

# Biting theater

**Impressive adaptation of Swedish romantic horror story**



Lola Parks (left) and Lilia Chavira.  
PHOTO BY JOE HILSEE

**Ghost and vampire tales certainly** blend themselves to the fall season. Nevertheless, I found it rather surprising that the Blue Room Theatre would stage back-to-back Gothic horror stories to open its 2019/20 season. But, I had a chance to see both

by  
**Carey Wilson**

**Review:**  
*Let the Right One In* shows Thursday-Saturday, 7:30 p.m., through Nov. 23  
Tickets: \$15  
(Thursdays, pay-what-you-can)

**Blue Room Theatre**  
139 W. First St.  
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and I've come away with a greater appreciation of the depth and variety of applications of the "horror" genre.

This stage adaptation of Swedish author John Ajvide Lindqvist's 2004 vampire novel (which was also made into two well-received films, one Swedish, one American) takes place in "Blackeburg, a suburb in Sweden in 1983." To depict the setting, stage designer Amber Miller created a stark interlocking network of silvery frames that, depending on the scene, represent either the forest outside the town or the dwellings and buildings

of the town itself. In the opening scene we witness what appears to be a ritualistic murder and draining of blood from a victim strung up by his heels in the manner of an animal dispatched in a slaughterhouse.

From there, expository scenes proceed very quickly in a live theater equivalent of cinematic flashback editing, with the actors serving as stagehands during the brief blackouts between tableaux. The play's central character, Oskar (played by Lilia Chavira), is bullied by his schoolmates pushing him around, tauntingly calling him "Piggy" and generally inspiring his fantasies of revenge.

Meanwhile, the townspeople are increasingly concerned about grisly murders in the woods and wonder if a mass murderer is afoot. In the midst of this tension, Oskar meets Eli (Lola Parks), a girl seemingly about his own age, wandering barefoot in the cold. The two develop a kinship based on their alienation from their parents, elders and contemporaries. However, Eli's alienation stems from the fact that she is not a lonely girl but an ages-old vampire who is not resigned to her fate and who harbors genuine compassion for Oskar, whose ostracism from and bullying by his peers is a dim reflection of her separation from the world of the mortals she must feed on.

With an excellent cast of 12 delivering 40 scenes in its two acts, the relationship between the mismatched but complementary couple is illuminated and commented on by the society that neither of them is capable of rejoining. Oskar's mother (Tricia McCutcheon) is a drink-swilling, red-robed drama queen and his estranged father (Justin Jodaitis) rejects his son's approaches, further pushing Oskar outside of "normal" relationships.

Enhancing the play's 1980s ambiance, director Martin Chavira has chosen a subtle musical background that employs repeated motifs from legendary English new wave band Joy Division's song "She's Lost Control" and Icelandic band The Sugarcubes' "Birthday." Both songs invoke the beauty and estrangement of the friendship between Oskar and Eli conveyed through haunting melodies and lyrics such as "She has one friend/He lives next door/They're listening to the weather."

The structure of the play, coming as it does in many short sequences, is very energetic, yet this pacing and fragmentation of narrative conveys a great amount of dramatic, thought-provoking information that will leave viewers with conversational material long after the players have left the stage. Bite into it and savor the bloody surge. □

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