

Wastwater

by Simon Stephens



BACKGROUND PACK

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1. ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

The Royal Court Theatre presents

Wastwater

by **Simon Stephens**

First performance at the Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Downstairs,
Sloane Square, London, Tuesday 5 April, 2011.

in order of appearance

Harry

Frieda

Mark

Lisa

Sian

Jonathan

Dalisay

Tom Sturridge

Linda Bassett

Paul Ready

Jo McInnes

Amanda Hale

Angus Wright

Jasmine Chen

Candice Chen

Director

Designer

Lighting Designer

Sound Designer

Casting Directors

Assistant Director

Production Manager

Stage Manager

Deputy Stage Manager

Assistant Stage Manager

Stage Management

Work Placement

Costume Supervisor

Set built by

Set painted by

Katie Mitchell

Lizzie Clachan

Lucy Carter

Gareth Fry

Amy Ball & Julia Horan

Ellen McDougall

Paul Handley

Michael Dennis

Pippa Meyer

Megan Kearney

Natascha Kurzreiter

Jackie Orton

Miraculous Engineering

Kerry Jarrett

2. ABOUT THE WRITER**SIMON STEPHENS**

Simon Stephens' last play at the Royal Court was Motortown in 2006. His previous plays for the Royal Court include Country Music, Herons and Bluebird. His plays elsewhere include Punk Rock at the Royal Exchange, Manchester and Lyric Hammersmith, Pornography at the Edinburgh Festival, Harper Regan at the National Theatre and On the Shore of the Wide World at the Royal Exchange, Manchester.



photo by Peter Kindersley

Time Out Interview, 21 March 2011

Katie Mitchell is directing Simon Stephens's new play 'Wastwater' at the Royal Court. Andrzej Lukowski finds out more.

She is Katie Mitchell, the divisive director whose trademark psychological rigour, disorienting use of video and iconoclastic reworkings of classic texts has led to her being branded an auteur. She is big in Germany.

He is Simon Stephens, the playwright whose string of acclaimed works ('On the Shore of the Wide World', 'Pornography', 'Punk

Rock') explore the blankness and violence that underpins human intimacy. He is also big in Germany.

Together they are... giggling like schoolchildren.

In truth, the puppyish Stephens is known for being affable, and if Mitchell's idea of small talk consists of a stream of consciousness that starts with miso soup and ends with the end of the human race, she is very personable too. But when Stephens bounds in, her face lights up. It's obvious they take great pleasure in each other's company. That's lucky, as they are in the middle of rehearsals for Stephens's new play 'Wastwater', an unsettling triptych about a trio of relationships unfolding around the periphery of Heathrow. It's the first time Mitchell has directed one of his plays, but it's apt that she's doing so for the Royal Court as that's where the pair first met - her as associate director, him in the literary department.

This was a decade ago, and Stephens, now 40, confesses to finding script meetings under then artistic director Ian Rickson and assorted gathered Court intelligentsia, quite 'terrifying'. You'd perhaps think Mitchell would have been a source of his nerves, but quite the contrary. 'Oh, I found those meetings very, very frightening,' she nods. 'Because we had people like Max [Stafford-Clarke]...'

'And Stephen Jeffreys!' adds Stephens. 'Oh my God, did he talk about plays. What you had to do was read two, three, four plays a week and then go to this meeting and advise the artistic director as to whether or not they should be programmed. And I've always said that I don't consider myself to be an intellectual, but there've rarely been times in my life when I've felt just downright stupid. I felt that Katie was an ally. That she was maybe as frightened of the ferocious rigour and intelligence as I was.'

Perhaps the pair's comparative down-to-earthness has helped them to carve out idiosyncratic artistic territories. Certainly 'Wastwater' is unmistakably a Simon Stephens play. It takes its name from England's deepest lake. 'Wastwater is defined by its depth,' explains Stephens, 'and also by the fact that it's nestled under the shadow of mountainous screes. It's never in complete daylight, so there's always shadow and darkness somewhere. It felt an appropriate metaphor for darkness and depth in a world that appears to be still.'

In part one of 'Wastwater', a mother and son part, awkwardly and at length, as he prepares to catch a bus to Heathrow in order to get on a plane for Canada. Terrible events in his past are alluded to, and his future is impossible to imagine. In part two, a pair of strangers meet to have sex at a posh airport hotel: precisely how or why this scenario has come about is never made entirely clear. And in the Kafka-esque final section, a man negotiates the purchase of a child in a warehouse on Heathrow's outskirts. The characters have

awkward conversations of unnerving intimacy, but behind the words, lives go unresolved. That's the script - but this is not a director who does vagueness.

