Welcome to the Graeae and Disability Arts online podcast, Disability And..., bringing together thoughtful discussion and debate. This month, Graeae's Associate Director, Nikki Miles-Wildon, chats with playwright and screenwriter, Jack Thorne about his work and his relationship with Graeae Theatre. This podcast contains some strong language.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: Hello, I'm Nikki Miles-Wildin. I'm Associate Director at Graeae Theatre Company. I am here in my little study in Manchester. I'm a white woman, I have brown eyes, wearing glasses. I have shaved hair at the side with a big white, blondey, large lockdown fringe on top. Wearing headphones, quite cool black and gold Adidas top. Behind me is my bookshelf. Jack likes what I'm wearing obviously. I've got my bookshelf with lots of really interesting drama books and photos on top.

And I am joined here on Zoom with the writer of stage, screen, many a Guardian article, and a very interesting Twitter, it's the marvellous Jack Thorne. How are you, Jack?

Jack Thorne: Very good. Do I need to describe myself?

Nikki Miles-Wil...: Yeah, go on. Your turn now.

Jack Thorne: Okay. I am a bald man of 41. I am, I've got brown hair, barely, I've got blue eyes, and I'm wearing a blue pair of glasses. I've got a black and blue top on and I'm sitting in my study that's got pictures on the wall behind me; one of my wife, and some of my work including Cast Offs, and then some aprons on my door that were made for me by my wife which have my theatre shows, she took pictures of the front of the Royal Court building and then made me an apron with the front of the Royal Court building on. So, yeah.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: Aprons, is that because you do a lot of cooking and baking or you like to write whilst you wear aprons?

Jack Thorne: I have no idea what prompted it. I definitely do more cooking than her, when she met me she could only make cereal. So, there is that, but I think mainly it's just ... I don't know what occurred to her, but I love the aprons.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: I love the aprons. I now have an image of you writing in just purely aprons, and now many people will as they watch or listen to this podcast.

How's lockdown and the time of the pandemic been for you, Jack? What have you been up to?

Jack Thorne: So, three things happened during lockdown of note; one is that I was able to keep writing so that just carried on happening, the second is that my wife and I had to cope with the horrors of home-school which was tough and my four year old didn't struggle with the fact that he couldn't see his friends because he doesn't have any friends yet, but he did struggle with the learning thing and there was definitely a struggle with the fact we were kept indoors because that was not his natural inclination. And then the third thing was that I did Crips without Constraints with you, that was a really beautiful process that really challenged me in quite interesting ways to be able to ... Because I've always, sort of, avoided all that stuff because I get very shy and I've always sort of thought that that was okay, that I could justify the fact that I don't do anything because I'm ... Talk to other writers and all that malarkey. And it did take it out of me each time but I loved it and the writers were just such an extraordinary bunch and I loved doing it with them. And you.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: Thanks. And I loved doing it with you too. And I know, for you, offering them those mentoring sessions, they got a lot out of it. Having that opportunity to talk to you and hear about your expertise is just wonderful.

Jack Thorne: Awesome, awesome. Well, yeah.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: Thank you.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: There we go, we've patted each other's backs now, that's cool. We've done that. So, I suppose you're well known aren't you, as a writer for stage, screen, from such things as Skins and Fades, which, why was there only one season of Fades?

Jack Thorne: We were cancelled. They didn't want us anymore. Yeah, yeah.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: I quite liked Fades.

Jack Thorne: Thank you.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: And then to more recently things like National Treasure, Cursed Child on stage. So, what was your journey into becoming the writer that you are now? Because not a lot of us know what it was.

Jack Thorne: I went to university to do a degree in politics and I was sort of intent on either becoming a politician or an actor and then I didn't become either because I wasn't very good at either. And I decided I wanted to direct plays but I couldn't afford the rights to plays because they're quite expensive, and so I decided to write a play to get round that. And I fell in love. It was one of those sort of things where you just get hit by a train. As soon as I started doing it, I loved it. And I kept doing it, writing for lots of different things. I had lots of interesting experiences as a young a writer. Some where I got opportunities, some where I got rejected. I think we all get rejected quite a lot.

A notable moment was at Graeae open day, actually, and then eventually the Bush Theatre decided to put on one of my plays, a play called When You Cure Me. And Jamie Brittain came and saw a reading of it and said, "We're making a TV show, we think you might be interesting to be a part of it." And then his co-creator Bryan Elsley came and saw it once we were mounted and said, "Yeah, we definitely think you're the sort of writer we want for this." And that show was Skins.

