

ROYAL COURT

Posh By Laura Wade



BACKGROUND PACK

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1. ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

The Royal Court Theatre presents

POSH

By Laura Wade

First performance at the Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Downstairs, Sloane Square, London, on 9 April 2010

Cast:

The Riot Club:

Guy Bellingfield

James Leighton-Masters

Toby Maitland

George Balfour

Alistair Ryle

Hugo Fraser-Tyrwhitt

Harry Villiers

Miles Richards

Dimitri Mitropoulos

Ed Montgomery

Joshua McGuire

Tom Mison

Jolyon Coy

Richard Goulding

Leo Bill

David Dawson

Harry Hadden-Paton

James Norton

Henry Lloyd-Hughes

Kit Harington

Plus:

Jeremy

Guy's godfather

Chris

The landlord of The Bull's Head

Rachel

Chris' daughter

Charlie

An escort

Simon Shepherd

Daniel Ryan

Fiona Button

Charlotte Lucas

Director

Designer

Lighting Designer

Sound Designer

Assistant Director

Costume Supervisor

Production Manager

Stage Manager

Deputy Stage Manager

Assistant Stage Manager

Stage Management work placement

Lyndsey Turner

Anthony Ward

Paule Constable

David McSeveney

James Yeatman

Jackie Orton

Paul Handley

Nafeesah Butt

Charlotte Padgham

Lucy Topham

Greg Staszczuk

2. ABOUT THE WRITER

Laura is a graduate of the Royal Court Young Writers' Programme. Her first play for the Royal Court, *Breathing Corpses* played in the Jerwood Theatre Upstairs in 2005 and won her the Critics' Circle Theatre Award for Most Promising Playwright, the Pearson Playwrights Best Play Award, the George Devine Award and an Olivier Award Nomination for Outstanding Achievement in an Affiliate Theatre.

Laura also worked on a collaborative project, *Catch*, for the Royal Court in 2006, with a group of female contemporaries featuring April De Angelis, Stella Feehily, Tanika Gupta and Chloe Moss.



Photo from The Observer 04.04.10 by Richard Saker

She has written for the Sheffield Crucible theatre which produced her production of *Limbo* in 1996, The Bristol Old Vic Basement Theatre (*16 Winters* produced in 2000), several plays for the Dream Factory in Warwick and was writer in residence at the Finborough Theatre in 2003 where her adaptation of W.H. Davies *Young Emma* was also performed during that year.

In 2004 Wade was a writer on attachment at the Soho Theatre and her play *Colder Than Here* was produced there in February 2005.

Laura Wade: The Girl in the Tories' Soup
by Rachel Cook
The Observer, 4 April 2010

Rachel Cook talks to award-winning Laura Wade about her new play Posh, a sharp portrayal of privileged Tory students at dinner.

Laura Wade likes research. She finds it helpful, up to a point. When she wrote her first play, *Colder Than Here*, which is about a dying woman who is planning her own funeral, she learned all about coffins, from paper to wicker to good old-fashioned oak. But on this score, her new play, *Posh*, was a trickier proposition: its subject is an all-male Oxbridge dining society of the kind to which David Cameron and George Osborne once so infamously belonged. "It wasn't as if I could gatecrash a dinner," she says. She had to fall back on interviews. "We talked to people who'd been in a club themselves or who'd had friends in one; we talked to older people who were still very much involved in the life of their old club and, I suspect, funding it. It was interesting. "There is this clichéd idea of poshness that crops up in television: you know, someone's posh cousin in a sitcom, *Tim Nice But Dim*. It's all a bit 'rah'. But as we went on, I realised it was important that the play's voices be modern, too. There are so many influences on the way people talk now." Her eyes widen. "Writing a tribe is fun. They have their own language, their own slang, they repeat it and it becomes part of the texture of the play. For a writer, that's thrilling. That's when my pen flies."

In theatre circles, the award-winning Wade is known for the precision of her writing and you feel her deadly accuracy in every sentence, every phrase, of *Posh*. Most of the play's action takes place in the private room of a country pub in which the Riot Club's members are meeting for one of their notorious dinners. The object of the evening is trashing: they get trashed and then they trash the room; the smashing of, say, only one chandelier by the end of the night will be considered a poor show.

As the characters grow ever more sodden, the mood grows thorny and dark. There is tension within the club, some of its members feeling that it is living on past glories, possibly because its current president, James Leighton-Masters, seems actually to be doing some academic work. One, Guy, is planning a coup; another, Harry, has booked a prostitute for the evening. The only thing that unites these 10 overgrown public-school boys is their sneering aversion to the pub's landlord, Chris. What happens next? It's *Brideshead Revisited* meets *Lord of the Flies*: horrifying, compelling and yet blackly funny. "They are quite entertaining," says Wade, in the manner of a fond zookeeper. "They're witty. They're clever. They have the verbal facility to follow an argument through to its end. This isn't a rugby-club dinner. The charge in the room is intellectual as well as physical."