'I always feel,' says Mitchell, 'that if you're the director of the first outing of a play, then you have a profound responsibility to share the play accurately and precisely, because sometimes you can negatively fingerprint a play and maybe ruin its future life. We did a fantastic exercise that made Simon laugh a great deal, in which I ran through each of the scenes and wrote a list of questions about the back history of everything that happened. There must have been about 40, 50, 60 questions per scene.'

'It was an extraordinary rigorous psychological examination of the landscape of those characters,' says Stephens, 'almost to the extent that it felt at times that your psychological interrogation of the characters was more rigorous than mine. But I think it's important for me to retain intuition in my writing. Sometimes I write my characters saying things or behaving in a way that I hadn't anticipated them doing before the moment of writing.'

One of the most curious features of 'Wastwater' is that none of it is set inside an airport. Yet airports are constantly alluded to, and Heathrow hovers in the background of each scenario. It's steeped in the sense of limbo and liminality that airports instil, the characters detached from any past or future outside the scenario.

'I'm a big fan of airports,' explains Stephens. 'We all love flying, but, environmentally, we really need to stop, and I think there's something quite dramatically charged in that paradox which begins to define the rest of the play for me. These characters are kind of living with an attempted civility in the face of catastrophe, this is I think what the play is kind of interrogating.'

As for what 'Wastwater' will look like, rehearsals are at an early stage. But Mitchell is enthused about working with set designer Lizzie Clachan, co-founder of Shunt and godmother to Stephens's oldest son. She can also reveal that 'Wastwater' will come without her trademark use of video.

'The poor Germans are going to be so disappointed', chuckles Stephens.

3. SYNOPSIS OF WASTWATER

All scenes are at 9pm, 25th June, 2010. It has been raining heavily and the rain stops. There is a strange light in the sky.

1

The scene is set in Sipson, a small village on the edge of Heathrow airport. Harry is Frieda's foster child. Today he is leaving, aged 21, to go to Canada to work as a Junior Marine Scientist research Orcas (killer whales). It's 9pm, and he has to leave the house to get the bus to the airport at 9.30pm. Just before the scene starts, Harry has left Frieda's old farmhouse where he lives, and gone down to the bottom of her garden, climbed over a wall and is standing in a disused greenhouse. This was a haunt for him and his best friend Gavin when they were at school together. Gavin was killed in a car crash when Harry was 17, and Harry was in the passenger seat. Although both of them were drunk, Harry blames himself a bit for not stopping Gavin getting into the car. He has come to the greenhouse to say goodbye to Gavin. Frieda finds him here and is worried that he is going to be late for his flight, and also that there won't be time for her to say goodbye to him properly. Harry shares some of his thoughts about leaving this place forever with Frieda. She tells him not to go. Frieda hasn't had any foster children since Harry, and he has been his favourite. Before he came to her, he tried to commit suicide in a barn nearby. Frieda tells him never to hate himself, and tells him she did her best to be a mother to him.

2

Lisa and Mark meet at 9pm at the Crowne Plaza Hotel near Heathrow airport. They don't know each other well: they met at a BBQ ten days ago. Lisa is married to a man called Andrew, who she met at Narcotics Anonymous while recovering from her heroin addiction. Lisa is a police officer, but also has a history of working as a porn star. She has an appetite for violent sex, which she is hoping to get from Mark. Mark is a teacher, and is married to his childhood sweetheart, Clare. He is a failed artist, and taught at the school that Gavin and Harry went to. Mark was very impressed with Gavin's talent, and thought it a terrible tragedy when he was killed. He wants to have sex with Lisa but does not expect her to tell him about her past. When she does, and she asks him to hit her, he isn't sure how to respond.

3

Jonathan arrives at a warehouse near Heathrow having received a call from a man called Alain, to come there and bring £31,000 in cash. This is because he and his wife were trying to adopt a child, when several attempts at IVF failed. They didn't qualify for adoption, because his wife, Fiona had been clinically depressed, so they had started to look into illegal adoption. They decided not to go ahead when they were told the child they were buying would be addicted to heroin when she arrived. However, the gang who were organising the adoption can't afford to lose the deal, so they persuade Jonathan to bring the money to the warehouse. He is met by Sian, who was also fostered by Frieda. She was Frieda's most

difficult foster child, and Harry worries about the effect she can have on Frieda. Sian interrogates Jonathan, and reveals to him that her and Alain, and their co-worker Stephen, have been watching his every move. Jonathan tells her he is no longer with Fiona, and that they no longer wish to adopt. Sian tells him there is a child on her way to them, and that Jonathan has to take her. She makes Jonathan see that he is going to look like a paedophile or criminal because of how far along the illegal adoption route he went, and that therefore he has no choice. Jonathan is terrified, and hands over the money. The child he has bought, illegally trafficked from the Philippines, is brought in by Alain and Sian and left with Jonathan.

