

**THE DEAD ROOM: REFLEXIVITY,
RECURSION AND MEMORY
IN THE ACT OF AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL
SCRIPTWRITING**

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This thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the awards of a higher degree elsewhere.

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This work is dedicated to Annie with love.

Abstract

During the course of this practice-based PhD I intend to explore the themes of family, memory and time by researching and writing a feature-length screenplay that will draw on research into autobiographical scriptwriting, establishing a direct and substantive dialogue between my own practice and the work of other recent writers for screen and radio who have explored similar themes. According to Blake Morrison, in his book *Too True*, 'Truth becomes the first casualty of a good story.' Through ongoing reflection upon my emergent work, I intend to explore this statement and examine the boundaries between fact and fiction within autobiographical writing focusing on the work of such writers as Alan Bennett, looking in particular at his recent plays *The Lady in the Van* and *Cocktail Sticks*, and the autobiographical work of the film-maker Terence Davies.

I will also attempt to identify and explore structural principles shared by scriptwriters and poets such as Tony Harrison, to test how fluid the boundaries are between what are routinely treated as separate subjects; in this sense, the project, with my developing writing at its core, has an interdisciplinary dimension.

The creative project will constitute 80% of my PhD studies. The premise for the screenplay is as follows: Having written an autobiographical radio play, a writer invites his parents and his sister to the studio to watch the recording. The screenplay shifts between different time frames as the writer's version of events are disputed by members of his own family. Whilst the screenplay will explore the proposed research questions within a practical framework, a reflective study, written in parallel, and constituting 20% of the PhD, will formally engage with aspects of critical theory and creative practice. Following principles of 'practice as research' and 'discovery through doing' recently established in the arts¹, the entire project attempts to establish a useful dynamic between creative act and critical reflection.

¹ Robin Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 48.

Both the creative writing project and the thesis will be integrated, with theoretical analysis feeding directly into the scriptwriting process and vice-versa. As well as reflecting on my own emergent writing by analysing the on-going creative process within the reflective thesis, an interview with the writer and dramatist Alan Bennett will also inform the exegesis.

Preface

'When a writer is born into a family, the family is finished.'

Czeslaw Milosz

It is only now, as I near the end of this project, that I am able to write its introduction. Although the premise for the creative project (a feature length screenplay about the making of an autobiographical radio play) has remained unchanged since its inception, much else has altered in its evolution. Whilst investigating the subject of autobiographical 'truth' within scriptwriting, my own past as a documentary film editor, has come to play a significant part in shaping this endeavor. I last set foot inside a cutting room over 15 years ago. However, much of what I learned has clearly influenced my subsequent approach to writing. Consequently, this has been an unexpected exploration of knowledge and experience largely forgotten or overlooked, resulting in a project that I now realize had been gestating long before I considered the idea of undertaking a PhD.

I had envisaged writing a conventional script, followed by an accompanying reflective thesis, where relevant influences would be cited and arguments drawn together to form some kind of conclusion. During the writing process, however, the autobiographical content began to dictate its own form, and in so doing threw up new research questions - new avenues to explore. One of these concerned the writing process itself; the mechanics of constructing both a screenplay and a PhD that is partially autobiographical in nature. Ironically, having long forgotten about my time as an editor, the cutting room became a metaphor for memory itself and gradually asserted itself as the conceptual framework for *The Dead Room*.

As the project progressed it also became apparent that regular exchanges with tutors were integral to its development and, as such, should be incorporated into the main body of the screenplay, rather than relegated to a separate accompanying essay - like pundits offering a post-match analysis. This, in turn, added another layer

to an already highly recursive narrative. The same applied to an interview with Alan Bennett, whose autobiographical film *The Lady in the Van* stands as a case study. The result, therefore, is one unified project in which contributors and tutors feature as characters in their own right, with their dialogue, set out in script form, intercut with the drama, something that seems entirely appropriate for a thesis that investigates, amongst other things, the boundaries between fact and fiction. The research questions themselves are written as captions, which, if ever this were to be realized as a produced work, would appear as text on the screen.

In his introduction to the published script of *Distant Voices, Still Lives*, the British film director and writer Terence Davies makes a plea to the reader:

Memory is its own validity. Thus any 'story' involving memory is not a narrative in the conventional sense but of necessity more diffuse, more elliptical. Therefore conventional narrative expectation will not be satisfied in any conventional way, and I would ask you to bear this in mind when you are reading this piece.²

The same could be asked of this endeavor. Instead of a conventional approach – achieved creative work, supported by underpinning critical commentary, analysis or theory – I have attempted to establish a clear dynamic between the various elements of this project – generative writing, drafting, the textual conventions of screenwriting, reflection, critical commentary, interviews – that admits a wholly reflexive approach in order to examine the creative process in action, and to explore the porousness of the boundaries between these elements in detail.

²Terence Davies, *A Modest Pageant* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p. 74.

NOTE: From this point on, the thesis switches from a standard font to a Courier, 'typewritten' font, as used in scriptwriting, with the intention that the entire project be read as a screenplay.

A caption fades up over black.

CAPTION: Upgrade. 18th June 2015.

INT. UNIVERSITY SEMINAR ROOM DAY

Voices are heard from a poor quality recording.

TUTOR 1

So listen, this is all good - you've submitted a screenplay as is the requirement - all in good style. We think it should all move forward now - we're not going to be difficult about it. And the idea is that Greg is going to kick off with the creative stuff and then I'll look at the academic framework.

TUTOR 2

Yeah. It's really interesting there are all sorts of ideas and all sorts of stuff to chew on, which is great. It obviously started out as quite a conventional piece, by which I mean it had a beginning, a middle and an end, whereas now it seems to have become much more an interrogation of itself. It's very self-referential - wouldn't you say?

TUTOR 1

Absolutely.

TUTOR 2

One hears of the novel of ideas - is this the play of ideas, do you think?

WRITER

I guess so. Yes.

TUTOR 1

What strikes me particularly is that we're talking about something that is ultimately going to be orchestrated through vision and

(MORE)

TUTOR 1 (CONT.)

through sound and yet what we have here is a script, written down on paper - but it's not a form of literature - it's a set of instructions - it's something you've got to unfold through another process in order for it to become three dimensional.

The regular beat of a click track fades in as the credits appear.

TITLE: THE DEAD ROOM

After several minutes the monotonous rhythm is shattered by a single piercing note from a violin bow played on the edge of a brass Chladni plate.

From the darkness grains of sand gradually appear, seen in extreme close-up, vibrating together like huge boulders as the sound resonates through the brass plate. Imperceptibly, the camera begins to zoom out, revealing a dark and shifting landscape. The particles continue to move creating ever-changing abstract patterns - like neural stem cells during the formation of the human brain.

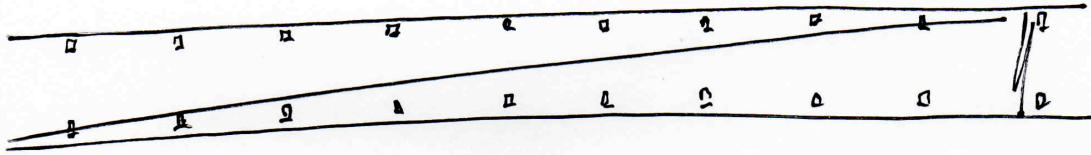
CAPTION: *'He who seeks to approach his own past must do so like a man digging.'*

Walter Benjamin

The camera pulls out still further to reveal a black and white ultrasound image of a 12-week-old foetus floating in embryonic fluid - an image created from sound waves operating at frequencies beyond human hearing.

A white chinagraph pencil marks the 16mm print with a vertical line - a scar across the unborn child.

The camera then follows its crumbling tip as it draws a horizontal line across the individual frames - a line that weaves across the celluloid as if following the contours of a landscape - whilst the print rattles through the gate of an Acmade Compeditor.



Metal teeth turn in the sprocket holes to the sound of an approaching train - steel upon steel. A footage counter ticks away - notching up numbers. Images of the foetus are seen, frame by frame, as it passes over the pic sync's blinding white light. As the high-pitched screech of the violin bow reaches a crescendo, so the white chinagraph line stops and a splicer's blade cuts the 16mm print in two.

The soundtrack stops abruptly.

EXT. STATION. DAWN

Silence. JOHN, a middle-aged man, stands alone on an empty platform listening to headphones. Mist hangs over the surrounding countryside. We hear the sound of the tracks vibrating - the regular musical click track emerging once again above the naturalistic sounds of a rural landscape. A digital clock hangs from the station canopy. 8:23. JOHN turns to see the train approaching in the distance.

INT. CUTTING ROOM NIGHT

Extreme close-up of a black marker pen as it scribbles the word 'START' on a torn piece of tape stuck to the bar of a trim bin from which hang numerous strips of 16mm film and magnetic tape. A hand removes a length of film from one of the hooks.

INT. TRAIN. DAY

JOHN walks through the carriage carrying a cup of coffee and bacon butty in a brown paper bag. He grabs hold of the luggage rack to steady himself as the train takes bends at speed. Reaching his seat, he sits down. He takes a large envelope out of his satchel, puts the satchel on the luggage rack above and settles back into his seat, placing the envelope on the table in front of him.

He glances up at the passenger sitting opposite and sees the WRITER working on a laptop. The character looks identical to JOHN but is dressed differently, wearing a black shirt, black jeans and black linen jacket. Sound

seeps through his headphones as he transcribes the earlier upgrade discussion, recorded on a minidisc player.

JOHN turns away and looks out of the window as the countryside slips by. The mudflats of Morecambe Bay give way to the industrial landscape of the North West. As it does so JOHN's faint reflection is brought into focus, superimposed across derelict mills and red brick chimneys. He feels the warmth of the sunlight on his face before the train suddenly plunges into a tunnel. The background immediately disappears leaving JOHN staring at the camera - the subject in a framed portrait of a middle-aged man. JOHN pulls a script out of the envelope and begins to read.