And then it all sort of just went from there. One thing after another, after another, after another. There's been times that have been really bleak but I've been incredibly lucky that the momentum has kept on and it's been really nice.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: So with being a writer on Skins, were you part of a team of writers or was that just individual writers, how did that work?

Jack Thorne: Yeah, there was a team and then we all wrote individual episodes. So I wrote two episodes of series 1, two episodes of series 2, and then I wrote half an episode of series 3, and then I left to do other things. So, yeah, there was a writer's room where we met once a week but it wasn't a writer's room like you have now where people spend 10 weeks together breaking down every episode. It wasn't something like that. It was much more, let's meet, let's talk, let's see our stuff, let's talk about our stuff, and then let's write it individually.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: So that progression from Skins, it's really, I suppose, spring-boarded you. Cast Offs, did that come before or after Skins?

Jack Thorne: That came after. So I did ... After I left Skins, there was a lot of stuff, sort of, bubbling around. A lot of possibilities of things. And then Channel 4 came to ... Joel Wilson who ran a company called Eleven Film and said, "Would you be interested in working on something for our disability slate?" Cast Offs was made for £100,000 an hour which is very, very, very small in TV terms.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: It's a lot in theatre terms though, that is a lot of money. That's mega.

Jack Thorne: Yes, but it's expensive. Making TV is much more expensive, sadly, than making theatre. With theatre you need a van and a space and an actor. With TV you need so much stuff. And so we were very limited in what we could do and how many locations we could be in and all those things, but we were also very determined and there was some really, really brilliant producing from Joel and Jamie on the show in terms of making everything possible.

And, yeah, we were originally ... We were sort of ... Channel 4 didn't quite know what to do with us and we were put out twice a week at 11:00 o'clock. But we got really good ratings and we got nominated for the RTS award for Best Drama. It went really, really well. The idea was to prove something about audiences for disability work, but every time there is disability work on TV it actually does really well in the ratings. And yet, it still is something everyone's frightened of, so it's just exasperating.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: Why is that? Why it is in TV that that work ... And I suppose in theatre it sometimes is attached to that R word, the word of risk, but why is it still deemed as that if it always does have the highest ratings?

Jack Thorne: I mean, it doesn't have the highest ratings.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: No, but has good ratings.

Jack Thorne: I don't know. I think there's a lot of fear of the unknown when it comes to disability. And there's a lot of, a sense of people worrying about getting things wrong. And there's a lot of, "Oh, I don't quite know how to deal with this situation." That is really, really problematic. And because there aren't ... I mean, Ruth Madeley's on her way now I think, but because there aren't established disabled stars, that's also a problem too, because shows are very star-led casting. Stars do matter in terms of getting a show made. But it's also good old fashioned prejudice. So, do you know what I mean? Where you go, there isn't an excuse for it. Well there is an excuse for it, whatever the excuses are, there is an excuse for it. Do you know what I mean? Where there isn't even a paper excuse for it, it's just there's a lot of people who've lived very insulated lives working in TV. There's a lot of people from very exclusive lives who haven't seen the real world and who don't deal well with it.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: I suppose it's that thing, isn't it? We all know that there is a massive change to make. And I think it's great seeing Ruth's journey as you've mentioned. Because what was the programme you worked with Ruth on?

Jack Thorne: Yeah, we cast her. We were the first ones ... She was working for Whizz-Kidz. It was a show called Don't Take My Baby that she was nominated for best actress at the BAFTAs for. So, yeah, and then since then she's just done better and better and better. Most recently, Years and Years with Russell.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: Yeah, and I think it's that thing isn't it? Of going ... It's that age old argument of "there are no disabled actors with those skills", but yet, how do disabled actors get those skills if they aren't given those opportunities to play those characters?