Ellen McDougall
Assistant Director



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Linda Bassett as Frieda and Tom Sturridge as Harry (left) Paul Ready as Mark and Jo McInnes as Lisa

4. NOTES FROM THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR'S REHEARSAL DIARY

Rehearsal Diary: Week One

We started day one of rehearsals by reading pre-prepared character biographies that Katie had prepared, based on interviews with Simon, the script, and background research. They start in the year the character is born, and describe key events, their family history,

and the more detailed moments leading up to the start of the play. As we read them, we wrote down questions the actors had about the characters: these are sometimes to do with gaps in the biography – for example, does my character have brothers or sisters?, or to do with dates – for example, how long was my character married for?

The second day we discussed the themes of the play, and we agreed they could be summarised in the following 4 categories: Family and Nurture, the Destruction of the Species, Love, and Death. All the characters in the play have a strong relationship with these ideas. Katie asked the actors to prepare 'slice of life' improvisations: these are short moments in an actors' own life, which speak to, or have a relationship with a theme in the play. The theme we started with was Family and Nurture. The actors were asked to share these with each other, and we discussed how complicated family love can be: how damaging a parent's criticism can be to a child, or how much or little parents and children can share or hide from one another. These brought up interesting questions about characters in the play: for example, what is the difference between the relationship between a foster mother/child as opposed to a biological mother/child?

Later in the week, having explored the character biographies in more detail, the actors were asked to spend a few minutes doing a simple activity, in a specific time and place, as their character. Angus Wright, who is playing Jonathan, chose to do some DIY in his house, listening to the two pieces of music Jonathan is associated with the play: Messiaen, Music for the End of Time, and then the Arctic Monkeys, while Linda Bassett, who is playing Frieda, filled out an assessment form for one of her foster children.

We then started to work on the text, notating events and intentions in the scenes. An intention is a simple description of what a character wants, or is trying to get from the other people in the scene, for example, Frieda's first intention in the story is 'to get Harry to realise she's been looking for him'. An event is when everything changes in the room, and both character change their intention as a result of it. A clear example of this might be a fire alarm going off in the middle of the lesson: before this point, everyone in the room would have an intention to learn/to teach or something similar. After the fire alarm goes off, their intentions might change to something like 'to make everyone get out of the room safely'.

Linda Bassett, playing Frieda, realised that there were a few aspects of working as a foster mother she wanted to know about. We managed to find a few people who work as foster carers, who agreed to speak to Linda on the phone about their work. Linda was

able to ask them questions like 'what is the first thing you do when a new foster child arrives?', to give her a clearer understanding of her character.

Ellen McDougall
Assistant Director



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Angus Wright as Jonathan (left) Amanda Hale as Sian

5. ABOUT THE SET DESIGN

Wastwater is a play in three parts. Each part has stage directions describing the setting (below). Imagine you are the designer for the play.

- 1 What sort of atmosphere do you think the writer would like to create in each space?
- 2 How would your set work to create the different feel of each place?
- 3 What colours would you use?
- 4 How would you light each space to enhance the atmosphere?

5 Would you give certain elements of each set prominence over other elements and how would you achieve this?

1

A field on the other side of a fence at the foot of a large garden of a converted farm house outside Sipson in Middlesex.

2

A room at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, Heathrow Airport.

It's a modern, rather beautiful room.

It has a large bed.

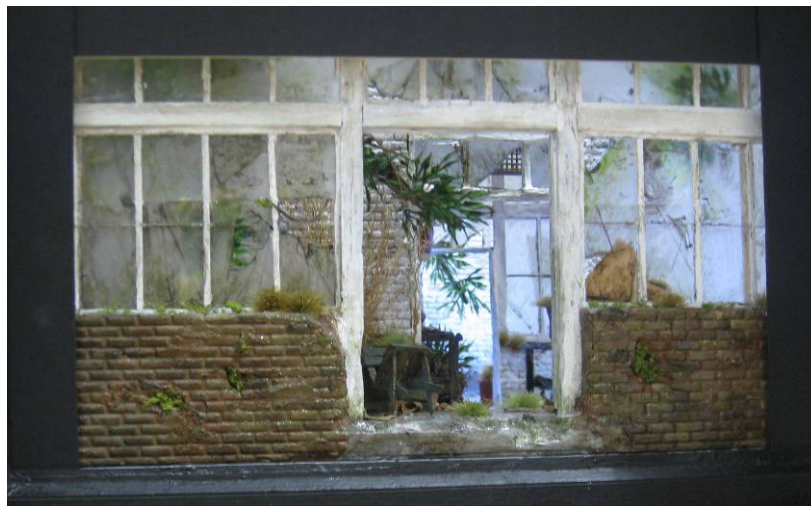
There is a large plasma screen television. A large screen for a computer. A digital radio. A large window behind beautiful curtains.