As he takes a bite of his bacon butty there is a sudden jolt. The window shatters, turning to crazed glass - his reflection vanishes. The train's brakes screech as it comes to a halt. JOHN looks round at the other passengers wondering what's happening. There is a long pause before the conductor's voice is heard over the intercom.

CONDUCTOR

We apologise for the delay to this service. This due to circumstances beyond our control. The train is being held here while we await further instructions. I will, of course, update you as soon as I have any further information. Thank you.

JOHN returns to his script - a smear of red ketchup obscures the title.

EXT. STATION DAY FLASHBACK

Passengers disembark in the rain. Amongst them is JOHN. He walks up towards the front of the train where the conductor stands talking to one of the station staff, pointing at the windscreen.

JOHN

What happened?

CONDUCTOR

Chap just got out of his car,
hopped over the fence and onto the
track.

JOHN

Is he dead?

CONDUCTOR

See that black line?

JOHN

Yeah.

CONDUCTOR

Those were his boots. Bounced down
eight carriages.

JOHN

Christ. Is the driver alright?

CONDUCTOR

He's gone home. It's his second
one since Christmas.

JOHN

Poor bugger.

CONDUCTOR

It's a popular spot. Where are you
going?

JOHN

London.

CONDUCTOR

Platform two.

JOHN glances across to Platform 2 where he sees the
WRITER, sat on a bench, waiting for the next train.

INT. CUTTING ROOM

Two strips of celluloid are placed in a heavy metal
splicer. Splicing tape is stretched over the join before
the splicer slams shut with a loud crack.

EXT. EUSTON STATION DAY

Steel tracks weave across the frame like oscillating sound waves.

Trains, seen from above, converge on a busy terminus powered by overhead lines that crisscross the frame like scratches on a negative. Sparks fly as the metal poles connect with the electric wires.

A hand turns a small wheel, advancing the film on the Compeditor. Sprocket holes run down the side of the screen before numbers appear momentarily 10...9...8...as the countdown leader rattles through the gate.

Pixilated orange squares fill the black screen – numbers on an arrivals board – a matrix of flickering colour.

EXT. STATION CONCOURSE DAY

JOHN crosses the busy concourse and heads for the taxi rank. As he reaches the stairs he sees the WRITER getting onto the escalators and disappearing down into the underground.

EXT. BBC BROADCASTING HOUSE DAY

The orange light of a taxi sign comes into focus as a black cab pulls up outside BBC Broadcasting House. The door opens and JOHN gets out in a fluster. He struggles with his rucksack as he pays the driver.

JOHN

And if I could have a receipt?
Thanks.

The cab driver hands JOHN a receipt and drives off. JOHN rushes towards the main entrance at the end of a large pedestrian area where BBC employees sit outside a café drinking coffee. As JOHN pushes his way through the large revolving doors the straps of his rucksack become stuck. The door jams. Eventually he manages to pull the straps free.

INT. BBC BH RECEPTION DAY

JOHN hurries to the reception desk.

JOHN

Hi. I'm recording in studio 60A.

RECEPTIONIST

Name?

JOHN

John Hughes. There should be a pass for me.

JOHN fidgets as the RECEPTIONIST methodically checks a list of names.

RECEPTIONIST

Are you a contributor?

JOHN

I'm the writer.

JOHN points impatiently to the top of the list where his name appears in bold letters. The RECEPTIONIST then slowly checks through a pile of passes, before handing one over. JOHN pins it on his jacket.

RECEPTIONIST

You know where you're going?

JOHN

I hope so.

JOHN hurries past security, through inner revolving doors to the lifts where he waits with others. The lift doors open and he steps inside hitting the button for the sixth floor before the lift doors close again.

INT. CUTTING ROOM.

An extreme close up of an old man's head, seen from side on. He lies motionless staring up at the ceiling. Gradually the camera begins to crane upwards, tilting through 90 degrees, until it looks down on his face. He is unshaven - his skin waxy-looking. His eyes are open - staring directly at the camera. Over the still image of the old man's face we hear the sound of the Compeditor - its wheels turning.

Cut to: The handle on the Compeditor turns, advancing the numbered countdown leader through the gate. The tiny screen flickers. 3...2...1...PICTURE START.

INT. BBC PRODUCTION OFFICE DAY

JOHN hurries into the production office and is greeted by SALLY, the director.

SALLY

Hello love.

JOHN

Hi Sally. Sorry I'm late.

They hug.

SALLY

Don't worry.

JOHN

Chap jumped in front of the train.

SALLY

God. How awful.

JOHN

Yeah.

SALLY

I've never understood why people do that.

JOHN

I guess he must've had his reasons.

SALLY

Well everyone's waiting in the green room. Do you want to grab a coffee, or something? Water?

JOHN

I'm fine. I had one on the train.

SALLY leads the way towards the Green Room.

SALLY

Everyone's been very complimentary about the script.

JOHN

Really?

SALLY

Studio manager cried when she first read it.

JOHN

Oh great. And you don't mind them coming in?

SALLY

Who?

JOHN

Mum and Dad.

SALLY

Oh no, not at all.

JOHN

I just thought they might be interested to see what goes on behind the scenes.

SALLY

Sure. Well it'll be nice to meet them after all this time.

INT. BBC GREEN ROOM DAY

A group of actors sit in a large circle with scripts in hand. JOHN and SALLY sit together at one end. The actors introduce themselves in turn. (FROM NOW ON THE ACTORS WILL BE REFERRED TO BY THEIR CHARACTER'S NAME. i.e. ROBIN BECOMES JOHN 2)

JOHN 2

Robin Blakemore playing John.

FATHER 2

Dan Jacobs playing Father.

MOTHER 2

Ruth Hewlitt playing Mother.

LUCY 2

Gabby Lawson, playing Lucy.

SALLY

Sally. Director.

JOHN

John. Writer.

SALLY

Great. Okay. Well welcome everyone. Do you want to say anything, John, before we read through? I just wonder if it might be quite useful to hear what inspired you. You know...what's behind the play.

JOHN

Yep. Sure. Umm...well I suppose, I mean obviously it's autobiographical - to an extent - well it is and it isn't - I've changed elements within my Father's story - umm - but the basic premise - the plot - is very much as it happened.

SALLY

In fact you'll meet him. He's coming in tomorrow to watch the recording.

JOHN

That's right, with my mother.

FATHER 2

Oh I'd love to talk to him, if I may, about the character.

JOHN

Absolutely. I'm sure he'd be happy to.

SALLY

I remember a very early conversation we had, after his accident, about memory.

JOHN

Yes. I mean you take so much for granted – we all do, I think. And then when something like that happens it forces you to reassess.

SALLY

But it's also about the tricks your memory plays. Something that you're convinced happened, may never have happened at all – or at least not in the way you remember it.

JOHN

That's right.

SALLY

You fill in the gaps, don't you? The blanks.

JOHN

Yeah.

SALLY

Creating your own narrative.

FATHER 2

It's fascinating.

JOHN

And of course the thing is that memory is reconstructed in our own interests. When we remember something we remember it in a particular way – in a way that supports our own self-esteem.

FATHER 2

Really?

JOHN

Subconsciously. Yes. We believe what we want to believe.

SALLY

Great. Well shall we go for it then? John if you wouldn't mind reading in the medic's lines, oh and maybe the mortuary attendant as well.

JOHN
Sorry – which page is that?

SALLY
Page 126.

JOHN
Fine.

SALLY
Are you alright to time this,
Becky?

BECKY, the Broadcast Assistant, holds up her stopwatch.
Ready.

SALLY
Okay. Interior bedroom night. A
telephone rings somewhere
downstairs. John groans as he
wakes from a deep sleep. He rolls
over. Beside him, his wife, Val,
stirs.

INT. JOHN'S HOUSE BEDROOM NIGHT FLASHBACK

JOHN and VAL lie asleep in bed, both facing the opposite
direction. A telephone rings.

VAL
John.

JOHN
Hmm?

VAL
Phone.

JOHN
What? What time is it?

VAL
I've no idea. But try not to wake
Poppy.

JOHN gets up and walks along the landing – an obstacle
course of boxes and washing.

INT. JOHN'S KITCHEN NIGHT - FLASHBACK

As JOHN opens the kitchen door he steps in a puddle on the floor.

JOHN

Shit!

A spaniel puppy rushes around his feet as he switches the light on then hops across the room to the phone. He picks it up.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Hello.

We hear a faint voice on the other end of the line.

JOHN (CONT'D)

When? How is he? Which hospital?

INT. JOHN'S BEDROOM NIGHT - FLASHBACK

JOHN returns to the bedroom and flicks on the light. VAL turns over - squinting.

VAL

Who on earth was that?

JOHN

Lucy.

VAL

What did she want?

JOHN

It's Dad. He's had a fall.

VAL

What? What sort of fall?

JOHN

I don't know. That's all she said.

VAL

Is he alright?

JOHN

They've taken him to the Royal
Surrey. She wants me to go down.

VAL

Do you want me to come?

JOHN

No. There's no point us both
going. I'll ring when I get there.

VAL gets up out of bed to reveal her pregnant stomach
under her nightshirt. She puts her arms around JOHN and
kisses him.

VAL

Drive carefully.

INT. BBC GREEN ROOM DAY

SALLY reads the stage directions from the script as the
read-through continues.

SALLY

Interior car. John drives south
flicking through the radio
stations – a confusing jumble of
music and voices mixed together.

JOHN leans across and interrupts.