Jack Thorne: Jenny and I, I won't tell you where because I don't think we're allowed to say, but we took part in a panel for an organisation, Jenny Sealey and I, where we were talking about whether there’s need for quotas, how the whole thing can be kick-started. And it was very interesting, there was representatives from drama schools there and it's a real challenge to them to go, "If we can get disabled actors through RADA, through LAMDA, through ... Just getting that seal of approval from those places would be transformative. And people are starting to listen to that, I think particularly LAMDA, but slowly, slowly, slowly, slowly pushing a badly oiled cart up a hill.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: Yeah, and it is a really slow process, isn't it? I think about 20 odd years ago when I wanted to apply to drama school and constantly faced with that thing of we're not accessible. What's the point in spending three years training if there aren't those opportunities for you there as a disabled actor. And sadly to hear those excuses, because that's what they are, are still being churned out by some of those bigger establishments. Because they can change and I think Sarah Frankcom, or Frankers, as I call her, I think her at LAMDA is a really positive thing-

Jack Thorne: Absolutely.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: ... for disabled actors, working class actors. I think-

Jack Thorne: Everyone.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: ... Yeah, everyone. I think it's going to really shake it up. And hopefully that can have a massive impact on the industry going forward. And you said you didn't want to get into politics, Jack, when you were younger. I think, great spokesperson for disabled people. And on that note, what's been your journey with regards to the world of disability?

Jack Thorne: It's really weird and I don't know whether ... I don't know quite where to categorise myself. I was a disabled person, I think I can safely say that. When I was 20 I had more a, more or less complete, physical breakdown. I became allergic to heat. So I was allergic to radiators, I was allergic to sunlight, and I was allergic to my body movement. So I spent six months bed-bound because every time I moved I would, it would create an allergic reaction and I'd end up in a lot of pain.

And then steadily over the next 15 years that got better and better and better to the degree that I feel uncomfortable describing myself as a disabled person now and yet being part of the community still really matters to me. So it's a really weird sort of thing. When it comes to ticking a box on a diversity form, I feel like I shouldn't tick that box on the diversity form because it doesn't feel right. But in terms of membership ... That open day I talked about, it was Alex Bulmer, Alex who co-wrote Cast Offs with me and I love dearly, I was talking to her there. And I said, "I don't know whether I should be here." And I talked about what was going on, and I talked about my pain, and she said, "Of course you're a disabled person."

And honestly it was like coming out. It was just this sort of huge sort of feeling of .... And I think a lot of pain sufferers have this, do you know what I mean? There's an awful lot of isolation in pain. And there's an awful lot of feeling like your struggles are your own and that no one's ever really going to get them and there's a lot of, frankly, cruel behaviour by doctors. I had quite a few instances of people really belittling me. And that feeling of being part of that community at that time was just the greatest feeling in the world. It just felt like, oh, right. Okay. These are my people. This is where I can fit. This is where I can feel safe. This is where I can talk about what I'm going through in a way that doesn't feel like I'm either embarrassing myself by inflating it, or ... Do you know what I mean? Just that sort of, I don't know how you describe it, but just that sort of warmth. Do you know what I mean?

And so, yes. Now I'm probably not a disabled person but I hope I am a disabled person in the same breath. Do you know what I mean?

Nikki Miles-Wil...: Yeah. I think it's that thing of you've had an impairment, haven't you? And therefore the way that society has been set up for people who have impairments is that society has disabled you and whether that's through, sort of, doctors attitudes towards that, that feeling of probably wanting to fix you, to normalise you, I think it's all, it's all incredibly valid. You've got that lived experience. You know what it's been like to face those barriers that a lot of ... physical and attitudinal barriers that a lot of disabled people have to face on a daily basis.

Jack Thorne: It's interesting. When I was doing press for Cast Offs, I did a radio show, and the first question I was asked is, "What is a disabled person?" And, honestly to this day that's the hardest question in the world. We've got these new criteria being announced for various different awards and everything like that and it's going to be hugely complicated. It's going to be hugely complicated, that notion of definition, because there are going to be people abuse it. And there are people that desperately need it and walking that line, it's the most complicated community I think of all the communities. It's the most complicated community because defining it is so ephemeral.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: I think it is and I think it's very much like, with regards to invisible impairments, hidden impairments ... It's such a weird thing as well of people going, "I don't know if I belong in it." I think if you're facing any sort of barrier due to an impairment then of course you're part of the disabled community. But like you say, will it become something that people take the mickey with? I don't know, and it's really funny isn't it because it feels like sometimes it's a club that people don't want to be part of until it suits them. And I know I'm probably going to offend a lot of people when I say that but it's absolutely true. And for a lot of us it's a real, it's a great sense of a community in a world that we all share. We get through with that support from each other. And I think that's the most important thing, is that group of shared voices.