3

A deserted warehouse on the peripheries of Heathrow Airport.

There is a desk with a clipboard and a pen on it, two chairs, a bucket.

When you have discussed this, possibly making some rough drawings, have a look at the photographs of the model boxes on the next page and discuss how your designs differed. Do you think your ideas would work better than the ideas shown by the model boxes? What would you change?





6. RESEARCH

In order to help the actors imagine their characters' circumstances and backstory in as much detail as possible, the assistant director was set the task of researching the key terms and issues that arise in the play. Before rehearsals began, the director, Katie Mitchell, gave the assistant a list of research questions for each section of Wastwater. Ellen brought the research into rehearsals, so the actors could use the information to deepen their understanding of the world each character inhabits.

I. Heathrow Airport

Heathrow facts: 2009

What time do the planes start flying in the morning?

6am

What time do the planes stop flying at night?

11.30pm. Between 11.30 and 6am, there are 16 flights, which land or take off.

There is an average total 1250 flights landing or taking off per day. In summer, there are more flights, so there maybe higher numbers than this in June, for example.

How often would the planes fly over Sipson in any given day, and at what intervals?

An Easterly day, for example 23rd June 2009:

Arrivals (from 4.30am) 672

Departures 661

Average is roughly 32 per hour, so 1 every 2 minutes.

A westerly day (Mon 22nd June, 2009):

Arrivals 669

Departures 671

Average is one every 3.5-4 minutes.

How far is Sipson from the airport?

From the village to the edge of the Heathrow airport land, its about a 15 minute walk down Sipson Way to Bath Road, or a 5 minute drive.

How loud are the planes when they fly overhead at Sipson?

They are between 55 and 63 decibels according to the map on the Hillingdon Council Website. The governments' acceptable levels are deemed to be 52-57 decibels.

The consultation uses data suggesting people get annoyed at 57 decibels but a new study suggests the level has reduced to 50 decibels, meaning more than two million people will be in the area affected by Heathrow noise, ten times the current number.

II. Care and

Fostering

What is the procedure and time scale about children taken into care? What happens and where do they go once taken out of family home? How long until they are fostered and how are the children allocated to foster parents?

Foster Care Associates (0800 023 4561) have sent through an info pack for prospective foster carers which includes case studies and FAQs about the process, and types of fostering.

It varies depending on the specific case, but the basic process is the following:

- local authority social worker makes a decision to remove a child from their birth-parents

- the fostering agency then become involved to match the child with a foster carer they have available
- the child is then either taken into residential units while their case is assessed, or may be placed straight into a foster home temporarily during assessment if there is one available
- the local authority decide whether it is a long or short term case – sometimes there is hope that the birth family may be able to improve their situation and the child might be returned to them after this has happened. In other cases they are more permanently removed and the agency would be asked to look for a long-term foster carer.

Source:

http://www.adviceguide.org.uk/index/your_family/family/children_and_local_authority_care.htm (information on how children are taken into care)

And how is that fostering monitored?

Becoming a foster carer involves a 12-16 week process in which you are assessed by your local authority. Children have a local authority social worker who visits roughly every 6 weeks, but not always that often. Foster parents are not directly overseen by the local authority and are expected to keep records about the children, including any specific incidents that occur.

And how long is it normal for children to stay with foster parents?

This depends on the reason the children need looking after. It can be a day, a week, months or years, although the average is about three to six months. Children may come and go: they don't necessarily stay until they are 18.

What are the key reasons that a child be taken into care and fostered?

From DirectGov:

A court can only make a care order if it is sure that:

- the child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm
- the harm is caused by the child's parents
- the harm would be caused because of insufficient care being given to the child by the parents in the future
- the child is likely to suffer harm because they are beyond parental control

Source: <http://www.hillingdon.gov.uk/index.jsp?articleid=8661> – (basic information on becoming a foster carer in Hillingdon)

III. Child trafficking

Trafficking in children is a global problem affecting large numbers of children. Some estimates have as many as 1.2 million children being trafficked every year. There is a demand for trafficked children as cheap labour or for sexual exploitation. Children and their families are often unaware of the dangers of trafficking, believing that better employment and lives lie in other countries.