JOHN

I meant to say – I thought we
could probably cut this and just
come in hard on the arrival?

SALLY

Alright. Let's see how we're doing
for time.

JOHN

Sure.

SALLY

Exterior parents' house. Dawn.
John gets out of the car and walks
across the gravel drive. We hear
birds – sounds of the countryside.
His sister, Lucy, answers the
door, exhausted from lack of
sleep.

JOHN 2

Hi.

LUCY 2

Hi.

SALLY

They hug.

LUCY 2

That was quick.

JOHN 2

I left as soon as you rang. How
is he?

JOHN studies the actors' faces as they deliver their
lines, occasionally amending his script.

LUCY 2

Not heard anything more. They
said to ring at eight.

JOHN 2

Is mum up?

LUCY 2

She's not slept at all.

JOHN 2

How's she doing?

LUCY 2

She's...well you'll see for
yourself.

INT. KITCHEN DAY - FLASHBACK

JOHN, LUCY and MOTHER sit at the kitchen table in a large
kitchen.

MOTHER

You shouldn't have come.

JOHN

It's fine. Don't be silly.

MOTHER

There's really no need.

JOHN

Doesn't take long. Not at this time.

JOHN glances up at the wall. A round mark is visible on the Anaglypta wallpaper where a clock has been.

JOHN

What's happened to the clock?

MOTHER

It broke when he fell.

JOHN

What was he doing?

MOTHER

You know what he's like. I told him it wasn't safe.

LUCY

He was up on a chair.

MOTHER

He insists on having them all five minutes fast. I should've stopped him.

LUCY

It's not your fault.

MOTHER

Do you think we can ring yet? What time is it?

JOHN looks at his watch.

JOHN

Let's just give it another few minutes. I'm sure if anything had happened they'd have phoned.

JOHN

Do you want another cup of tea?

LUCY

No. Thanks.

JOHN

Mum?

MOTHER

No.

JOHN gets up and goes over to the kettle. LUCY notices him opening cupboard doors searching for the coffee.

LUCY

Top one.

JOHN opens the top cupboard and takes out a jar of instant coffee. He then looks about for a spoon and starts opening drawers.

JOHN

You've changed everything round.

LUCY

Months ago.

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR DAY - FLASHBACK

JOHN walks down a sterile hospital corridor with his arm through MOTHER's. LUCY walks alone on the other side. As they round a corner, into a small ward, they see FATHER lying in bed attached to a drip (the same man whose face was seen earlier in extreme close-up.) He looks weak, barely registering them as they approach the bed. His face is badly bruised; a square of surgical gauze stuck to the side of his head.

JOHN
Dad.

FATHER
Hello.

FATHER looks confused.

FATHER (CONT'D)
What are you doing here?

JOHN
Come to see you.

JOHN takes his FATHER's hand to which a needle is taped to a vein.

JOHN
What have you been up to then?
You're too old for gymnastics.

LUCY
How are you feeling?

FATHER
Alright.

LUCY
Have they said anything?

LUCY looks at the notes clipped to a board on the end of the bed.

FATHER
No.

MOTHER
Have you had anything to eat?

FATHER
Don't think so.

JOHN notices a plate with toast crumbs on the chair beside the bed. A NURSE passes. LUCY calls over.

LUCY

Excuse me. Sorry. Could we speak to the consultant, please? Mr. Desai, I think it was.

NURSE

He's doing his rounds at the moment.

LUCY

Well will you tell him we're here?

NURSE

Of course.

They sit around the bed - unsure quite what to say. LUCY looks around at the other patients - half a dozen old men coughing and wheezing.

MOTHER

Nothing broken, apparently - that's the main thing.

JOHN

You look better than I thought you would.

FATHER

Pull the other one - it's got bells on.

JOHN

Honestly.

FATHER

When did you get here?

JOHN

About an hour ago.

FATHER

Much traffic?

JOHN

Came on the toll road.

FATHER

You've kept the receipt?

JOHN

Of course.

LUCY

I've brought you some grapes, Dad,
and a paper – I didn't know if
you'd be up to it.

JOHN

You had us worried.

FATHER

It's too hot in here.

JOHN

Always is in these places.
Breeding ground for germs.

FATHER

When did you get here?

JOHN

About an hour ago.

JOHN reaches into his pocket for his wallet. He pulls
out a crumpled receipt.

JOHN

There you go.

FATHER

What's this?

JOHN

Receipt.

FATHER

What for?

JOHN

Toll road.

FATHER

Oh that's good. Get the old VAT
back. Only two certainties in
life..

BOTH

Death and taxes.

FATHER smiles. JOHN squeezes his hand.

JOHN
Well you don't have to worry about
either for now.

FATHER lies propped up on pillows – his skin grey and
waxy – his breathing difficult.

LUCY
Have they said anything about an
MRI?

FATHER
No.

LUCY
You're sure?

JOHN stands.

FATHER
You going?

JOHN
Just to the loo. I'll be back in a
minute.

INT. BBC TOILETS DAY

JOHN stands in a cubicle and takes off his jacket. Patches of sweat can be seen soaking through his shirt. He unbuttons his shirt and takes that off too, before hanging it on the back of the cubicle door. He then pulls off several long lengths of toilet roll and begins to dry under his armpits, his chest and back. Standing half naked, he hears someone enter the room. He puts his shirt and jacket back on and flushes the toilet. Emerging from the cubicle he finds JOHN 2 stood at the urinals.

JOHN 2
Lovely script by the way.

JOHN
Thanks.

JOHN 2

'Punctuality is the politeness of kings.'

JOHN

Yes. That's one of Dad's.

JOHN 2

He seems almost obsessive.

JOHN

About time?

JOHN 2

Yes.

JOHN

Always has been.

JOHN 2

It's not rubbed off on you then?

JOHN

What? (Realises he's referring to him being late) Oh. No. He always used to say that I'd be late for my own funeral.

JOHN 2

Are you happy with what you've heard so far?

JOHN

Yeah. Very.

JOHN 2

Fascinating dynamic too. Do you mind if I ask you about John and Lucy's relationship?

JOHN

Not at all.

JOHN starts washing his hands at the basins.

JOHN 2

I mean this is probably a discussion we should have with Gabby and Sally as well, at some stage, just so we're all singing from the same hymn sheet, but how irritated is she by his arrival? There's obviously a degree of animosity there. Of friction between them.

JOHN

Yeah.

JOHN 2

Based on the whole prodigal son thing, I assume?

JOHN

I guess so. I think she feels – should feel – umm – marginalized – or at least that's her fear. Sidelined. Which she resents.

JOHN 2

And from my point of view – do I pick on this at all?

JOHN

Oh I think so – I mean it's always been there between them – so he knows exactly what he's going back to – but he can't do a whole lot about it. It's just the way things are within the family.

JOHN 2

But nothing's ever said outright? Explicitly.

JOHN

No. And I think that's the problem. She certainly doesn't talk about her feelings – not initially anyway. No one does. It's all surface – the traffic – the weather...

JOHN 2

Okay. Cool.

JOHN

I mean they can be civil to one another. Are, in fact, for the most part. The thing is they've never been a family to express their emotions particularly. It's all about keeping a lid on it – repressed.

JOHN 2

Great. Thank you. That helps a lot.

JOHN

Yeah?

JOHN 2

Yeah. And you're happy with the accent?

JOHN

Accent?

JOHN 2

I thought I'd keep it RP. Neutral.

JOHN

What do you mean?

JOHN 2

Well I think there's a bit of Lancashire in there somewhere, unless I'm mistaken.

JOHN

Possibly. Father was from Warrington.

JOHN 2

I mean I can do Lancashire, if that's what you want. (attempting the accent) My brother-in-law's from Huddersfield.

JOHN

Yorkshire.

JOHN 2

Really?

JOHN

Neutral's fine.

JOHN 2

Right.

JOHN and JOHN 2 stand side by side at the sinks washing their hands in front of a large mirror. JOHN glances up at their reflections - they look nothing like each other. JOHN 2 is in his early thirties - short and balding - whereas JOHN is late forties - tall and dark.

JOHN 2

Lucky it's not TV, eh?

JOHN

What?

JOHN looks back at the mirror.

JOHN

Oh I see. Yes.

JOHN 2

Although it's amazing what they can do with CGI these days. I'll see you back in there.

JOHN

Right you are.

JOHN places his hands under the drier. There is a sudden rush of air.

INT. HOSPITAL MRI SUITE DAY - FLASHBACK

A loud buzzing sound is heard as the magnetic field switches on and off. FATHER lies on his back as he moves slowly inside the scanner. A light comes on overhead - numbers count down. He looks terrified.

INT. MRI OBSERVATION SUITE DAY - FLASHBACK

A NURSE sits at a computer as x-ray images of FATHER's brain appear on the screen. JOHN watches from a chair in the corner of the room.

JOHN

What can you tell?

NURSE

The consultant will go through it
all once we've finished.

JOHN

Does it look normal though?

NURSE

I'm afraid I can't say. Is he
your father?

JOHN

Yes. He wanted me to come in with
him.

NURSE

Well he's in the right place.

JOHN watches the images on the screen – dark spaces –
shadows across the folds of the cerebral cortex.

INT. MRI SCANNER DAY – FLASHBACK

FATHER stares up inside the tunnel as the deafening
thumping sound of the magnetic scanner cuts in and out.

Steel tracks fill the screen, weaving like celluloid
through the gate of the Compeditor. Sleepers mark out
each frame – imprinting themselves on the back of the
retina in a series of blinding white flashes.

INT. BBC CORRIDOR DAY

Lift doors open and JOHN steps out into a long curved
corridor. He follows it round to the right, unable to
see the end. He then realizes he's lost. Retracing his
steps he comes out at a stairwell. On the wall is a
floor plan. He studies it before BECKY, the Broadcast
Assistant, appears.