And let's not forget actually that everybody is pre-disabled aren't they, because I think people will become disabled whether that's through illness or old age. I think lockdown has given me time to do a lot more reading and watching Crip Camp on Netflix, which is just amazing to look at that movement in America. And also reading Judy Heumann's book about the disability movement, and about saying to non-disabled people ... Their attitudes towards disability, like, "Oh, well, I don't know anyone who's disabled." Well then find people, do you know what I mean?

"Oh, it's invisible to me." It's invisible because you're not looking for it, because you don't want to look for it. I'm really struggling to make sense of, sort of, a non-disabled privilege and I think people need to be aware that they only have that privilege for a certain amount of time because they are going to be part of the gang, dare I say it, and they need to do something about it. But like you say, it's because a lot of the industry ... And also, theatre, dare I say it, we can't let theatre off the hook either, is run by a lot of white non-disabled, quite privileged males, who disability is not in there world. And it's a real struggle that a lot of those narratives that are written are written by non-disabled people rather than actually having a true disabled narrative to them. And that's what we've really got to ... I don't want to say fight against, because I hate this feeling of it being us and them, but it's having to really change the thinking around it all.

And also, I mean this is a whole can of worms we've probably opened but why not, eh? Playwrights and, I say playwrights because there's one in particular, but also actors who are becoming disabled not outrightly owning it, I'm finding as well in the industry at the moment. And I wonder why they're afraid to own it. And part of that probably is because they feel they get put down, the work they'll be offered will get smaller and smaller. I don't know, but I'm finding that at the moment as well. There are people who are becoming disabled but are denying it.

Jack Thorne: That's very interesting.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: So, what is it you love about writing? You said you just fell in love with it. What, how, what does it do to you?

Jack Thorne: I don't quite know. It's a love that I do not understand fully. It's not un-painful, it's quite often painful, but that process of breaking a script I find joyful. My, she doesn't do it so much now because we're always busy with the kid, but it used to be that when Rach and I got together, if I was being, if I was just inside my own head and being a bit, I don't know, just a bit of a dick I guess, Rach would say, "Go and write something." And it would take me out of my own head. So it's probably that, it's probably being taken out of my own head. It's probably being given the opportunity to be a tourist in other people's heads. Still feels thrilling to me. But yeah, no, I mean it's just ... I love it. Yeah.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: I was going to say that, actually, one of my ... what I've written down here is this idea of your inspiration for writing and do they all live in your head? Because the amount of stuff that you churn out, you must have a lot of people in your head. And also, from what you just said, you owe Rachel your career really, don't you then? That she's kind of gone, "Go and write."

Jack Thorne: I had a career before I got with Rachel, so-

Nikki Miles-Wil...: Okay, all right, just to clarify.

Jack Thorne: ... She can ... I owe her too much, I don't want to owe her that too. Do you know what I mean? The balance sheet is very heavily balanced towards her so I don't, yeah. Yeah, no, a lot of people do live in my head but it's never, I'm not like one of those ... I'm not a great poet that just walks around and goes ah.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: And just for a little bit of AD there, Jack did do the flamboyant with his arms as he talked about being a poet. Yep.

Jack Thorne: And he's now crossing his arms very hard. But I don't go around and start ... with great lyrical thoughts in my head. I just sit at the computer and graft. I don't, I sometimes get thoughts about things in the middle of the night and all those kind of things but generally it's just that process of creating in front of a computer that I just love the most.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: Where do your inspirations come from?

Jack Thorne: No idea. A lot of stuff comes to me, a lot of stuff is given to me and said, "Would you fancy having a go at this?" So often it doesn't, it's not something I create. I'm trying to challenge that at the moment and I'm trying to rethink the way I work about things, work through things. But it's interesting, I've been doing two projects with Genevieve Barr, we're co-writing together because she's astonishing. And on one project it just flew out of both of us. That we were just constantly churning stuff out. And then on another project there was a moment when there was a sort of, "Oh, we don't quite know what this is." And there was a moment of sort of going back and looking at it.

And because I've been doing this for a very long time, I don't really look at my process, but she did in that moment and she was like, "Oh, you've stopped writing stage directions. Oh you've stopped writing ... That you've stopped, you're looking for something and so there's a different sort of churn going on." So, a lot of it is, you just, it's a feeling that you just get of how to tell the story. But that doesn't come in one big, lovely gloop, that comes in lots of little scoops of stuff that then are painfully assembled into a gloop.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: Yeah. I hear that gloop. I really like the idea that you said you don't know what your process is. Because for me, working at Graeae, working with a lot of our writers, I know they're struggling to go, "What is my ... What's my process, what's my structure?" And I'm really encouraging them to rip up what we know as structure and find out what their own sort of dramaturgy is, if that makes sense. So I think it's really enlightening to hear that you don't know what your process is. You just write.