Child trafficking is lucrative and linked with criminal activity and corruption. It is often hidden and hard to address. Trafficking always violates the child's right to grow up in a family environment. In addition, children who have been trafficked face a range of dangers, including violence and sexual abuse. Trafficked children are even arrested and detained as illegal aliens.

Some facts:

- UNICEF estimates that 1,000 to 1,500 Guatemalan babies and children are trafficked each year for adoption by couples in North America and Europe.
- Girls as young as 13 (mainly from Asia and Eastern Europe) are trafficked as "mail-order brides." In most cases these girls and women are powerless and isolated and at great risk of violence.
- Large numbers of children are being trafficked in West and Central Africa, mainly for domestic work but also for sexual exploitation and to work in shops or on farms. Nearly 90 per cent of these trafficked domestic workers are girls.
- Children from Togo, Mali, Burkina Faso and Ghana are trafficked to Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Cameroon and Gabon. Children are trafficked both in and out of Benin and Nigeria. Some children are sent as far away as the Middle East and Europe.

http://www.unicef.org/protection/index_exploitation.html

IV. Adoption

In brief – from Adoption Agency Interview:

Adopters contact the adoption agency. They then arrange a visit by social workers, and run all kinds of vetting checks, like CRBs.

Basic requirements:

- Age isn't a concern as long as one of the people is under 40.
- If it is a couple, they must have stopped trying IVF for 2 years.
- There is no financial stipulation.
- **Medicals are very important – health requirements are:**
 - 1. No smoking**
 - 2. No obesity (often women with failed pregnancies can put on weight as food is a source of comfort).**
 - 3. Men are checked for signs of testicular cancer.**
 - 4. Anything that might reduce your life expectancy.**

Who are the children who need adopting?

There are around 4,000 children across the UK needing adoption every year. These children are from a great variety of ethnic and religious backgrounds.

Many of these children are of school age and over half of them are in groups of brothers and sisters who need to be placed together.

There are disabled children and children whose future development is unclear. Some children will have been abused and/or neglected and all will have experienced moves and uncertainty and their resulting behaviour may be challenging.

Who can adopt?

- You have to be over 21, happy to make space in your life and home for a child, patient, flexible and energetic, and determined to make a real difference to a child's life, for a lifetime.
- Some people think about adoption but never look into it further – possibly because they are over 40 and think they'll be ruled out. But they are wrong, there is no upper age limit. Agencies are looking for adopters who have the physical and mental energy to care for demanding children, and whose lifestyle suggests they will still have that energy when the child is a teenager, or young adult. Older children are among those children who wait the longest so adoption agencies are keen to hear from people who can give a permanent and loving home to an older child.
- A record of offences will need to be carefully looked into but, apart from some offences against children, will not necessarily rule someone out.
- **Everyone has to have a medical examination and health issues will need to be explored.**
- People from all ethnic origins and religions can adopt. Ideally, a new family should meet all a child's emotional, identity, health and development needs. In BAAF's view, practice experience indicates that children do best when brought up in a family that reflects their ethnic and racial identity as closely as possible. In part, this is informed by reports from black and minority ethnic adopted adults who grew up with families who did not match their ethnic and racial identity, describing difficulties in belonging to any community outside of their immediate family. What this means in practice is that vigorous efforts are made to find a family that reflects the child's individual identity. Given the profile of prospective adopters, this is not always achievable. In these instances, social workers will have to make a decision about when to consider alternative families in order to minimise delay for the child. Children would then be placed with families that best match most of their needs, even if this means they are of a different ethnic group.
- Disabled people are not excluded and sometimes experience of disability will be positively welcomed.
- A single person, or one partner in an unmarried couple - heterosexual, lesbian or gay - can adopt. Since 30 December 2005 unmarried couples in England and Wales can apply to adopt jointly.

How do people get approved to adopt?

It usually takes at least six months for social workers from an adoption agency to get to know prospective adopters, assess them and help prepare them for the task ahead. Confidential enquiries will be made of the local social services or social work department and the police.

Applicants will be examined by their GP and will be asked to provide personal references from at least two friends.

The agency's independent adoption panel will consider a report on the application and recommend whether or not applicants should be approved as adopters who will be given the opportunity to meet the panel.

Source: <http://www.baaf.org.uk/>

7. CAST INTERVIEWS

I. Interview with Tom Sturridge who plays Harry

What excited you about Wastwater when you first read it?

I've only ever done one play before. Emotionally it was quite operatic. It's about a boy losing his mind and ending up killing his friends. What is interesting about this and scary at the same time is the opposites. Everything was underneath: I had to think about making a banal conversation between two people dramatic.