BECKY

You look lost.

JOHN

Hi. Yes. Not sure quite what
happened.

BECKY

This way. They're all back in the studio now.

JOHN follows.

JOHN

It's Beth, isn't it?

BECKY

Becky.

JOHN

Sorry. Becky. I'm useless with names.

BECKY

We've met before – early on – once when you were down with Sally.

JOHN

Of course.

BECKY

Is the hotel alright?

JOHN

I've not checked in yet.

BECKY

Oh. Well it's just round the corner.

JOHN

I'm sure it'll be fine.

They push through a heavy black fire door, which closes behind them with a bang.

INT. CONSULTANT'S OFFICE DAY - FLASHBACK

A bright white light flickers as a light box fills the screen, illuminating an x-ray image of the brain.

CONSULTANT

We believe your father suffered a transient ischemic attack.

JOHN

Which is?

CONSULTANT

A minor stroke – brought about by a blockage of blood flow to the brain.

JOHN

Right.

CONSULTANT

Most likely that's what caused him to fall.

JOHN

I see.

The CONSULTANT points to part of the x-ray.

CONSULTANT

Now the majority of damage has occurred to the frontal and medial temporal lobes. How familiar are you with the brain?

JOHN

Not really. In fact not at all.

CONSULTANT

Okay. Well this is the frontal lobe, here, it's associated, amongst other things, with short term memory, planning and motivation. The medial temporal lobe is where much of our long-term memory is stored. Obviously it's hard, at this stage, to give an exact prognosis. Every case is different – but early signs are that he's suffering from retrograde amnesia – loss of memory prior to the trauma.

JOHN

Well his memory wasn't great before.

CONSULTANT

Your sister mentioned dementia.

JOHN

He's never been tested – not properly.

CONSULTANT

But she said she'd noticed a deterioration?

JOHN

Yes. That's right. Is there anything we can do about it?

CONSULTANT

As far as the dementia is concerned?

JOHN

Yes.

CONSULTANT

Not much, I'm afraid. But in terms of the stroke we need to exercise the brain. Occupational Health will obviously be in touch but you can help day to day.

JOHN

How?

CONSULTANT

By stimulating his memory. Playing games – objects on a table with a tea towel – that sort of thing? Jigsaw puzzles.

JOHN

He hates jigsaws.

CONSULTANT

Or photographs. Reminiscence therapy. The main thing is to get him talking about the past – the more he engages, the more he's likely to remember.

EXT. HOSPITAL DAY - FLASHBACK

JOHN stands outside the hospital entrance smoking a cigarette whilst talking on his mobile. It is a bleak, grey day. JOHN is surrounded by grey concrete buildings and hundreds of cars parked in the car park.

JOHN

He looks dreadful. Yeah. Well you know what Mum's like - never lets on, but she's obviously pretty shaken. Anyway I thought I'd stay down for a few days. It's not as if I've got any work on at the moment. End of the week they reckon. Yeah.

JOHN exhales.

JOHN

(defensively) No. Alright. It's just one. Okay? Look, I've got to go. I'll ring you later. Bye.

He hangs up and stands finishing his cigarette. He watches an old man being wheeled out by a relative and helped into a car in the car park. It is a pathetic sight - the old man is unable to help himself. JOHN stubs out his cigarette in the metal ashtray on the wall of the shelter and goes back inside the hospital.

INT. BBC STUDIO DAY

The second hand of the studio clock judders as time advances. JOHN sits listening to a discussion between SALLY, LUCY 2 and JOHN 2, about the character of LUCY in the script.

LUCY 2

Although I suppose at this point her feelings towards him are probably heightened, more intensified, everything's brought into focus.

SALLY

With Father's collapse?

LUCY 2

Exactly. And who can blame her in a way? There she is, she's been doing all the donkeywork for years.

JOHN 2

Not entirely.

LUCY 2

But that's what it seems like to her. That's her perception.

JOHN 2

Yep.

LUCY 2

I mean she's the one they ring up when something goes wrong – all the small things. At one stage, for instance, she mentions having to replace a light bulb in the freezer on a Sunday morning.

JOHN 2

Although she was going round anyway.

LUCY 2

Ah – but was she?

JOHN 2

Well it's in the script. Page 43.

LUCY

Yeah I know...

JOHN 2 reads from the script.

JOHN 2

Mother thanks Lucy and Lucy says, 'It's fine – no problem. I was passing anyway...'

LUCY 2

Sure – but I'm just wondering if that's actually true – I imagine she says that all the time – they ask her to do things and she feels she has no choice, given that he's at the other end of the country – John – and she's five minutes away.

JOHN

I think you're right, Lucy does feel somewhat obliged and that responsibility weighs heavily on her – there's no doubt about that. But Lucy has her reasons for behaving in the way she does – for taking on that role.

JOHN 2

To do with John being the favourite? And her efforts to win favour.

JOHN

But again that's her perception – I don't think John feels that particularly.

JOHN 2

That's obviously putting it crudely but you know what I mean?

JOHN

In fact I think if you were to ask him he'd probably tell you that he didn't get on with his father particularly.

JOHN 2

Really?

JOHN

No. Not really.

LUCY 2

That's interesting. So why does she see John as the favourite?

JOHN 2

She probably feels taken for granted – you know? The drudge.

JOHN

And I know she moans about it – but there is part of her, I think, that wouldn't actually have it any other way. She needs to be needed. She quite likes being the linch pin; central to everything that's going on. So there's a touch of the martyr too.

SALLY

But the audience should definitely empathise with her.

JOHN

Oh definitely.

LUCY 2

Because I just don't think she should be seen as the bad guy in this.

JOHN

Absolutely not.

SALLY

That's not how she's written anyway.

JOHN 2

No. Not at all.

LUCY 2

Because from my point of view – as an actor – there's not a lot here – and that's not a criticism – it's wonderfully economic – but so much is in what's not said – it's just a case of me trying to understand where she's coming from.

JOHN

Sure.

JOHN 2

And it'll be the same for the audience – to an extent – they're going to have to read between the lines – fill in the gaps and work out what's really going on between them – the truth.

SALLY

Whatever that is.

JOHN

What do you mean?

SALLY

Well because of course all this is subjective. We're seeing all this through John's eyes - from his point of view. I'm sure if we were to ask Lucy what happened we'd get a completely different story.

JOHN 2

Right.

SALLY

Which is what's great about it.
Biscuit anyone?

SALLY picks up a packet of biscuits and hands them round.

LUCY 2

Sorry - have I got time for a quick wee?

SALLY

Of course.

SALLY leads the way out of the studio back towards the control room - opening heavy doors as she goes. LUCY 2 follows.

LUCY 2

I hope I haven't held things up.

SALLY

No. Not at all.

LUCY 2

I'll be fine once I've got my head round it.

As LUCY 2 disappears down the corridor, SALLY raises her eyes at JOHN.

SALLY

(SOTTO)

I'd forgotten how high maintenance she is.

They disappear inside the control room.

INT. HOUSE DAY - FLASHBACK

JOHN and LUCY struggle to carry a bed down the stairs. It is wedged against the wall.

JOHN
Lift your end a bit. Higher.

LUCY
I can't.

JOHN
It's alright. I've got the weight.

LUCY
We should've dismantled it.

JOHN
I thought it'd be easier to keep it in one piece.

LUCY
Well it's not going to work.

JOHN
Not even if we turn it on its side?

LUCY
It won't get round the corner.

JOHN
They must've got it up here somehow. What are you doing?

LUCY
Getting a screwdriver.

LUCY squeezes past and heads off to the garage. JOHN sits on the step. He looks around at the pictures on the walls - the floral wallpaper - the oak banisters, smoothed with time. The house is silent. After a while LUCY reappears with a screwdriver and passes it up to JOHN.

LUCY
Here.

JOHN

Is it a Phillips?

LUCY

What?

JOHN

It needs to be a Phillips
screwdriver.

LUCY

Oh for God's sake.

JOHN

Don't worry, I'll get it. You
know I was just thinking. Do you
remember when they used to have
dinner parties and we'd lean over
the banisters as everyone arrived?

LUCY

Shall we just get this done?

JOHN

Sorry. Just came back to me –
listening to all the voices.

INT. GARAGE DAY - FLASHBACK

On the far wall of the garage dozens of pairs of men's shoes line two long shelves. Black and brown leather brogues, old tennis shoes, golf shoes, sandals...all covered in a fine layer of dust. Below the shelves is a workbench piled high with boxes full of bits and pieces. As JOHN opens one of the cupboards an avalanche of brown paper bags spills out onto the floor. He tries stuffing them back in before giving up. He opens a draw in which he finds jars of screws and old keys. In another he finds tins of dried out shoe polish. He bends down to look inside another. He pulls out a shoebox in which he finds a collection of 16mm film cans. At that moment LUCY puts her head round the door to see where he's got to.

LUCY

I thought you were getting a
screwdriver?

JOHN

Look what I found.

LUCY

What?

JOHN holds up a film canister.

JOHN

Do you remember the film shows in
the lounge?

LUCY

Oh for God's sake. I haven't got
time for this.

JOHN rootles about in the cupboard and pulls out another
box of editing equipment – splicer – rolls of tape – a
white and chinagraph pencils.

JOHN

All his old editing stuff as well.

LUCY

Can we just get this bed sorted?
I have got other things to do.

JOHN

Look, you go – I can manage.

LUCY

I don't mind but/

JOHN

It's fine. Mike will be wondering
where you've got to.

LUCY

He knows exactly where I am. Where
I always am.

JOHN

Well I'm here now so you don't
have to worry.

LUCY

Oh well that is a weight off my
mind. (Sarcastically) Thank you so
much.