Wade's play will open just one month before the general election. No doubt the Royal Court, which commissioned the work, is pretty gleeful about this. Dominic Cooke, the theatre's artistic director, match-made her with the

director of *Posh*, Lyndsey Turner, knowing that both of them were interested in working on the idea of wealth. A Bullingdon-style club at a play's heart is likely to stir more than the usual interest in a new work. Who knows, it may even swing the odd vote. But Wade is ambivalent about the timing. "It's a very visible time to have it go on and for me, it asks big social and cultural questions as well as political ones – and I don't want people to be disappointed when they find it's not just a big stitch-up. Because it isn't." Any similarities between the aggressive and opportunist Riot Club member, Alistair Ryle, and David Cameron are, she says, entirely coincidental. Nor did she hold *that* photo – of Cameron and Osborne in their ridiculous Bullingdon Club suits – in her head as she wrote *Posh*. "I don't like writing with real people in mind. This is about a whole group of people. For me, it's a hypothesis: do these connections help you in later life? There's a sense [for the super privileged] of having to stick together in a world that doesn't want you or understand you any more."

Wade is not posh. She grew up in Sheffield, where her father worked for a computer company. "I was the family alien. Both my parents are quite creative, but I was... appalling ... always putting on little shows. I was rather a shy child, not a natural performer, but there was a performative edge to everything I did." Her school was discouraging when she suggested that drama might be her thing, so she arranged her own work experience at the Crucible theatre and it was there, at the age of 18, that her first play was staged, in its studio. "It was called *Limbo*. It was about teenagers in Sheffield. You will never be able to find a copy of it and I'm quite happy about that. All the people involved with it have been killed." She giggles. Still, the Crucible remains her ideal theatre – "I still think its main house is the most exciting space in the country" – and this summer, to her great joy, it will stage her play, *Alice*, based on *Alice in Wonderland*.

After a drama degree at Bristol University, she began writing seriously, earning her keep with temp jobs during the day. "Temping was good. At the beginning of the week, I'd hate everyone. By the end of the week, there'd be all these characters; everyone had some sort of quirk." But she regards her move to London and her joining of the Royal Court's young writers programme as the real start of her career. The Court was a wonderful refuge, not least because, for the first time, she met other writers.

And it worked. In 2005, when she was still only 27, her first and second plays ran simultaneously in London: her debut, *Colder Than Here*, at the Soho theatre, and her second, *Breathing Corpses*, at the Royal Court. They won her a Critics' Circle award for most promising playwright and an Olivier award nomination.

Does she find writing easy? "Not really. Some parts are agony. I certainly don't wake up and haemorrhage ideas." *Posh*, with its cast of 14, is her biggest play to date. But it was a less lonely business than usual. "Lyndsey and I worked on it scene by scene; there was no terrible moment when I handed this thing to someone, saying, 'That's my heart and soul on a plate.'"

The life of a playwright is, she concedes, an odd one: the "massively introverted" months of working alone, followed by the "massively extrovert thing" of having a play on. And right now, it is even weirder than usual. Her boyfriend, Sam West, is starring in the West End hit, *Enron*, a show she has seen seven times. Sundays have become "very precious". West is a noted birdwatcher. Has he given that up by way of a concession? No. "I think I thought it was a bit dorky at the beginning," she says. "But actually, it's thrilling. I love it. It's about evolving a different way of looking and hearing. We go all over and it's nice having something that we do that isn't about the theatre, though it isn't necessarily very calming when you're driving five hours to see a bird that may, or may not, have flown away by the time you get there."

This a big year for the two of them, isn't it? When she answers this question, sweetly, spoonily, her thoughts are only for West. "Oh, gosh, yes!" she says. "*Enron* is an extraordinarily good play and he's amazing in it." She says nothing about what might be riding on *Posh*. "I just hope lots of people will come," she says. My hunch is that they will, though Messrs Cameron, Osborne et al will probably want to give it a miss.

3. SYNOPSIS OF POSH

Posh is about the rarefied world of the British upper classes, examining how this group of people have remained close to the centre of power in Britain for generations, and whether their dominance remains unchanged, or is under threat in the country today.



As such it is a play about clubs and gangs. Lots of modern drama is concerned with gangs at the bottom of the social spectrum, but Posh deals with those at the top; specifically examining how elite, exclusive clubs breed a mentality of unquestioned entitlement and right to rule among its members.



The play opens in a Gentleman's Club where Jeremy, a Tory MP, is meeting his nephew, Guy, for a drink. Like his uncle Jeremy was before him, Guy is a student at Oxford University and is a member of the Riot Club, an elite dining society. As Jeremy and Guy trade Riot Club war stories, it becomes clear that the club has lost its riotous edge in recent years. Where Jeremy talks wistfully of the complete and utter destruction his generation of rioters would visit on the restaurants they dined in, he seems disappointed that Guy and his friends could only manage to break one chandelier at their last dinner. Guy wonders if the president is

at fault, and whether he might make a better leader – possibly if he did something at the next dinner to impress everyone he would be favourite to be president at the next election.

Several months later we are at an Oxfordshire country pub for the next dinner. Gradually the ten Riot Club members arrive: James the president is late, and he is preceded by the Hugo, an academic fourth year of very refined tastes, third years George and Toby, four second years Harry, Alistair, Guy and Dimitri, who were all at Eton together, and the two new boys, Miles and Ed. Guy has been given permission by James to arrange the menu for the evening, but it emerges that he is not the only one to have tried to make an impression at this dinner. Dimitri is promising to whisk them all off to a mystery foreign country after the dinner on his family's private jet, while Harry has hired a prostitute for them all for the evening. There is much excitement at the big surprises, but also a healthy tension between everyone who has arranged something special.

Once James arrives the dinner begins. There are numerous toasts and discussions about the glorious history of the Riot. Chris the landlord and his pretty daughter Rachel bring in the food – a different wine for each course, foie gras, and then Guy's special surprise – a ten bird roast for the main course. However the evening begins to unravel pretty quickly. The ten bird roast only has nine birds in it, and the club are disappointed that James only feebly complains to Rachel about it. Then when Chris throws out the prostitute just after her arrival, the boys are furious at what they feel to be their right to do whatever they want being challenged by the socially inferior landlord.