How have you and the director Katie Mitchell approached working on your character?

We extracted every concrete fact from the script. For example, how long he's been with the Frieda character, there are certain dates in the text: details about school; about other people, like Sian. We used anything we could create a structure from. After that we tried to find what could be a psychologically accurate way of connecting these points.

Katie analyses the text by identifying the events in each scene. Could you describe this working method in a bit more detail?

An event in the script is, I believe, a moment which alters the intention of every character in the scene. For example, if the phone rings, it changes our intentions. Should I answer it? Should you? It affects both of us. And there is a link between us. But if my mother had just died, though, that would only affect me.

How would you, at this mid-rehearsal point, describe your character's relationship with Frieda?

She is my foster-mother. I am a boy who grew up in an abusive (from the point of neglect) family. She's the person I'm most intimate with in the world but the relationship is borne of my history so it doesn't have the same intimacy as a mother.

Are you as close to her as she is to you?

Yes, but I'm not as articulate about it.

In terms of backstory, how did you develop this for your character. Was that something that Katie handed to you?

She had prepared something but it was by extracting as many facts as possible from the script and then tying those facts together in the most psychologically accurate way. Nothing was pulled out of thin air! Anything major that wasn't there we created by instinct.

Did you use the backstory to do improvisations?

Yes, something she likes to do which is really helpful, is basically whenever you have a memory within the script (which is

constantly), we tried to improvise what you're thinking about. For example I talk about my friend Gavin, who died in a car crash. We improvised moments of our friendship; improvised the moment I was told he'd died at the hospital; improvised the car itself. Several different things. It became involuntary that when Gavin's name was mentioned, I automatically remembered those memories which is testament to the talent of the other people in the cast who created them with me.

Did you do any research on fostering? What role did that issue play?

The assistant director helped us filter the most useful information. What was important to Simon was how middle-class my character is, which I didn't realise at the beginning, I was doing it totally differently. We had to find a route into understanding why someone from a middle-class background would end up in foster care, not because someone from that background can't have an awful life, but that someone from a background with money and a better life might be better at covering their tracks and perhaps better at the structure of deceit. So for me, the research was finding stories that were connected to that. The thing that kept coming up was neglect. Usually it was alcoholic parents, single parents, children not being looked after; not being fed, not being cleaned and not being washed and not knowing the basic ways of looking after themselves. Right down to the basics. Not knowing that when you've worn a tee-shirt for two months, you should probably wash it.

Apart from the narrative threads, how do you think the three stories are connected? In terms of ideas? Is there one thing that drives the play?

There are thematic ideas which come up consistently. Family, love, death and the smell of impending doom. I haven't watched the other two, which is interesting. I would imagine that if you watched the play, intimacy would be a word that would kind of haunt it. Different ways people try to be close to other people. I think that's what I would feel. It's astonishing to be here almost at the end of rehearsal and to have no idea what the play you are doing is about, simply because two-thirds of it are in a locked room to which I don't have the key!

Does intimacy drive the play then?

It doesn't drive it. What drives it is the establishment of identity. There are moments in your life when you define who you are. Suddenly you're alone in your life and you need to establish who you are.

What would you say you've enjoyed most about the process?

I've only done one play before – Punk Rock, also by Simon Stephens – I've no idea what a rehearsal process is. I have had

nothing to compare it with so I'm just assuming this is how you do it. It's immensely satisfying to sit around with intelligent people and talk about the world in a serious way.

II. Interview with Amanda Hale who plays Sian

When you first read *Wastwater*, what excited you or interested you about the play?

I read it a long time ago in another incarnation. It was when I was doing another of Simon's plays, *Pornography*. He mumbled something about having a draft and would I give my feedback. I said I'd love to. It made me feel like the first time I heard the band My Bloody Valentine. It had a physical effect on me. When I read it I felt really hyper-aware about how easily we can harm each other and how just by being on this earth we harm things. We just can't help it. The reasons why we are here are also the very reasons why we destroy each other. Our need to connect with people is what fuels us through life but it's also what causes the most damage, but we have to keep doing it. Just moving around the earth, we need to move, we need to explore, but we're killing the planet. It's being pulled apart.

And how do you and Katie work together in approaching your character? What's been your working method?

I've had a gap since I last worked with Katie. You're spoiled when you work with Katie because she is so rigorous about going through the biography of the character and up to the point of the play's action.

Is that a communal exercise or does she come into rehearsals with that first?

Because we've only got four weeks rehearsal and it's like doing three plays, she came with a lot of it in place. In the first week, people would say this doesn't seem to ring true; this isn't right; so we really refined those to make them specific and believable. I came having worked on the character for months and we had to negotiate what works and what doesn't.