JOHN

I didn't mean it like that. Oh
come on.

LUCY

He puts on a good show, you know,
for visitors.

JOHN

Look I'm just trying to help.

LUCY

For how long?

JOHN

As long as it takes.

LUCY

Until he dies?

JOHN

Don't say that.

LUCY

Well he's not going to get better.
We've got to face it.

JOHN

I know but...

LUCY

What about Val?

JOHN

What about her?

LUCY

Won't she want you home?

JOHN

She's fine about it.

LUCY

Really?

At the bottom of the box JOHN finds a photo album. Inside are a series of small square black and white photographs held in place with paper corners. As he flicks through the pages one in particular catches his eye - a picture of a toddler on a beach, buried up to his neck in sand.

JOHN

The consultant said we need to stimulate his memory – get him remembering.

LUCY

Remembering what?

JOHN turns the photo over in his hand. On the back is a date. 1960.

JOHN

Whatever it is he seems to have forgotten.

INT. CUTTING ROOM

The camera tracks slowly along the rail of the trim bin, past numerous different lengths of celluloid, hanging from hooks. Single frames are stuck to the metal bar with splicing tape – the un-catalogued remnants of edited sequences long misplaced.

SALLY's voice crackles over a speaker – her words distorted – shattered, like crazed glass.

SALLY (O/S)

Can you hear me? Hello.

INT. BBC STUDIO DAY

SALLY flicks the intercom switch as she speaks into a microphone on the desk. Sat beside her is JOHN checking his script.

SALLY

Anyone in the green room?

JOHN 2's voice comes back over the speakers.

JOHN 2

Loud and clear. Sorry. Didn't know which button to press.

SALLY

Great. I've tried to schedule this as best I could but it's been pretty difficult with everyone's availabilities - so we're sort of all over the place in terms of the chronology of things. Sorry. I just thought I'd warn you. So we're starting with scene 6 - as they leave the hospital.

She takes her finger off the intercom and turns to JOHN.

SALLY (CONT'D)

And don't blame me - blame Robin. It really annoys me - his agent said he'd be fine for the whole two days. I wouldn't have cast him if I'd known.

JOHN

What's he got on?

SALLY

A matinee. He's completely thrown the schedule. Fortunately they're all good - so it shouldn't be a problem. But it's always better to record in sequence.

JOHN

I thought we'd offered it to Matthew MacFadyen.

SALLY

I did. And he accepted.

JOHN

So what happened?

SALLY

He landed a tele on Friday. Nothing we could do. Don't worry, Robin will be fine.

JOHN

Don't you think he's a bit young?

SALLY

He doesn't sound it. I'd believe he was late forties, if you didn't know. Don't worry - he'll be fine.

The actors drift into the studio on the other side of the glass partition whilst SALLY and MARTHA, on grams, discuss sound fx. SIMON sits behind the mixing desk listening to various sounds. Colour-coded squares fill a computer screen beside him. Over the speakers we hear the voice of a sound recordist 'identing' a recording before hearing the sound of people walking down an echoey corridor.

SOUND RECORDIST

Interior school corridor atmos - take one.

MARTHA

I can't find a decent hospital atmos but we can cheat it.

SIMON

There's a good supermarket somewhere that might do.

MARTHA

I'll have a look. Use this for now. Okay - so I've put you a general murmur on one.

SIMON

Which?

MARTHA

Monks filing out of mass.

SALLY

So long as you've got rid of that bloke coughing. You could tell it was a loop.

MARTHA

School corridor on two. Plus a few trolleys etc... Air on three.

SIMON

Rain?

MARTHA

Do we want rain?

SIMON

It's in the script.

MARTHA

Really?

SALLY

Don't worry for now. We'll bung it on in the edit.

MARTHA hurriedly calls up the sound fx on her computer.

MARTHA

It's alright won't take a sec.
'Rain on leaves'. On four. It eases off towards the end but you should have enough.

SALLY

Okay? Everyone ready for a go?
(To Simon) We might as well record this.

SIMON presses the intercom to speak to the actors.

SIMON

Could we just have a few lines for level?

The actors gather around the microphone and begin to read their lines from a script balanced on music stand.

JOHN 2

Hang on. His blanket's caught in the wheel. Why don't I take him?

LUCY 2

I'm fine. Where are you parked?

JOHN 2

Top car park.

LUCY 2

We're not flogging all the way up there. He'll catch pneumonia.

JOHN 2

Alright. I'll see if I can get a bit closer. You wait here.

SIMON presses the intercom switch.

SIMON

Robin, could we just move you back a smidge?

JOHN 2 takes a step back from the microphone and looks at SIMON through the glass.

JOHN 2

Better?

SIMON

Step more.

JOHN 2

Lundy, Fastnet, Irish Sea
Southwest gale 8 to storm 10,
veering west. Thundery showers.
Poor, becoming moderate...

SIMON

Perfect. And a little more pitch –
especially once you get outside.
Okay. Ready for a green light
then? Scene 6 take one. CD1.
Rolling.

A red flashing sign fills the screen. 'RECORDING'.

EXT. HOSPITAL CAR PARK DAY - FLASHBACK

A glorious sunny day. A car pulls up outside the hospital entrance where LUCY and MOTHER wait with FATHER. JOHN jumps out of the car and hurries round to help.

FATHER

New car?

JOHN

It's yours.

FATHER

Is it?

JOHN

Come on – in you get? (To LUCY)
It's alright I've got him.

JOHN helps FATHER into the front of the car.

JOHN

Leg in. Okay?

FATHER

Where are we going?

JOHN

Home.

JOHN shuts the car door. FATHER looks out of the passenger window – the sharp angles of the hospital building, reflected on glass, cut across his face. He looks lost.

A flash of white light. Steel tracks fill the screen. Railway sleepers flicker through frame. The camera tilts upwards towards a bleached out horizon – hurtling forwards all the while.

INT. BBC STUDIO DAY

A green light mounted on a pole flashes repeatedly.

SALLY

Okay – well done everyone. I'd like to do a quick retake just from cue 8. I'm not really hearing the wheel chair, Caz.

CAZ

Okay.

SALLY

And can we give you another line,
Father?

FATHER 2

Sure.

SALLY

It's just that we're losing you a
bit in the scene. So after cue 4 –
if you could say...

SALLY turns to JOHN.

JOHN

Steady.

SALLY

(INTO THE MIC)

Steady.

FATHER 2

Steady?

SALLY

Yep. So as John is helping you
into the front of the car – you
say 'steady'.

FATHER 2

Right you are. And presumably I'm
still pretty bruised at this point
– so I might be in a bit of pain?
What do you think?

FATHER 2 looks at JOHN through the glass partition. JOHN
nods.

JOHN

Yep.

FATHER 2

Good. Thank you.

SALLY

And a little more effort noise
from you, Robin.

JOHN 2

Fine.

SIMON

What was the car you gave me?

MARTHA

Ummm. Just says 'car approach'.
Could be a Vauxhall. The next
track's a Vauxhall coming to a
stop.

SALLY becomes slightly irritable.

SALLY

Is there are problem?

SIMON

Just didn't sound modern enough to
me. What sort of car do they
drive?

JOHN

Volvo. It's quite old.

MARTHA

I'm not sure we've got a Volvo.

SALLY

Can we look at it in the edit, do
you think? I need to get on.

SIMON

Sure.

SALLY

Once again then, from cue 8 to the
bottom of page 13.

SIMON

I'll give you a second light for
the car door. Scene 6. Retake.
Rolling.

As SIMON brings up the faders we hear the sound of heavy rain. He flicks the green light on. Becky presses the start button on her stopwatch. The actors begin reading their lines. Beside them, CAZ rattles a wheel chair. SALLY and JOHN listen via the huge speakers in the 'control room'.

LUCY 2

Where's he gone?

MOTHER 2

There he is.

SALLY

(TO SIMON)

Can we hear the car?

MARTHA

It is there. On five.

SIMON

I can bring it up a bit more in post.

A car pulls up on cue. We hear the sound of the driver's door opening. The green light flashes again. JOHN 2 moves around the microphone as he acts getting out of the car in the rain.

JOHN 2

You're going to have to run for it.

LUCY 2

What took you?

JOHN 2

Didn't have any change for the machine. It's okay - I've got him. You get in. No point us both getting wet.

JOHN 2 helps FATHER 2 out of the wheel chair and into the front seat of the car, straining loudly.

SALLY (SOTTO)

Sounds like he's having a baby.

FATHER 2

Steady.

JOHN

Sounds like he's acting.

SALLY

Don't worry. I think between them we have it. Do you want to flash them?

The green light flashes repeatedly. SALLY presses the intercom switch.

SALLY

Lovely. We'll break there for lunch. Back at 2:20 when we'll be clearing the dining room. Scene 19. (To JOHN) Sorry – you know what it's like – we've just got to keep going.

JOHN

Sure.

SALLY

It'll sound fine. Have you got plans for lunch?

JOHN

Not really. I thought maybe the canteen?

SALLY

I've got a few bits and bobs to catch up on so –

JOHN

Oh right.

SALLY

Maybe tomorrow?

JOHN

That's fine. I might just wander out then – grab a sandwich.

SALLY

Happy?

JOHN

Hmm?

SALLY

So far?

JOHN

Yeah. It's sounding great.

INT. DINING ROOM DAY - FLASHBACK

FATHER sits on the edge of his bed. He looks around the room, dazed, as JOHN carries out the last of the furniture. A pair of pyjamas lie folded beside him. MOTHER comes in and draws the curtains closed.

MOTHER

I thought you were getting changed.

FATHER

Was I?

MOTHER

Come on - up you get.