The second half begins with the boys airing their grievances about how they feel disempowered in a modern Britain that has got rid of all the privileges of the upper class in favour of a washed out democracy that favours grey mediocrity. Into this gloomy discussion however, arrives the ghost of the original Earl Riot, who exhorts the boys to take their country back.



Buoyed by the presence of their ancestor, the boys start a raucous drinking game and try and get Rachel involved. Miles ends up forcibly kissing her, and she leaves, terrified. Then begins the true purpose of the evening – the boys start to trash their room, methodically and operatically, but Chris bursts in, furious, before they have finished. In the argument that ensues, Alistair completely loses his cool and lashes out at Chris. All the boys join in with terrible results. Worried that they might have killed him, the boys try and work out what to say to the police when they come, and they decide to blame the entire fight on Alistair.

In the final scene, we return once again to the Gentleman's Club from the beginning of the play. Jeremy is this time meeting Alistair, who is facing a trial



for what the boys said he did to Chris. Impressed by his political ideas, Jeremy suggests that he might be able to get Alistair's charges dropped, and that he might have a future in politics some day.

- James Yeatman
Assistant Director

4. NOTES FROM THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR'S REHEARSAL NOTEBOOK

Week One:

Our first week is spent building the world of the play as it exists before the action begins. While many aspects of the play bear a strong resemblance to the world we live in, the director, Lyndsey Turner, was very clear that 'Posh World' exists in a universe different from our own, and we had to work out its rules and particularities methodically in order to create as fully realised a world as possible on stage. Most of this week therefore is spent sitting around a table reading through the play a line at a time and establishing any facts and questions we have about the world the characters inhabit. These are organised at the end of each day into themes (such as general Riot Club attitudes, or issues to do with character back-story) and any questions from the previous day are generally answered by Laura (Wade, the writer) and Lyndsey the next morning. For an example of the types of facts and questions that occur, see below for the questions that arose from act 1 scene 2.



This close script work is coupled with research into the aspects of *Posh* that bear a strong resemblance to the real world, most notably Oxford University. On the Thursday of our first week, the whole company have a big research trip to Oxford to see what the town is like. The boys playing the Riot Club members are given tasks to try and find the colleges their characters attended and have a general look around, while the actors playing Chris and Rachel visit the lovely Perch pub and its charming French proprietor, Johnny Mignon, who gives them the low-down on what it's like to run a country pub/restaurant often frequented by Oxford students. In the evening the cast were able to attend formal dinners at Oxford colleges, and then watch a debate at the Oxford Union. By the end of the week we all feel well armed with a clear picture of the Riot Club and the kind of world it operates in.

The actors playing the Riot Club begin to receive fencing training from Jo Maynard, a former British no.1, in order to teach them a familiarity with a gentlemanly, witty, yet aggressive sport, as Lyndsey feels this is the attitude the Riot Club members would take to group banter. The lessons continue until the fourth week of rehearsals.

Most excitingly of all, James Fortune of the a capella group The Magnets has been brought in to train the Rioters up to be a choir in the style of the famous university a capella groups Out Of The Blue (from Oxford), or the Swingle Singers (at Yale.) Initially, this is just to get them to bond as a gang, but they're so good at it, and hearing them sing Dizzee Rascal is so hilarious, that we start to think that doing them in the scene changes might be a pretty good idea.

Week Two:

Our second week is still spent around a table, but now we move onto the action of the play itself. Once again reading line by line, we break the play down into events – things that happen in the story that means everyone on stage has to respond to them. Events can be as simple as a new character entering the room, but we often find that the work we did in the previous week allows us to spot things that may appear innocuous to us, but in Posh World actually constitute an event-worthy violation of common codes and practices.



Once we have 'evented' the play, we then go through each event and work out the intention of each character for that unit of action. To illustrate the process look at the extract below from Act 1, Scene 2.

We identified that two main 'events' take place; the first being the moment where Chris the Landlord of the Bull's Head Inn and George a Riot Club member enter the private dining room in the pub and the second George's line 'Might go and sit out'.

We decided for the first event, entering the room, that Chris' intention was to 'get George to acknowledge that the room was satisfactory and met their needs' and that George's intention was to 'get out of the room as soon as he realises he's the first to arrive'.

For the second, George's intention was to go and 'get a pint' while he waited for the other members to arrive, while Chris' was to 'work out why George wanted to leave and was it something to do with the room being badly prepared'.

Over the course of the week we work through every event in the play in this manner, naming the intentions of all those who are on stage and also about to enter. Lyndsey is careful to make sure these are worded in such a way as to always allow the actor to be trying to 'do' something to the room around them, so 'be sad' would be rejected in favour of 'make the room see how sad I am'. This takes quite a while as generally there are at least ten people in the room, but we emerge with a fascinatingly complex picture of all the warring intentions that are present in a scene, and is especially important in helping us remember characters who might not speak during a particular event, but still have to be fully realised in that moment on stage.



Week Three:

We have now moved to an enormous rehearsal room in Clapham and have started the business of putting the show on its feet. Our main focus in these first drafts of scenes is to get the actors to concentrate on the events and intentions and to play them accurately – not to worry about a polished performance, but to get used to turning the corners of intentions as one event becomes another. The focus is all on control and accuracy, and remains so throughout the rehearsal process – we are on a gradual journey of building up more and more detail around the framework of events and intentions, and so Lyndsey reassures the actors that they don't need to worry about giving full performances 'with feeling' at all.