Was there some common ground?

Yes, but there were some areas where what Katie came up with was much better.

Once you have the biography, how do you then work? How do you use them in rehearsal?

The whole point of the biography is to understand the character. There are moments when my character talks about her marriage – a huge shock – her history of being fostered. If you don't have a clear idea of the through-line of those events through your lifespan, they can become just speeches floating around in isolation with no layers underneath. The biog gives it so much life. You might be

able to get away with not having to do that if you're doing one take in a film, but if you're doing it every night for a month, you're going to run out of ideas if you haven't imagined everything so specifically. That's what takes up your brain power in rehearsal, is imagining as vividly as you can every detail. You're trying to fill a whole life. This character is 25 and I'm filling up 25 years in four weeks. Even if I looked at this for 2 years I'd never fill all the gaps, but the attempt makes it much richer than it would be.

In rehearsal, Katie was asking you to imagine vivid and detailed pictures of events in your character's past. Do you find that a helpful way to work?

I couldn't do it if I didn't have that help. I did a play called *Our Class* at the National about a year and a half ago and it was about the nature of memory and how we tell stories about our life. The rehearsal process was interesting – the director had worked with Katie before. It made such a difference. That was a run of five months and to have those pictures in your head every night made it clearer. You have flashes. You don't have documentary type recall, but you have images, senses, sounds, smell and you remember odd things and it's because of what your senses are recalling. You're not just an actor.

What kind of research did you need to do? Apart from the biographies? Your story deals with child trafficking -that must have made for very grim research.

Yes, it was dark. I did heaps as I knew I was going to do it so long ago. I read lots. My internet history is so twisted! I'm either a terrorist or a paedophile. I read about people trafficking, child trafficking and inter-country adoption, mental illness and fostering, the care system. First-hand accounts of abuse because Sian's been abused. I sort of got addicted to it, I've had four months to research, which is quite a luxury.

The character Frieda has fostered you. There's an incident, before the play begins, when Sian leaves. How did you decide what the incident might have been?

We talked about it a lot as a trio with Tom's character. We improvised what that incident was and talked about our relationship and the ongoing contact that Sian and Frieda have had, where Sian has a fantasy phone call with her every night which she never did but Katie and Tom decided that it was true. We decided what was really interesting. All those ideas give the audience more colour and detail.

Apart from narrative ideas which link the three pieces, what theme do you think connects them?

I think it is how brutally we can hurt each other and how all the characters feel they are aware of the end of the world. Setting it in

and around Heathrow, in Sipson, within the context of the world, the whole world becomes Sipson. It feels like they are all more attuned to the catastrophe that's on its way.

Did you discuss why each scene is happening at the same point and why it is near Heathrow?

Simon is obsessed with Terminal 5! He wanted the sound of the planes passing over. Like a bell tolling. The characters are attuned to the fact that they don't have much time. Time is running out. The twilight of life. The sound of the planes won't be naturalistic. It will be heightened. In our scene planes passing over are referred to as an 'unholy noise'. We went to Sipson and it's interesting, it depends which side of the airport you're on as to how much noise you hear. They were landing and taking off. It depended on the direction of the wind and where the open space was. It sounded like a bird calling, a mechanical bird screaming. Others sounded recognisable, like a big machine taking off. I don't know how people can live that close. At least they don't fly all night! We went to a warehouse which was the idea of the first scene. People were immune to the noise. They switched off.

What are you hoping the audience will take away from the play?

Simon doesn't write plays with messages. I think it will be a heightened awareness. Maybe how fragile we all are and how fragile the earth is and how much time we have left and what you do with the time you have left.

8. CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Drama Exercises

KATIE MITCHELL'S PROCESS AS A DIRECTOR

In her diary, the Assistant Director, Ellen McDougall, speaks of the biographies that Katie Mitchell prepares for the cast prior to rehearsals starting. These are an essential way for the cast to gain access to the world of the character before the action of the play begins. The biographies are then used to build the backstory of the character and through a process of improvisation, the actors start to create the reality of the person they are playing.

You're going to look at the biographies of the characters Frieda and Harry. They each have separate biographies for their individual characters, but what you will concentrate on here is their joint history. Think about what brings them together. When do they first meet? How old are they? What has happened beforehand?

