Education Department aims to stimulate and inspire students of all ages, encouraging learning and participation in every aspect of the theatre's work, from the process of writing plays to pioneering rehearsal room techniques.

We offer a wide-ranging programme of work designed to open up and de-mystify the craft of making theatre. Royal Court Education activities include:

**Workshops for productions**  
**INSET workshops for teachers**  
**Post-show talks**  
**Royal Court in a Day Study Day**  
**Drama School in a Day Study Day**  
**Performing Arts Business Study Day**

A full description of all education events can be found on the education page of the Royal Court web-site, [www.royalcourttheatre.com](http://www.royalcourttheatre.com) If you would like more information, please e-mail Lynne Gagliano, Education Associate, at [lynnegagliano@royalcourttheatre.com](mailto:lynnegagliano@royalcourttheatre.com) or phone 020 7565 5174.

***Let the Right One In* Education Background Pack** compiled and written by Maia Clarke, Royal Court Education Assistant with the kind assistance of Justin Martin and John Tiffany, the creative team of *Let the Right One In* and the National Theatre of Scotland.