Jack Thorne: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, I probably would love to know, have a better sense of it so that it isn't so hard each time. But I'm good with what I'm ... The one good thing about getting older is you do become more comfortable with your own inadequacy.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: What would you say ... What project are you most proud of?

Jack Thorne: I think the best thing I wrote for TV is National Treasure. I think the best thing I wrote for stage is probably Harry Potter and the Cursed Child. I also like Christmas Carol quite a lot. But I'm still waiting for the one that's just perfect.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: So are you quite a collaborative writer in the room when you're working with people? Do you like to be part of that team.

Jack Thorne: Love it. I'm not a novelist, do you know what I mean? I don't want to be a novelist. I like being inspired by others. I like being led in new directions by others. When we started speaking I'm just working through a set of notes on ep 3 of series 3 of His Dark Materials and we've been working together for such a long time on that. There's a core group of us that have been there for four or five years working, and this'll be the 18th episode we've done together, do you know what I mean? The 18th hour we've made together, and still they're provoking me, and still they're challenging me to change the way I write. And I love that.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: Yeah, I think collaboration is the key, isn't it really? Having those people around you to push you and to inspire you and to see things in a different way you might not have thought about.

Jack Thorne: I mean, I think theatre is insanely more collaborative, probably, but maybe not with the writing. That actually, that when you're in a room with actors and you're making it, it's really, really beautifully exciting but you're always on a clock by that point. And so you're not going back and chucking a spanner in the engine and stuff like that. And often during that writing process there's a respect for the writer that you don't have in TV. You don't have that same sort of, "Oh, this is beautiful." There's a sort of workman like quality to writing for TV, and so there isn't quite the sense of, "We all wrote this." Which I think you do get in TV a bit more than you do in theatre. But that might just be me and my process.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: What's your relationship with Graeae? You mentioned that ... Did that come out through that open day with Alex Bulmer?

Jack Thorne: Yes. Yes, and Jenny was in charge, so I've only known Graeae under Jenny, though I do know some of the past leaders of Graeae now. And yes, so I did that open day and then I think I wrote something else for Graeae that didn't happen, and then the first thing we all worked on together was Hunchback of Notre Dame which I did with Alex. And then the Solid Life of Sugar Water which was just joyous from start to finish and really challenging in a beautiful way.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: Yeah, and is that how you first met Genevieve who you're now writing with?

Jack Thorne: Nope, Genevieve was in The Fades. So I knew Genevieve already from that, only very vaguely, but yes. Yeah, but then it was Solid Life where I just went, "You're extraordinary and I need to understand how your mind works." And then she told me she wanted to write and Mat Fraser contacted me about Disability Monologues and writing something for Disability Monologues and I said, "I'd love to write one. I'd love to look after Genevieve writing another. I'd love to see if I can sort of script edit Genevieve a little bit so that Genevieve could get a start in TV." And Mat backed that because he's brilliant and all the good notes were Mat. But I was there with Genevieve through it and then following on from that I got asked to write a piece about the Disability Discrimination Act and I said, "I'd love to write it but I'd love to write it with Genevieve." And so it's sort of gone from there.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: Having looked at and knowing who's involved I think it's a great ... It's going to be exciting. Exciting watch definitely.

Jack Thorne: I hope so, I hope so. I'm really proud of mine. I don't think I'm even allowed to say who's in mine. But, yeah.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: Okay.

Jack Thorne: It's been great. I don't want to ... Mat Fraser's a fierce man. You don't want to get on the wrong side of Mat Fraser.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: No, you don't. You don't or he’ll send you an angry email with lots of exclamation marks. Because you've worked with Mat quite a few times, haven't you now? Cast Offs ...

Jack Thorne: I think he's been in five things I've written. I think Mat is like my go-to actor. He's ... I love Mat.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: And as a writer, do you have that say on saying, "I've written this for Mat. I want Mat in it."?