Timeline

- 1984 Frieda (35) buys and moves into converted farmhouse in Sipson
- 1985
- 1986 Terminal 4 opens at Heathrow
- 1987 Harry born in Sipson (August)
- 1987
- 1988 Frieda's mother dies of dementia
 - Harry's mother does not toilet train Harry properly. (This is to be a problem for many years for him.)
- 1989 Harry (4) begins looking at airplanes and counting them. His father talks about the planes and airport with him.
- 1990 Harry (5) starts primary school in Sipson. He develops hayfever. He refuses to put his socks on (The habit of being sockless develops into adulthood).
- 1991 Harry (6) develops a condition where his bladder leaks a bit.
- 1992 Frieda gets her first computer
- 1993
- 1994
- 1995
- 1996
- 1997
- 1998 Sian (14) comes to live with Frieda.
- 1999 Harry (12) starts secondary school. His unhappiness is chronic. One day after school he sets fire to a barn (in a field which adjoins Frieda's farmhouse).

- He loves ecology at school.
 - He meets Gavin Berkshire and develops a strong bond with him.
- 2000 Harry (13) gets into more trouble shoplifting and is arrested.
- Sian (16) leaves Frieda's foster care
- 2001 Frieda gets the files for her next foster child, Harry.
- Harry (14) moves into Frieda's house as her foster child.
 - Frieda meets Harry's best friend Gavin Berkshire.
 - Frieda helps Harry deal with his toilet training.
 - Frieda gives Harry pocket money.
- 2002 Frieda goes to Sian's wedding
- 2003 Harry (16) and Gavin start sixth form studies.
- 2004 Frieda buys a small second hand car.
- Gavin dies in a car crash. Harry (17) feels responsible because he didn't stop him driving when drunk.
- 2005 August Harry has his 18th birthday.
- Harry starts at Reading University.

II. Events and Intentions

Katie Mitchell and the cast analysed each scene of the play in terms of 'events' and 'intentions'. This helped the actors to discover what drives the action and how the actors' motives change in response to an event. An event is a moment when everyone's intentions change within a scene.

Here's an example of an 'event':

Imagine a normal rehearsal situation, in which the director is explaining an idea to the actors. The director's intention would be something like 'to make the idea clear to the actors' and the actors' intentions would be something like 'to reassure the director they understand'. An event would be, for example, the fire alarm going off. Everyone's intentions would change in response to the fire alarm (to eg. 'to make sure everyone gets out of the room safely'), so it would be classified as an event.

On the following page, you will find an extract of the script, notated with the events and intentions that the director and actors decided on in rehearsals.

Event 1: F & H hear mobile phone go off

F: to let H know it's OK to take a text

H: to make F aware the text is important

Event 2: H reads a text message

F: to reassure H you won't interrupt

H: to get F to give you a few seconds

Event 3: Harry replies

H: to make L think I'll call later

H: to convince F I remember exactly what they were talking about

F: to make H feel bad

Event 4: informs F that the moon is out/F notices her leg.

H: to get F off the subject of her feelings for me.

F: to make him see how silly she is.

Event 5: F tells H she is bleeding.

H: to get F to tell you what is wrong.

F: to make H realise I've hurt myself.

F: to make H look after me (?)

H: ? to find out how serious it is.

Event 1 *He receives a text on his phone.* **Event 2** *Takes it out. Looks at it.* **Event 3** *Texts something quickly.*

Harry Well, you're being a bit bonkers.

He puts phone away.

Frieda I'm not. I'm just being a mother.

Harry Yeah.

Frieda It's a habit I've learned to acquire.

He looks at her. Smiles.

Harry The moon's out. **Event 4**

She feels the back of her calf.

Frieda Oh look.

Harry What?

Frieda I'm bleeding a bit. **Event 5**

Harry Are you?

Frieda I cut my leg.

Harry How did you do that?

Frieda Climbing over that fence.

Now it's your turn! In groups, decide where the key events are in this bit of text. Then, decide how each event impacts or changes the characters' intentions.

Harry Come here.

He bends down. He touches her cut. He has a packet of tissues in his back pocket. He takes one out and wipes her calf. She winces.

Frieda What are you doing?

Harry Does that hurt?

Frieda Of course it doesn't hurt. It's just a graze.

Harry I can't believe you didn't notice it. Seriously.

Frieda I know, I'm sorry

Harry Clean that properly after I'm gone. Get a plaster on it. It'll get infected.

Frieda Don't be hysterical. Honestly. Talk about a bewildering over-reaction!

The thing you don't know about me, Harry, is I'm a bit of a savage.

Harry That's not true.

Frieda It is you know.

9. 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

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.



Jo McInnes as Lisa

Wastwater Background Pack compiled and written by Lynne Gagliano and Ellen McDougall, March 2011. Wastwater set design by Lizzie Clachan ©2011. Production and Rehearsal photographs by Stephen Cummiskey ©2011.