While this goes on throughout the week we set up improvisations of key events that happen before the start of the play and in between scenes so that the actors have very clear images of key moments they talk about as a group. The most enjoyable of these are the Miles and Ed's room trashes. Stage management were brilliant at getting loads of smashable stuff from charity shops and decorating two smaller rooms above our rehearsal room as Ed and Miles' rooms respectively. The Riot Boys were then let loose and we listened to the incredible noise they made as they ripped everything apart. Everyone enjoyed it, but more importantly got very clear pictures of what the trashes were like which lead to much more accuracy in the playing of the scenes.

During this time as well, Penny Dyer, who has been doing voice work with the company has been in to coach the cast on their accents. It is fascinating to see her talk about where the 'Posh' accent lies in the mouth, and she is armed with loads of great exercises to get the cast talking clearly and listening to each other. One of the best is to repeat the gist of the previous character's lines before saying your own, and almost immediately everyone is able to hear the progression of conversations much better.

Week Four:

As we move into week four, we continue doing some improvisations and tightening scenes, but the general focus is on running sections together a bit more – trying to get a sense of the arc of scenes (some of which are very long) and being aware of the larger movement of the story across the course of the play. There is still an emphasis on trying to accurately play the moves from event to event, intention to intention but it is now about trying to put these small details in a bigger context. Lyndsey gets the actors to make a list of the key 15 events that happen to their characters in order to get them to understand this a bit better.



We have our first go at trying to work out what the trash might be like as well – we are trying to find a way to make it witty, not just an exercise in mindless violence, and it seems that an operatic approach is best – possibly with some music sung by the boys.

Week Five:

This is our last week in the rehearsal room, and it is now about stringing the whole play together. We run acts one and two over a couple of days and this allows us to see sections that aren't working so well in relation to the piece as a whole, and so we take them apart and try and tinker with them a bit to make them work. On the Thursday before we break for Easter we have the first full run. It's good to see the whole show, although it's still missing things like the finished trash and the singing. There is a great feeling of at last being aware of what the whole play might feel like for an audience to watch – you spend such a long time working on little details and now there is a chance to get a sense of perspective. During the run there's a massive thunderstorm going on outside and we get very dramatic claps of thunder at key events - it almost feels like a shame the play isn't set on a dark and stormy night!

Week Six:

So we've been teching on set since Tuesday and today is Friday. There's been a lot to sort out this week, as so much of the play couldn't really be worked out till we were in the theatre, the trash being the main one of these. It's all feeling quite exhilarating though and the design and costumes look beautiful. With everyone in their tails, the candles lit on the beautifully laid table and the walls a deep red, the room looks almost like a painting. All of us now are just waiting to see what the audience make of it.

Extract: Act 1 Scene 2

The private dining room at the Bull's Head Inn, set for dinner, but empty at first.

Chris and George enter. George looks around surprised that the room is empty.

Chris You're the first.

George Yeah. Savage.

Chris Well you can tell me if everything's OK– anything you think you'll need you can't see here?

George Uh. Yeah. I'm not really the –
Not really the right chap.

Chris Been to a wedding?

George Uh, no, it's uh. Club regimentals.

I mean it's –

Chris Thought you'd be in business suits, more of a pinstripe thing.

George Sorry?

Chris Young Entrepreneurs.

George Oh yeah.

Chris I thought that'd be, you know. Entrepreneurs *now*.

George Yeah, it's uh. It's retro night. Lovely.

Chris Well, take a pew, make yourself at home.

George looks at a chair, then looks around the room, at a loss.

George Yeah, bit weird. On my own. Might go and sit out –

Chris Whatever you prefer.

Chris ushers George out of the door.

George Have you got a snug?

Arising Questions from the Line by Line Reading:

- Where is the Bull's Head Inn?
- How far is it from Oxford?
- What day does the scene take place?
- What time is it?
- How long has Chris had the private Dining room?
- How much time has passed between scenes 1 and 2?
- Who set the room for dinner and what does it look like?
- What is the club uniform?
- Is George really early or are the others late?
- What's he been doing that day?
- Did James Leighton Masters tell Chris it was Young Entrepreneurs and how did he pass that on to the other Riot Club members?
- How long have they been turning up by themselves to Riot Club functions?
- What's the layout of the pub?
- Does the pub actually have a snug?

- James Yeatman
Assistant Director

5. INTERVIEWS WITH CAST MEMBERS

A. Harry Hadden-Paton, playing Harry Villiers

How would you describe your character?

Harry: Harry is in the second year of the Riot Club, he's the son of a Duke so he is the most aristocratic member, and he scores a ten on womanising, as well, if you were to imagine them all in top trumps. So he comes in, is in the fencing team, sporty, athletic, suave and up for a good time before the responsibilities of inheriting a Duchy take over his life after University.

What drew you to the play?

Harry: Well it's the Royal Court, so...!

I first heard about it about three years ago, when I was asked to do a workshop on it. Theatre Director Peter Gill asked me to do a couple of weeks with him on a similar subject and the Court had commissioned a couple of writers to work on it. Laura had done a draft and we got to do a rehearsed reading of it. The play, as soon as you start reading it, you can't put it down.

Were you cast as the character you first played?