Jack Thorne: Sometimes, and sometimes not. So, I can push for Mat for something or I can push for Gen for something, or I can push for Ruth for something, but I don't really, really get final say on it. I sometimes push very hard with ... And sometimes I say right at the beginning that I'm not doing this unless ... So, with Christmas Carol for instance, when Matthew contacted me about Christmas Carol, I said, "Absolutely, I want to do it, but I only really want to do it if Tiny Tim's disabled because I'm not interested in doing a version of this with non-disabled Tiny Tims," and he went, "Cool." And since then the Old Vic has worked really tirelessly actually to back that and each year it's three or four kids that come in and do, but each year it's just the best bit about the show, do you know what I mean? These amazing children getting given this chance and then killing it.

So, yeah, so it depends on the project, basically, but I'm always sort of going, "If there isn't at least one disabled actor in this then I've failed." And there tends to be at least one.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: Yeah, and that's brilliant that you're fighting that corner.

Jack Thorne: Trying to.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: No, you are. And I know this is a question that's come up from other writers to me and I don't know the exact answer, but of just going, "When I write something should I say 'This is a disabled character'? Should I say 'This is the impairment this character has and therefore I want someone with that impairment to be cast'?"

Jack Thorne: I do but I always, sort of ... So, I worked on a play recently that's got a lead actress that's disabled, and I said at the beginning, "This is the impairment this lead actress has got but if we were to find someone else with a different impairment I would rewrite it for that person." So, I'm not going, "It has to be this." Because you want the casting process to be as open as possible and you want to get the best actor you can for the role. And so yeah, sometimes I'm specific. When I'm being really specific it's because I'm writing for someone I know. When I'm less specific it's because I know what this character needs and I know that there'll probably be a range of disabilities that fit with that and it's just a matter of just going, "There has to be, there should be a flexibility within that."

Nikki Miles-Wil...: So, it is always best to put it in?

Jack Thorne: I think so, but then maybe putting a note at the beginning going, "This is what's in my head but there is a flexibility within my head that can accommodate lots of different actors with lots of different disabilities." With The Solid Life of Sugar Water, we just said, "It's going to be two disabled actors." And we found two disabled actors and then I rewrote it for Gen. And actually that was a process we went through, Amit and I, where we initially were like, "We shouldn't rewrite it, it can just be that she just happens to be Deaf." And then it was like, "No, this play is about truth and it's about a battle and it feels wrong if we're not acknowledging and celebrating and delving into her disability as part of it." So then we did rewrite it for her.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: Thank you. There's going to be loads of scripts now with characters with impairments and I love it because I think that if us as a community can make a change as well it's our writers that can do that for us as well and help change the industry.

Jack Thorne: And the thing I'd say is, no one knows the right word for anything in the non-disabled world and so they need as much help as they can get. It's to their shame they don't know but at the same time, as easy as we can make it, the better. It should be that thing of just a velvet revolution.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: Yeah definitely. Make the change. Make the change we want to see, is that right? Is that what they say?

Jack Thorne: Yes. Be the change you want to be in the world.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: Be the change, that's the one. You talked briefly about this project you were writing with Genevieve about Disability Discrimination Act; is that like a UK version of Crip Camp? Are we going to be excited by it? Sell it to me, Jack.

Jack Thorne: It's about DAN. It's ... I mean, I love Crip Camp. Crip Camp is very American, I think. The British way of doing things is a bit more punky. I mean, Dan was very, very punky. So it's about Barbara and Alan and about that whole incredible, incredible, incredible community of people and the battles they fought and the way they fought it. So, Crip Camp was a lot of very determined, very sincere individuals. We want this to be called, I don't know whether we're going to get away with it, but we want this to be called Piss on Pity, which was a central, one of their central campaign slogans. In Crip Camp, no one would wear a t-shirt with Piss on Pity on it but these guys were punks, and they did.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: So have you been researching DAN and the movement?

Jack Thorne: Yeah, which has been amazing because they're incredible. They're incredible bunch of people.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: So are you fully politicised?

Jack Thorne: Am I fully politicised?

Nikki Miles-Wil...: Do you feel like you want to go out there and piss on pity now? Would you wear the t-shirt?

Jack Thorne: Have I got ... I would definitely wear the t-shirt, though I've worried that it would be misconstrued on me. I don't know whether I would have the balls to handcuff myself to a bus. The most radical ... I've attended a lot of marches and I've done a lot of those kind of things. The most radical I've ever been is when we tried to close all the Vodafone shops and all the, that movement about tax dodgers. So that's the most radical I've ever been and I was a bit scared that I was going to get arrested the entire time and I don't quite have the same sort of ... I'm just not brave enough, I don't think. But I don't think there's many that are as brave as that DAN lot, they were just crazy nuts.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: They were. They were brilliant and I always remember that I am sitting on the shoulders of those giants.