JOHN watches from the doorway as MOTHER helps FATHER change. It is a pathetic sight.

MOTHER (CONT.)

Leg.

FATHER lifts one leg and steps into his pyjama bottoms.

MOTHER (CONT.)

Other one.

He steps again and she pulls them up tying the cord around his waist.

MOTHER (CONT.)

Arms.

FATHER holds out his arms as MOTHER puts on the pyjama top and buttons it. A Grandmother clock chimes in the corner of the room.

EXT. ALL SOUL'S CHURCH DAY

JOHN sits on the steps of the church eating a sandwich. He watches passers-by on Regent Street. BECKY appears.

BECKY
Alright.

JOHN
Hi.

BECKY
Getting some fresh air?

JOHN
Yeah. It gets a bit stuffy in there.

BECKY
Have you worked with Sally before?

JOHN
Yeah. Quite a few times. You?

BECKY
No. I'm just on a six-month secondment.

JOHN
Oh right.

BECKY
From TV.

JOHN
Enjoying it?

BECKY
It's different.

JOHN
No pictures.

JOHN laughs. Becky doesn't react.

BECKY
I was brought up with the Archers.

JOHN

Well that's enough to put anyone off.

BECKY

Have you written for it?

JOHN

(appalled at the thought)
God no! Mind you, they've never asked.

BECKY

This is much better - yours. Could even be tele.

JOHN smiles to himself.

JOHN

High praise.

BECKY smiles.

BECKY

I just meant...

JOHN

It's all right. I'm only teasing.

BECKY

I've put three passes behind the desk for your parents and sister tomorrow.

JOHN

Thanks.

BECKY

Is this their first time?

JOHN

Hmm?

BECKY

In studio.

JOHN

Oh. Yeah.

BECKY

What do you think they'll make of it?

JOHN

How do you mean?

BECKY

Seeing their lives played out.

JOHN

I'm not sure.

BECKY

Is he ok with it now? Your father. With what happened.

JOHN

I've no idea. He won't talk about it.

BECKY

Well you can understand why. It must be awful to lose a child.

JOHN

Yeah.

BECKY

Well I'd better get back. I'll see you in there.

BECKY leaves. JOHN smiles to himself as he watches her go. Just then his mobile rings. VAL's name appears on the screen. He answers it.

JOHN

Hi. Good – yeah. Some of the casting's a bit – well it's just not as I heard it. I can't. If you say anything you just piss people off. Anyway – how's things?

JOHN glances back at BECKY making her way towards the BBC main entrance. The camera tracks slowly around JOHN passing behind a large stone pillar. The screen turns black.

INT. UNIVERSITY SEMINAR ROOM DAY

A black screen. We hear recorded voices - the sound is thin.

TUTOR 1

One of the consequences, of course, to a traumatic event is not to remember it, or to remember it in a particular way - without responsibility for it. Because of course the thing about memory is that we reconstruct it in our own interest. When we remember things, the narrative that we make of that memory, serves to support our self-esteem. So there's that aspect to all of this - there's an unspoken event - something that's happened in the past which John is obviously pretty cut up about - more than that - he's obsessed about it. But as a form of therapy, after his father falls off the steps, he insistently reminds his father of his dead son - John's dead brother - which seems extraordinary to me. Why would he do that?

TUTOR 2

I suppose the question - looking at this in narrative terms - is whether this traumatic event has any dramatic pay-off? Is there some sort of revelation around it?

TUTOR 1

It's interesting that you say it's something John doesn't remember.

WRITER

He was very young at the time.

TUTOR 1

And yet it's something he moves blindly towards.

WRITER

He's aware that his brother died - and he sees his brother's death as the reason he's not particularly close to his father - he sees it as a barrier, if you like, that's between them.

TUTOR 1

Could it be that he's never seen these films?

WRITER

You mean that he discovers them for the first time in the garage?

TUTOR 1

Yeah - because it seems to me that the dramatic locus here is John and what he finds out. By definition you're uncovering the past - and there's also that curious lack of soundtrack too with the home-movies - which is ironic because what the viewer is trying to do here is make his own soundtrack. We're watching these old films with people saying things but we don't know what they're saying anymore - so I wonder if the revelation is for John. He takes his father in this direction and in doing so unwittingly moves himself towards some painful realization.

WRITER

Right.

TUTOR 2

What I'd like to know is why he's doing it? Is he sublimely un-self-aware - or is he just down right cruel? What's his motivation?

INT. BBC STUDIO DAY

The actors stand around the microphone reading from their scripts whilst CAZ moves around them with various props doing spot effects. She opens a door as JOHN 2 enters the scene.

JOHN 2

I've managed to stack most of it at the back of the garage. You'll need to decide, though, what you want to do with it all.

MOTHER 2

Might as well sell it. We've not had a dinner party in years.

JOHN 2

Is that for me?

MOTHER 2

Afraid it's not decaf.

CAZ scrapes a cup across a worktop.

JOHN 2

Thanks. How is he?

MOTHER 2

Asleep. At last. I think he's feeling a bit disorientated being downstairs.

JOHN 2

He'll get used to it.

MOTHER 2

What's all this?

JOHN 2

I found it out there - thought I'd have a look - trip down memory lane.

CAZ briefly switches on the projector before turning it off again.

MOTHER 2

Amazed it still works.

JOHN 2

Lucy gone?

MOTHER 2

To pick up the kids. Val phoned by the way.

JOHN 2

When?

MOTHER 2

You had your hands full. I said you'd call back. Is everything alright?

JOHN 2

Why?

MOTHER 2

She sounded tired.

JOHN 2

She's fine. There should be another spool somewhere.

CAZ rootles in a cardboard box and produces a plastic reel that she taps against the side of the projector to make a sound.

MOTHER 2

You don't have to stay you know.

JOHN 2

I want to.

MOTHER 2

We can manage. (attempts the line again) We can manage.

JOHN 2

I thought I could do a shop this afternoon. If you let me know what you want.

MOTHER 2

There's no need. I do it all on-line.

JOHN 2

Oh. Right.

MOTHER 2

How's the writing going?

JOHN 2

Okay.

MOTHER 2

Heard anything from Tatania?

JOHN 2

Tatiana.

MOTHER 2

I was almost right.

JOHN 2

She's moved to Channel 4.

MOTHER 2

Oh. Can't she put in a good word for you there?

JOHN 2

I sent her an idea a while ago but...I think it was too...there wasn't enough jeopardy.

MOTHER 2

What's that?

JOHN 2

It's what everything needs these days – that and a journey.

MOTHER 2

Doesn't the Lake District count?

JOHN 2

What?

MOTHER 2

Well you've to come a long way for these meetings.

JOHN 2

For the characters. The characters have to change – have to learn something along the way.

MOTHER 2

Oh I see. Well I hope they pay your train fare.

JOHN 2

Not always.

MOTHER 2

They should. They're down on us
like a ton of bricks if we forget
our license fee. Are you winning?

The green light beside them starts flashing. SALLY's
voice is heard over the speakers.

SALLY

Lovely. I'd just like to go once
again, if that's alright. I think
we had a couple of scripts in
there. Would it help if you had a
stand?

INT. HALLWAY/KITCHEN - FLASHBACK

JOHN sticks a post-it label on the downstairs toilet door
that reads 'LOO'.

JOHN

I read somewhere that you should
paint all the doors different
colours.

JOHN wanders into the kitchen where MOTHER sits at the
table reading an NHS leaflet entitled - 'Coping with
Memory Loss'.

MOTHER

Why?

JOHN

So that he knows the blue one's
the loo. The red one's his
bedroom...etc....

MOTHER

Well I can't see that working. He
has trouble enough without having
to remember what colour everything
is.

JOHN scribbles on another note and sticks it to the back
door. 'DO NOT GO OUT'.

MOTHER

It's like being back at nursery –
everything labeled.

JOHN

They said he might wander.

JOHN looks around the room. All the cupboards and drawers
are labeled: Plates. Cutlery. Mugs. Tea. Coffee...

JOHN

What else does it say?

MOTHER

We're meant to put away all sharp
objects.

JOHN

In case he stabs someone?

MOTHER

For his own sake, I think, more
than ours. (She reads from the
leaflet) 'A person with memory
loss may at times be confused or
disorientated. It's therefore a
good idea to safety proof the
house.'

JOHN

They were saying at the hospital
that he's likely to become upset
as well.

MOTHER

There's nothing new in that.

JOHN

Really?

MOTHER

He's just good at hiding it.

INT. CONTROL ROOM DAY

The scene continues as we see the radio script itself in
close-up. However, as we hear their voices it becomes
apparent that their conversation differs from the
dialogue as written.

JOHN (O/S)

I wish you'd told me. You could've phoned.

MOTHER (O/S)

He wouldn't have wanted me to. Besides, you're always busy.

FX JOHN TEARS A POST-IT NOTE FROM THE PAD AND STICKS IT ON THE DOOR.

JOHN There. That should stop him wandering.

MOTHER Assuming he's got his glasses on.

JOHN What?

MOTHER Well he won't be able to read all these labels otherwise. It's like being back at nursery. What are you doing now?

FX OPENS KITCHEN DRAWER. CLATTER OF CUTLERY

JOHN Putting the knives away.

MOTHER Why?

JOHN To be on the safe side.

FX CLOSES KITCHEN DRAWER

MOTHER He's not going to stab anyone.

JOHN They get frustrated. Angry.

MOTHER Aren't you over-reacting?

JOHN Better safe than sorry. Why didn't you tell me he was getting worse?

JOHN SITS DOWN AT THE TABLE BESIDE MOTHER

MOTHER I didn't want to worry you.

JOHN I'd have come down sooner. Done something about it.

MOTHER You've your own life to lead.