Harry: Yeah, I don't know what that says about me. And obviously a few actors went for it, I had a few friends that went for it and they said that as soon as they read the part they thought of me. Quite bad, because he is a bit of a cad. He doesn't have that much respect for women at this stage in his life. Uh, obviously I'm within him now so I can forgive him, and it's the 21 year old version of me. But I was particularly drawn to him.



So that's when I first heard of the play, and I have had it on my mind ever since, because a play dealing with this class of people isn't and hasn't been done. And for that to happen at the Court is very interesting, because for Public School actors, this is the place to come. It's just really interesting, trying to do a play about this kind of people without trying to satirise them. Actually letting these characters be who they are and without commenting on them.

What are the key themes of the play?

Harry: Right and propriety and the warped sense of ownership and merit. They feel like they deserve to have what they've got. And that's really interesting because my

character's the one that orders a prostitute, for example, and when they realise she is not going to stay it's not the fact that they want a blow job, it's actually the fact that they have paid her, and she owes them. It's propriety.

There is a lot of darkness. And we've found it hard not commenting on the ridiculous behaviour of the characters in performance. We've got to just take it as a play and not put in our opinions of it. It's odd because we've sort of put it into our heads that it's okay to do these things, because you have to, for work. You have to believe in what you're characters are doing, and you have to understand that he is a 21 year old version of a person, he's not fully formed yet. He's probably grown up outside of London on a country estate, and his father's a duke, and he's gone to Eton, and gone to Oxford, so I guess we have to find ways of believing in what they are doing. And if you can go to that place where everything is done for you, then asking the prostitute 'why do you need a break?' becomes plausible because he actually doesn't know.

Did you start preparing before rehearsals?

Harry: Yeah, yeah yeah. I read and read and read it. And to try and get the journey of an individual character when there are twelve people on stage at all times talking, you have to think about your individual journey as one person, one character, and then intertwine it with the rest of the play.

Did you do any background research of your own?

Harry: Yeah. I did a lot at home, and Lyndsey sent us lots of links, I did lots of reading, and I watched Posh Rock and various things on telly, and Boris and Dave, and did a lot of asking around. In another world at a different age I probably knew quite a lot of people like this, so I did a lot of mental thinking.

What were some of the preparation exercises that Lyndsey asked you to do?

Harry: It's all about believing the characters and believing they do what they do, and to try to understand that. So going to Oxford and improvising the initiation test that the new members would have to do to join the club really helped. We actually improvised the whole thing from meeting in a coffee shop to talk about what we were going to do to the bedroom to actually dressing up in character and trashing a 'mocked up' dormitory room. We did that, because it immediately informed the beginning of the play. So there is this history that really happened and that we can be sure of. So that was hugely useful.

When we were in Oxford we visited our respective colleges, got to see the restaurants, the pubs we might hang out in. And I was looking round for clubs. And eventually I ended up in a nightclub, with a few of the others, and we were sitting there having a drink and in walked the Bloomsbury Club, in tails and everything. So that was very useful.

How did you respond to them?

Harry: Just absorption, taking in as much as we could, and talking about it amongst ourselves. And we just saw them! And it was the sense of effortless confidence. Obviously you think 'who do you think you are' but there's part of you that wants to be them! In an awful way, there was something very

attractive about it. They all looked very dashing. They just swanned in, had a word with the bouncer, walked into the VIP room where there was a table waiting for them and just sat down and people came to them. We wondered if they had partly gained a level of confidence from being a group. As individuals we thought they may be very different. We knew we started to feel that way, you know, 'all for one and one for all'. That's what I found really interesting, the difference you feel when there's a group of you, especially as blokes I guess.

What do you like about him?

Harry: I am envious of his confidence. I can sort of feel for him. I feel sorry for him because I've tried to think about what it would be like, at 21 years old, to enter into a world where you inherit thousands of acres, money, money, money, a lot is assumed of him, of his future. The pressure he must be feeling from his parents, from the other aristocracy, the Duke of Wellington, all the Dukes you can think of – you know you feel sorry for him. So you have to like him. Or at least you have to empathise with him, and that's what I'm getting into. He's being loaded with this huge responsibility – and apart from the monetary side of things it must be sad, knowing that your life is going to be a certain way from a very young age.

What is like having Laura in rehearsals?

Oh, great, it's so freeing. Cause you're like 'is he the eldest brother? How many brothers are there?' and she can tell you! I think she's amazing, she just takes it all in and she's a good listener. It's so well written that most of the answers are there. But if you do need an answer it's great to have her there and know what she is thinking.

What have you find exciting or challenging about this role?

Harry: Um, it's the youthfulness and the voice. I'm 28, so it's not a huge gap, but I play older parts usually. So it's finding the youthfulness and the contrast, and we're getting into how drunk are they, and what kind of a drunk are they, and that's difficult, to be drunk onstage, and the voice, because they are, posh, and I might sound quite posh but they are unapologetically posh. I just earlier on went and got myself a coffee, went round the corner for a coffee and I turned into a cockney, and I think most people do that. But these guys don't do that, they get in a taxi and 'Hellair, Sloane Square please'. But it's doing the posh voice that doesn't sound like you're from the 1920s. You have to trust that they do exist.

B. Henry Lloyd-Hughes, playing Dimitri Mitropoulos

What drew you to the play?