Jack Thorne: Yeah, absolutely.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: And what they did with regards to access towards public transport. It's been amazing and getting into buildings.

Jack Thorne: It was so interesting because during the ... When we were announced that we were doing this, that they announced it with the title Independence Day. And we'd insisted on a question mark after Independence Day. But I had so many old trots coming at me and going, "You aren't saying the Disability Discrimination Act was a good thing are you? Because if you are, we are not on board with that. This is not what DAN was about and we are still very, very angry about it," and I was like, "That's why there's a question mark. Please notice the question mark. Please notice the question mark." I think they'll be a lot more comfortable ... If we get away with Piss on Pity, I think they'd be a lot more comfortable with that title than with Independence Day.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: Yeah, no, definitely. And when will that go out? What are the plans for that? When will it-

Jack Thorne: We haven't found yet, we got stopped by COVID. So, yeah, we're working towards it.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: And is that going out on TV?

Jack Thorne: Yes, the BBC.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: BBC? One, two?

Jack Thorne: Two.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: Nice. Well keep us posted on that, won't you? And let us know ...

Jack Thorne: Of course, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: ... because we'd love to ... And hopefully it can still be Piss on Pity because that'd just be, yeah ...

Jack Thorne: Absolutely. Yeah. I completely agree.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: That would be mega.

Jack Thorne: It's just, it's the right title for it.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: It is.

Jack Thorne: But let's see.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: What happens between now and then. Okay, just two more questions because I'm wary of time because we've been chatting for a while. Have you got any advice for writers, particularly disabled writers who I know many have been part of a writer's room have maybe felt more like a tick box than they have actually being able to put their material across, any advice you could give any Deaf or disabled writers that are wanting to forge their career in the industry? And that could be theatre, screen, whatever.

Jack Thorne: The first advice is I'm sorry there are still doors to kick down. I'm sorry that you're still required to kick those doors down. I'm sorry that you do feel like a tick box exercise sometimes and I also don't doubt you are a tick box exercise sometimes. And that's awful. But, stay hungry, keep pushing, keep writing. The world is hungry for disabled stories, finally, I do feel that. There are more and more being commissioned by TV, a lot more than there was 10 years ago. And there's a lot ... The attitudes are changing. In the last couple of years we've had Fleabag, followed by I May Destroy You, it does seem like the next big storytelling explosion should be disabled storytelling. That someone should come and do an I May Destroy You for disabled stories. I've got a feeling that's getting closer and closer. But, I'm sorry it, yeah, is going to be a struggle. And I'm sorry that people are going to say stupid things to you because they are and you're better than them.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: Yeah, and I think, talking about I May Destroy You, Michaela Cole's MacTaggart lecture at Edinburgh was about a year, two years ago, that ... What she was saying on the parallels between that and disabled writers is really key actually. And about for her not having that knowledge of the language of TV but yet being told her story had to be X, Y, and Z, whereas she wanted it to be F, H, I ... All mixed up, but still it was certain people telling her, "This is what the narrative is."

Jack Thorne: Yeah, I mean, personally I think I May Destroy You is one of the best bits of literature of the last 10 years in TV, Film, Theatre, everything. It's just extraordinary bit of storytelling. And it did feel like she'd put herself on screen ... Not herself, but do you know what I mean? Her notion of storytelling on screen and redefined television a little bit in the process. And that is going to ... When someone does a disabled version of that then we'll be good.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: Yeah. So, no pressure to those disabled writers out there but you know, clock's ticking, clock's ticking.

Okay, so, what have you not adapted that you'd love to do?

Jack Thorne: Nothing, I really want to do my own stuff now. I've done a lot of adaptation and I'm sure that I'll get pulled into other stuff again but I, yeah, I like doing my own stuff.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: Cool. Brilliant, thank you Jack. Thank you for taking this time-

Jack Thorne: Thank you.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: ... to chat to me on Zoom.

Jack Thorne: Thank you.

Nikki Miles-Wil...: It's been great, thank you very much.

Jack Thorne: Thank you, really lovely talking to you and yeah, see you soon.