T1 Good

A vertical line is drawn down the page through the recorded dialogue. Beside it is written 'T1 GOOD'.

INT. DINING ROOM NIGHT

Rain streaks down the windowpane, lit by a streetlamp outside. As the camera moves slowly from the watery shadows on the wall, it reveals JOHN sat at the end of his FATHER's bed watching him sleep. He listens to him breathing. In the silence of the room a clock ticks.

INT. SITTING ROOM NIGHT - FLASHBACK

A projector screen is pulled from a long metal tube, wiping the previous scene. JOHN clips it onto its stand and walks back across the room. He moves various ornaments, including a carriage clock, from a nest of coffee tables and sets up the cine-projector. He flicks off the lights and switches on the projector.

Kodachrome images of two young children chasing each other in a park fill the screen - JOHN and LUCY aged 2 & 4. Light spills across JOHN's face as he watches the silent movie. MOTHER appears smoking a cigarette - she glances at the camera, chatting to the unseen cameraman - FATHER. The scene changes abruptly as it cuts from summer to winter.

JOHN and LUCY are pulled along on a sledge by MOTHER. They laugh as they pass close to the camera and into their FATHER's long shadow, cast on the deep snow.

JOHN sits on the back seat of a car. He is smiling. As the camera pans we catch a glimpse of another child sitting beside him. This is MATTHEW. The colour suddenly fades in intensity - dots appear on the screen before the film slips through the gate and the frantic flapping of celluloid is heard as the picture runs out, leaving a blurred shadow of the rotating spool.

INT. CUTTING ROOM

The footage counter clicks - 7 becomes 8. JOHN stares at the camera. A wavering horizontal line stretches across the screen marking a 24 frame dissolve as the sound of flapping film begins to change to the pulsating drone of a helicopter's rota blades.

A splicer blade cuts a piece of magnetic tape - the sound of the helicopter stops abruptly. Blue spacer is placed alongside the remaining trim and tape stretched over the join. A white-gloved finger smoothes the edit. Another piece of magnetic tape is lined up in the gang of the

Compeditor. The clamps are clicked into place and the wheel is turned.

The sound of shrieking gulls is heard as negative images of white waves running up a black beach flicker on the Compeditor's tiny screen. As the speed slows so the pitch changes and the cries become deeper – almost human.

INT. BBC STUDIO DAY

The cries continue. The VU meters on the mixing desk peak - the needles dip into the red.

SALLY

What's that?

SIMON

Sorry – we're getting ahead of ourselves. Stick it on two, Martha.

MARTHA

Already have. You've also got a ticking clock on three.

SIMON

Cheers.

JOHN sits listening with his head in his hands.

SALLY

Okay?

JOHN

Fine.

SALLY

Alright then – moving forward.
Scene 17. John, Father and Mother.

The actors wave through the glass.

SALLY (CONT.)

Oh you're all there. Splendid.
We'll come through.

JOHN follows SALLY through to studio where the three actors stand waiting.

SALLY

So this is John's first attempt to try and encourage his father to remember. And I think what needs to come across, Dan, is that sense of frustration. Here is a man who cannot remember what he had for tea, what he did five minutes ago.

FATHER 2

Sure. And until this moment he'd been perfectly active - run his own business...

SALLY

Exactly. And it's obviously upsetting for Mother too, to see him like this. A week ago they were making plans - then bang!

MOTHER 2

She's devastated.

SALLY

And frightened too, I think. Scared.

JOHN 2

And what about John?

SALLY

What do you mean?

JOHN 2

Well what's his motivation for all this?

JOHN

Motivation?

JOHN 2

Well if he knows what happened to Matthew - his brother...it just seems a bit - cruel, almost.

SALLY

All he knows is that he died. Isn't that right?

JOHN

Yeah.

JOHN 2

But the circumstances - I mean he'd have some idea about what happened.

JOHN

Nothing was ever said.

JOHN 2

No - but he'd have overheard something, surely - the odd exchange.

SALLY

I think what happens, in the script, is that he starts to piece it together - over time - so that as he shows these films to his father it begins to make sense to him. I don't think he knows what happened from the outset, does he?

JOHN

No.

SALLY

Otherwise it could be perceived that he's punishing his father in some way.

JOHN 2

Is he?

JOHN

Of course not.

JOHN 2

Fine.

SALLY

Okay?

JOHN

He just wants to get to the bottom of things - discover the truth.

JOHN 2

So he does have an agenda?

SALLY

John?

JOHN

I wouldn't put it as strongly as that. Whatever happened to Matthew is bound up in the past - in his father's memory - it's unavoidable if he's trying to remember back.

JOHN 2

Right. But what I'm getting at, though, is whether there should be any kind of edge to this? To his insistence that his father watches these films.

JOHN

No.

JOHN 2

Okay. Thanks.

SALLY

Anything else?

JOHN 2

Oh just one more thing - while we're on about motives. At what point does John see this as potential material for a play? How conscious is he of what he's doing - as a writer, with his writing hat on, if you like?

SALLY

I think his first concern is for his father's wellbeing.

JOHN

Definitely.

SALLY

But I think he is also aware of the dramatic possibilities.

JOHN

Only in so much as he sees everything in that way - life's experiences. I'm not sure it's that overt.

SALLY

No, but it's there – it's in his DNA.

JOHN 2

So he's not too worried about exploiting the situation. It's just part and parcel.

SALLY

I think so.

JOHN

Hang on a minute – I don't think he's exploiting anyone. That makes him sound like a bit of a shit.

JOHN 2

I suppose what I'm asking is whether there's a sense that somehow he's crossing the line.

SALLY

Well Lucy certainly thinks so.

JOHN 2

And the audience?

SALLY

It's tricky. The thing is it's not black and white. I think they should definitely empathise with him.

JOHN

I don't think he's a bad person.

SALLY

No. Not at all. And he shouldn't come across as that.

JOHN

It's just the way his mind works. But, as I say, I don't think we should even be aware that that's what he's thinking. I'm not sure he is half the time.

JOHN 2

It's interesting, isn't it? A poet friend of mine was at his father's funeral and as he watched the coffin disappear through the curtain he found himself thinking 'I'd better get a poem out of this.'

JOHN

But that's not John. You're implying that, somehow, he sees this whole visit as a material gathering exercise.

The actors look at one another awkwardly as JOHN's voice wavers with nerves.

JOHN 2

But then it's that dichotomy, isn't it?

SALLY

I think all we're saying is that a seed is sown, albeit subconsciously, and over the weeks it starts to grow - an idea starts to develop with time.

INT. BEDROOM NIGHT - FLASHBACK

JOHN lies in bed staring up at a cotton thread hanging from a small blob of blu-tac on the ceiling. Somewhere downstairs a clock chimes. The rhythmic sound of a rotating projector spool fades in.

INT. SITTING ROOM DAY - FLASHBACK

Film clatters through the projector gate in front of the lens. Dust particles float in a beam of brilliant white light that shines across the room. FATHER sits watching in partial shadow. Blurred colours - distorted shapes move across the screen as the light hits the far wall.

JOHN

Hang on a minute.

JOHN twists the lens slowly bringing the amorphous image into sharp focus.

JOHN (CONT.)

That's better.

JOHN picks up the old film can on which is written the words: 1960.

Close up on FATHER's face as he stares at a woman proudly pushing a pram. The camera moves slowly in on his eye as the flickering rays of light are reflected across the iris. The pupil contracts as we move inside the eyeball itself, through the gelatinous vitreous, to reveal the upside down image of MOTHER and child refracted on the back of the retina, before passing along the optic nerve and into the brain where we see dark jagged shapes – foam acoustic tiles in extreme close up. Detached voices are heard as partial images of MOTHER and child are seen superimposed on the angular soundproofed walls of the Dead Room – broken and incomplete.

JOHN

Do you recognize her?

FATHER

Yes.

JOHN

Who is she?

FATHER

Your mother.

JOHN

And the baby?

FATHER hesitates.

FATHER

Matthew.

JOHN

Good. Where are they?

FATHER

I don't know. No idea.

JOHN

Think.

FATHER

A house somewhere.

JOHN

Your first house. Do you remember what it was called?

FATHER

High Lea.

JOHN

Well done.

FATHER

That's easy.

JOHN

Where's Matthew?

FATHER

Is he here?

JOHN

No. He's not here.

FATHER

Where is he?

JOHN

You don't remember?

FATHER

I've no idea.

As the camera moves back along the optic nerve and through gelatinous vitreous we hear the sound of a train on the tracks. Sleepers flash through frame as the camera speeds towards the bleached out horizon. A dark indistinguishable shape is seen up ahead. FATHER blinks.

INT. BEDROOM NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Coffee spills across a page of scribbled notes.

JOHN

Shit!

JOHN quickly mops it up as a Dictaphone replays their recorded conversation.

FATHER
Where's Matthew?

JOHN
You tell me.

FATHER
I don't know.

JOHN
Think.

FATHER
I am thinking. I don't remember. I don't even know how old he is. How old is he?

JOHN
Five.

FATHER
Really?

JOHN
You don't remember?

FATHER
No.

JOHN hears a toilet flush, then footsteps on the landing. A door closes. He pauses the tape recorder and listens to the silence of his parents' house.

EXT. GARDEN DAY - FLASHBACK

A bird flies across the frame against a blank grey sky. The camera pans down to find JOHN sitting with LUCY on a bench in the back garden smoking a cigarette.

JOHN
If you had one wish, what would it be?

LUCY
What?

JOHN

Anything.

LUCY

Grow up.

JOHN

I remember wishing I could stop
time – that we'd never get older
and no one would die.

LUCY

When was this?

JOHN

Years ago. That we'd all just live
in the present.

LUCY

Jesus.

JOHN

It's not as easy as that though,
is it?