Henry: I don't know, I'm trying to shy away from the obvious thing, it being that it's quite an incendiary play, by which I mean the subject matter and the way in which it's dealt with, it puts you right at the heart of people who feel incredibly confident in what they are saying. And the views that they express, whether it's views on class, views on England as a country, as a nation past, present and future, uncompromising. And I think it's always really exciting to

do a play that's close to the bone, you know? And that's why the Royal Court would have chosen it, definitely. I think the theatre has a reputation for choosing things that are more likely to involve three black girls on a council estate with an abortion and a gun but this is no less cutting edge and no less controversial because of the way in which people speak so candidly. I think it's always a massive thrill, not always in the most mature way, to look at characters who are saying things which aren't necessarily right, but some people in the audience might think like that, and challenging those preconceptions are some of the really interesting things about doing plays. Because you can do the classics all you want, but there's nothing more exciting about theatre, as a live medium, having people in the audience go 'Do you reckon my son's like that? Do you reckon my husband's like that, do you reckon I'm like that!?' And I think this is very plugged in, very accurately to a certain class and a certain type of elitist group.

What do you think are the key themes that the play is dealing with?

Henry: I think that that word I just used is probably the best – elitism, the nature of elitism, what it means to achieve, what it means to be elite, whether it's about having the most money, whether it's about coming from the best, bluest blood, you know – aristocracy, whether it's about your status among your equivalents, whether it's about being cash rich, whether it's about being property rich, all these different aspects, and you know, this is a group of people who are debating that, twelve angry men style, round a table, while they try and work out their place in the world. So I think in a weird way it's a coming of age story, but it's a coming of age story seen through the prism of huge amounts of pressure and very strong ideas about identity and elitism and competition.

You went to Oxford University for research – how was that?

Henry: Yeah, it's interesting because I didn't go to University but when I went to school I went to Oxford University on an open day, just because I wanted the day off school. School said 'with your predicted grades I don't think you're actually eligible for Oxford' and I said 'don't worry I'll fluke it', and they weren't going to let me go, but I took the day off school and I went. So I had been once before, and I knew some people, contemporaries who ended up at Oxford. I think it's a slightly magical place. I think the reason why we went there was to get the sense of fraternity within a lofty institution. Because it's one thing to be in a drinking club, or a club within a huge sphere, but we wanted to get the sense of being the big fish in the small pond, and the small pond, one that is incredibly academic and high achieving because that is the level that these people are used to in every aspect of their lives. So it was great, you do get this sense of,....obviously you have these hilarious outfits with tailored tailcoats and everything, but you do need to sit in amongst old buildings a little bit, I think, to soak up the sense of occasion whereby that would be appropriate.

No two views of elitism within the group are the same, but there is a reason why there are so many different people in the play, and that's because everybody is having a slightly different angle and take on where they come from. You know Dmitri is cash rich, above and beyond anyone else in the

club, he's very jet set in a kind of pan-European, private jet kind of way, but he's not an aristocrat, he has no blue blood whatsoever. The group is totally splintered. We are all, throughout the play, trying to come to a consensus, there are moments where we all come together and say, ok we agree on this much, but there are massive bits of the play where things are being debated.

I think as an outsider you will sympathise with some characters more than others. I wouldn't go as so far to say that they are all unlovable, you know they're not all villains. We did a really interesting exercise where we made top trumps of every single character – in silly ways as well, looks, intelligence, aristocracy, money....And everything is a huge sliding scale, you walk into a place and see ten guys all talking in quite posh accents and as an outsider you make a judgment on that. But without giving away too much of the plot, certain people around that table are penniless!

How did you begin creating your character?

Henry: I think it's weird being cast as someone half Greek and half Russian, it's a bit of a masquerade for me because I've lived in London all my life and I am English but happen to look slightly olive-skinned and dark. So I put my feelers out to find people that I know who are of mixed heritage, but also there is a specific European thing that Dmitri brings to the table that is a slightly different flavour of ice cream to the others. And it was really important for me before the process started just to soak up a little bit of that. Because there's a way that the French, or the Spanish or the Greek, even when they're being British, even when they're part of the English Public School system for instance, that they do it almost slightly more English than the English, they are slightly smarter, it is a slightly more polished product. You see it round here as well, and I put my feelers out and I met a guy who was half Greek and eurotrash – I say that in a kind sense in terms of private jets and heliskis and he told me unbelievable stories.

Can you tell us?!

Henry: I met him on the Kings Road, and went to his house, and he said well you know, last year was a crazy year, my friend he is a billionaire, he took a private jet and took us to St Tropez for a weekend, every weekend. Like we would catch the bus, they would catch this private jet to St Tropez. But the other thing is, and this is kind of fascinating for me, is that there are stories that we are doing in this play, that you could go in to that theatre and think 'this is all a bit preposterous, who actually lives like that' and I can look you in the eye, because I have done the research and that is literally scratching the surface. For every story that I tried to do the research for, I found stories that were twice as shocking or controversial.

So what is the agenda for him at the Club?

Henry: For him the agenda is, well it's more of an English thing; it's more of a class thing. Excess is all well and good, but that can be achieved in many other ways for him. His real agenda as far as the club is to cement himself in something that is classically Oxford that typifies English aristocratic excess, rather than generic partying, because he can do that in Ibiza or wherever.

How has the rehearsal process been different to other work that you've done?

Henry: I suppose it has been very different. I can tell you that it's very rare in theatre to get a cast this big all young men, sitting round a table, it's very rare. And I think because of that it's been very methodical, almost clinical research, like seriously, seriously in depth. In many plays I've done research, where essentially you are looking inwards, I mean you look out but you look back in on yourself. So I'd be asked to do a task, or write a letter or something, 'okay this is what I think of so and so' or something and I take that letter and I show it to the director, but essentially that letter is for me. Whereas the process here, by Lyndsey our director is knowing everything about that guy's back story, and that guy's back story and so on, not so much that you know more than the character does, but it's totally clinical, we totally cross reference, so that when that character says something about their country house we know exactly how you feel about it, because you've worked out the strata and the hierarchy, and you know that he says something about his house but actually he's a bit snobby about it. So the cross section is completely established.

What is the relationship with Laura and Lyndsey in rehearsals?

Henry: What they've done is they have created an environment where every single back story is able to be scrutinized and there is an answer if you want it. And for the first two and a half weeks Laura was with us and she is still available. If you have a really specific question, the longest it would be until you got an answer was twenty four hours.

What's been exciting and challenging about this role?

Henry: It's the first time I've played a foreigner, it's the first time that I've been given the luxury of soaking up an entire world or universe. It has been challenging because there has been so much to cross reference, it's been immensely rewarding because you have such a strong feeling of Oxford, the Club, the rules, we've improvised whole other dinners, written complex rule books, we've written rules that don't even get mentioned, the universe is totally there. And it's been a totally immersive process.

How do you think it's going to be when you first perform it?

Henry: It's going to be mad! I've got a strange feeling it's going to be like coming home, with a new experience. We have such a feeling of ownership, such a feeling of what we want to get out of it.

6. INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR, LYNDSEY TURNER

How did the project come about?

Lyndsey: I was working as a trainee director at the Royal Court and Laura Wade was a commissioned writer at the Royal Court and within the space of a month we both went to see the Artistic Director of the theatre and he asked us what kind of things we would be interested in exploring. We both said we would be interested in exploring power and privilege. So he match-made us, put us in a room together with some actors and some stimulus and it began there really, as part of the Royal Court's Rough Cuts which is a scheme where we can try out new ideas and new bit of work in a really low risk, artist friendly, environment.

So what kind of stimulus was used in that workshop?

Lyndsey: Well I used to be a journalist, and I bought a lot of newspaper articles but I also decided that we needed to do some fieldwork, and arranged for us to interview lots of people who might have a relationship with power or privilege so we got our little rucksacks, and our Oyster cards and went to see – for instance – an estate agent who specialises in the sale of eight million pound country houses, to ask him about his work and who he meets and what they're like. We had the social commentator Peter York come and talk to us about the history of the Kings Road, because the theatre is just on the doorstep. We went to see a political editor at one of the newspapers, who was phenomenally useful in telling us how power works at the highest levels, and we went to interview a couple of MPs, who were very generous in giving us their time, and telling us what they think is going on in the country from their perspective.

So out of all this research, how did you settle on this notion of the Riot Club and basing the play on that?

Lyndsey: Well all this was fascinating research in terms of understanding more about how power maps itself onto contemporary Britain, but it wasn't until we suggested a day out in Oxford when we happened upon the metaphor for the play. That day out, we interviewed an awful lot of students, all powerful and privileged in their own ways, but we had a meeting with two chaps in a dining society, that we took in Randolph Hotel, and during the course of that meeting – we were asking them about what they do and why they do what they do – I think it dawned on both Laura and I that there might be a play there. So it started as a general enquiry into power and privilege, but it didn't land for the writer until we met those guys, on that day in that hotel. And got inducted for the first time in their lives, into the private drinking/dining club.

And how much detail did they give you at that time?

Lyndsey: Well they were rather cat and mousish, because the club that they belong to is shrouded in a cloud of secrecy, so we had to play some games just to get the very, very basics out of them. But we got enough to be hooked. And I think when you are talking to someone who has a secret, it is in the nature of humans to become very curious. So then we went off and did our independent digging around and fleshed out more and more about how a

club, an exclusive club might operate. And about a year, into that process, all these stories started breaking in the newspapers about one particular club, that some people who are powerful in this country belonged to when they were younger. And we folded as much as we could mine from that into the piece. But it began as a club of the imagination, even before those stories hit the paper.

Did you and Laura write the script completely collaboratively, or did she go away on her own? How did that process work?

Lyndsey: The first version of the script was written for one of these rough cuts at the Royal Court – it was only half an hour. And it was exactly that – loading Laura up with a bunch of ideas, and she went off and in a week, wrote a thirty minute thing which we put on for three nights at the Court. And that's been our relationship ever since, is that I bring stuff from the world, the odd idea here and there, but I'm not a writer and I never will be, and the play has to happen in the writer's head. My job as far as I see it is kicking the tyres of the play to make sure it's pretty robust, and putting in a lot of (possibly annoying) 'what ifs' for a writer, in the hope that it will stimulate her imagination.

Why do you think you were drawn to this material?

Lyndsey: I think everybody is curious about the stuff that they're not allowed to see. And it's like a red rag to a bull, isn't it, if you stumble across something where it is a closed door policy. I've walked around London with people who say 'you know that's the Garrick Club, or that's the RAC club' and I don't know, because there are no signs saying this is this club, this is that club, but the moment you know they're there you're madly curious about what's happened inside them. So I can only speak for myself here, but I am absolutely fascinated with what privileged means today and the way in which power really works, and settling on the idea of a student dining society, seemed to allow a real exploration of those ideas.

What ideas did you work on with the designer?

Lyndsey: Having lived with the play in my head for about three years before it was programmed and a designer was attached, I had a core sense of what it was and what it wasn't. I had no idea what it looked like, but every time we settled or chucked about an idea I found I knew instantly whether that was the play or wasn't the play. And the guiding principal of the design was to do with the weight that history, heredity and ancestry puts on the shoulders of young men, who can't just tell you about their grandparents but their great grandparents and their great, great grandparents. What is it like to live under a massive weight of history, and to have a responsibility to that history. And what is it like to live in a world where that history doesn't count for as much as it used to? So the idea of framing the play with a portrait of what the first dinner of the Riot Club might look like and contrasting it with the world that these chaps might live in now, that seemed to cut to the heart of what Laura was writing about.

So the people that we perceive as having privilege, do you think they actually have privilege today or not?

Lyndsey: I think that they live increasingly in a world where the underpinnings of their historical privilege are in jeopardy, and growing up in the 1990s, being told that I was living in a classless society, might have some purchase in one way, in understanding why Lily Allen at a party is more likely to make the papers than a princess -

Do you think privilege means the same thing as it used to?

Lyndsey: No, no I don't. And I think what the play does, is look at privilege in a moment of crisis.

What do you think drives the piece?

Lyndsey: It's driven by the unconscious will of ten young men to recapture a moment in the history of this country, where their right to rule was unquestioned. And I think the evening is structured as a pursuit – as something that they don't quite understand themselves, but might equate to a moment in the past when it was okay to be them.

And do you see them destroying themselves within that small group?

Lyndsey: I think that the play offers a wealth of definitions about what this club that they belong to is for. And as soon as you can define what the club is about, another definition comes in, and another definition. So what the club is for remains a fugitive subject throughout, but I think what it does in its final moments is a reversal of expectation. It is very much like the ending of *Lord of the Flies*, when the grown up walks onto the island and looks at the boys and says 'what have you done?' Laura has done something much more perverse, which is a grown up looking at a group of boys and saying 'bravo'.

What do you think the audience will take away from the piece?

Lyndsey: I don't think it's a finger wagging piece with a particular moral, I think it's a massive dramatic what if, what if this is the way that our country really worked, what would it mean? So hopefully, in terms of conversations on the bus home, it might spark some exciting thoughts or some extreme reactions about what goes on behind closed doors.

7. CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Lyndsey Turner, when working with a cast of young actors, feels it's important to find a way to liberate them from trying to explore a scene encumbered by scripts-in-hand. She often uses the technique outlined below to allow the actors to experiment freely with staging the scenes. By using a tape recorder in the early stages of rehearsals, young actors are not physically hindered by focusing on their scripts. The method is based on a technique pioneered by American actor and director, Jeremy Whelan, and it can be adapted easily for use in the classroom.

A Brief Guide to Jeremy Whelan's Instant Acting Technique

Basic Rules

- Black out all stage directions from the script
- Put the tape recorder close enough to the actors to make a clean recording
- Do a sound check
- Do only one take
- Don't rush the reading
- Stay on the script
- Don't make eye contact
- Don't try to act
- Never use the same recording twice

First Run Through

- 'Fake' a set and props
- Concentrate on the three basic moves:
 - Away from – repelled
 - Toward – impelled
 - To remain – compelled
- Don't perform
- Don't deny anything, but don't work for anything
- Don't move your lips
- Don't try to remember what you're going to say next
- Don't negate any impulses
- Simply focus on responding to the emotional stimulus of the script
- Maintain contact with your partner
- Don't be literal in expressing the repels-impels-compels
- Focus on your emotions (i.e. how you feel saying or hearing a line)
- Maintain your concentration
- Be free to make hand gestures, body gestures and verbal sounds without speech
- Don't stop for any reason once you start the tape

Between the First and Second Tapings

- Think about the contact you made with your partner
- Don't analyse the last run through too much
- Don't fall in love with the way you said or did something the first time
- Go deeper – there is better in you

Second Run Through

- Tape the scene again and act to it as you play it back

Between the Second and Third Tapings

- Think about the organic blocking you happened upon

Third Run Through

- Perform a basic mirror exercise in super slow motion
- Start the tape
- When you hear your voice, you lead and your partner mirrors you
- Follow the repels-impels-compels but don't break the mirror
- The movement can be literal or stylised
- Tape the scene again
- This time the person speaking is the follower in the mirror exercise
- Tape the scene again
- This time, nobody leads or follows
- The actors will give and take, working in sync with each other

Fourth Run Through

- Tape the scene again and run it on the set
- The director pauses the tape playback
- The actors use that time to penetrate the emotion generated by what was just said or heard
- The pause may take the place of a 'beat'
- The director can spend up to three minutes on a pause
- Nothing is said during the pause

Fifth Run Through

- Tape the scene again and play it back while the actors act to it

Sixth Run Through

- Try the scene without the tape recording
- The only crime is breaking character before the scene is over
- Stay on the script and don't start improvising
- If you skip a section, keep going
- If you find yourself looping back on a section, keep running it and move onwards
- Actors may find that they have memorised between 60% and 90% of the dialogue

8. EDUCATION AT THE ROYAL COURT

As the Royal Court is a centre for excellence and innovation in theatre-making, 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 demystify the craft of making theatre. Royal Court Education activities include:

Workshops for productions

INSET workshops for teachers

Education Matinees

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 pages of the Royal Court web-site, www.royalcourttheatre.com. If you would like more information, please e-mail Lynne Gagliano, Education Associate, at lynnegagliano@royalcourttheatre.com or phone 020 7565 5174.

For more information about Royal Court productions and the Young Writers Programme, please visit our web-site, www.royalcourttheatre.com.