LUCY

And they always said you were the
bright one.

JOHN looks out at the overgrown garden. Dead leaves blow
about on the lawn.

LUCY

What you're doing - it's wrong,
you know that?

JOHN

So you've said.

LUCY

You're using him.

JOHN

I am not.

LUCY

No?

JOHN

Not at all.

LUCY

That's what it amounts to.

JOHN

I'm trying to help.

LUCY

What if it's too painful?

INT. STUDIO DAY

Close-up on VU meters as they peak into the red.

LUCY 2

What if he doesn't want to
remember... what if he'd rather
forget?

The computerised faders move up and down as we hear the
sound of rain.

JOHN 2

I'm going back inside.

LUCY 2

He won't thank you, you know.
Dragging it all up again.

JOHN listens as the two actors stand close to the
microphone on the other side of the glass. The sound of
the rain fills the studio.

JOHN 2

It's for his own good.

LUCY 2

Really?

JOHN 2

Why do you think he never talks
about him?

LUCY 2

It's too painful.

JOHN 2
Guilt.

LUCY 2
What?

JOHN 2
It's obvious.

LUCY 2
What's he got to feel guilty
about?

The green light starts to flash, reflecting on the glass partition.

BECKY stops her stopwatch – 1'30" dead. SALLY scrawls a vertical red line through sections of dialogue on her script.

SALLY
Lovely. (Turning to BECKY) So
that's take 1 for cues 1 to 6,
take 3 for 7 and 8 and I'd like to
listen to both 2 and 3 for the
end.

INT. KITCHEN NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Pieces of a jigsaw lie scattered across the kitchen table.

FATHER
What time is it?

JOHN
Ten minutes since you last asked.

FATHER
Feels late.

JOHN
Let's at least make a start.

FATHER
I don't know where to begin.

JOHN

With a corner. Something definite. Something you can place – that you know where it belongs.

FATHER

I don't recognise any of it.

JOHN

Look for colours – certain shapes.

FATHER picks up a piece of the jigsaw. He examines it closely, turning it in his hand. JOHN watches as he tries to fit it to another piece.

JOHN (CONT.)

Here. Have a look at the box – see what you're aiming for.

JOHN places the lid of the box on the table beside FATHER. It shows *A Portrait of a Young Woman* by Johannes Vermeer.

INT. BEDROOM NIGHT - FLASHBACK

JOHN sits up in bed looking through the photograph album – snapshots of a beach – a summer holiday forty years ago. He turns the page and sees the picture of Matthew buried up to his neck in sand. He pauses – staring at it before beginning to make notes in his coffee stained notebook. As he thinks he doodles on the paper – a diagram of a box with rays of light passing through a narrow aperture.

INT. CUTTING ROOM

An inverted image of the cove is seen in Kodachrome – static – frozen in time. A large clock on the wall of the post office at the top of the slipway. It, too, is motionless. JOHN stares at the image on the Competitor. As he turns the handle the second hand on the clock begins to move. And as the 16mm print moves through the gate so the numbers on the footage counter begin to flick round.

INT. BBC CONTROL ROOM DAY

A deep rhythmic ticking sound is heard, amplified over the speakers, as JOHN 2 rehearses his lines to himself.

JOHN 2

He's back home now. I know, which is why I thought...well I'm not sure, but I think I might have something. An idea. (repeating the line with a change of emphasis) I think I might have something. An idea.

SALLY listens carefully.

SALLY

What's that?

SIMON

What?

SALLY

That noise.

SIMON

It's his foot.

SALLY

What?

SIMON

Tapping.

INT. BBC STUDIO DAY

We cut inside the studio where we hear the sound of JOHN 2's shoe knocking against the metal script stand. SALLY's voice is heard over the speakers.

SALLY

Sorry. Robin we can hear your foot tapping I think. So if you could try and keep things nice and still.

JOHN 2

Sorry.

SIMON

Ready for the green light.

JOHN 2 stands ready for a take.

INT. BBC CONTROL ROOM DAY

The red 'RECORDING' light flashes on.

SIMON (CONT)

Here we go. Scene 36. Take 1.

The faders on the mixing desk move up as the sound of traffic is heard. A busy street. Pedestrians passing. A horn sounds. SALLY looks up from her script.

SALLY

I can't hear his footsteps. Is he actually walking?

SIMON

Looks like it.

SALLY

What shoes has he got on?

SIMON

Can't see.

SALLY

I'm going to stop him.

JOHN sighs with frustration as SALLY presses the intercom again.

SALLY

Sorry, Robin. We're not getting your footsteps. Can you make sure you stay on the concrete. I think you were straying onto the carpet just then. Let's go again. (to JOHN) We might as well get it right.

SIMON

Scene 36. Take 2.

The sound fx fade up again. We hear a mobile ring – muffled by clothing. On the other side of the glass CAZ pulls a mobile out of her pocket as she stands beside JOHN 2. JOHN 2 answers it.

JOHN 2

Sally. Hi. I'm fine. I was going to give you a call today. He's back home now. I know, which is why I thought...well I don't know but I might have something. An idea. When's the deadline? I'll email you something when I get back. And you'll let me know what you think, yeah?

The green light flashes repeatedly, reflecting on the glass partition. SALLY presses the intercom switch.

SALLY

Lovely. Just relax for a moment. (turning to JOHN) What do you think?

JOHN

What do you mean?

SALLY

I'm just wondering if we need hear the other end of the conversation. Ruth's in tomorrow - we could stick her in the cubicle and record both sides. What do you reckon?

JOHN

I just always think it sounds...I don't know, false, somehow. I mean if we're with John – if it's from his point of view – we're not going to hear what she's saying – especially if he's walking down the street.

SALLY

Not in reality – no – but I mean it's convention, isn't it? We just accept it. Do you think we'll get a sense, otherwise, of what's happening? That he's got this idea for a script.

JOHN

I think so – and anyway does it matter if we don't – it becomes clear.

SALLY

Except that later, (checking the script) scene 24, you've written Val's half of the call to be intercut.

JOHN

That feels more significant though somehow. I think we'd want to hear her clearly. If it were TV, or film – you'd see her in close up – you'd intercut between the two.

SALLY

Well, we can easily cut her lines in later, we don't have to decide right now.

SALLY leans into the intercom again.

SALLY

Okay. I think that's it then for today. Thank you everyone. See you all tomorrow.

The actors wave through the glass as they leave the studio.

SALLY (CONT.)

Happy?

JOHN

(UNCONVINCINGLY)

Yeah.

SALLY

What? Say.

JOHN

You don't think he's coming across
as too...

SALLY

What?

JOHN

Devious.

SALLY

No. I don't think so. Look it's
inevitable you're going to worry –
this is the most personal thing
you've written but you've just got
to take a step back. Let go.

JOHN

Easier said than done.

SALLY

It's sounding great. Really.

JOHN

Yeah?

SALLY

Oh and while I remember it looks
like we might need another couple
of scenes.

JOHN

Really?

SALLY

At the moment we're running...

SALLY turns to BECKY.

BECKY

Three minutes 15 seconds under.

JOHN

What about music though?

SALLY

You know we've no money for a composer.

JOHN

No but presumably you'll use something off disc. Max Richter - someone like that.

SALLY

We just need to think where. You've not marked anything specifically in the script.

JOHN

No. I thought I'd leave that to you.

SALLY

Ok - but that's not going to add a lot - time wise.

JOHN

The scenes on the beach will spread.

SALLY

A bit but not that much. If you've got time tonight - it might be worth jotting something down.

JOHN

What sort of thing?

SALLY

I don't know. Maybe a couple of scenes with Father? Up to you.

JOHN

Okay. I'll have a think.

SALLY

We'll be here a while clearing up. Why don't you shoot off?

JOHN

Oh right.

SALLY

Maybe go for a drink tomorrow.

INT. LIFT/LOBBY DAY

JOHN steps into the lift and presses for the ground floor. He waits alone as the lift descends – his face reflected in mirrors on either side. As the counter reaches zero the doors open and JOHN walks out into the entrance lobby where one of the security guards lets him exit through the revolving doors.

EXT. BBC BROADCASTING HOUSE NIGHT

JOHN takes out his mobile and dials.

JOHN

Hi. Just finished. Heading back to the hotel. It was okay. It's hard to tell. No, I've got to ring them later. I think they're staying at the same hotel..

JOHN's voice trails off as he becomes lost in the rush hour crowds on Regent Street.

INT. HOTEL ROOM NIGHT

JOHN lets himself into his hotel room. Lights flicker on to reveal a soulless room with a bed, a desk and a television mounted on the wall. He checks out the tiny bathroom, in which there is a loo and a shower. He looks out the window.

Platform announcements are heard coming from the train station on the other side of a high concrete wall – lists of place names echoing over the tannoy. 'Warrington Bank Quay, Wigan North Western, Preston...' He listens for a moment before pulling the net curtains closed.

He looks tired. He turns into the room and switches on the television with the remote. He sits on the edge of the bed, idly flicking through the channels. He switches it off again and reaches for his book. 'Funes the Memorious' by Jorge Luis Borges.

INT. CUTTING ROOM

Close-up on JOHN's face – staring. Silent images flick rapidly from one to another – mother and child – a hand tinted post card of a picturesque cove – mackerel flapping in a crate – flashes of iridescent silver and blue. Celluloid rattles through the Compeditor. A pencil

shades in squares on a dubbing chart - mapping sound.
 Screeching gulls fade in at 390. Cut out hard at 422.

ACTION	fx 1	fx 2	fx 3
INT. CUTTING Room	401 Shouts	390 Gulls Screech	Beach ATmos - waves
	412		
	422		
INT. HOTEL Room	Kettle Boiling	422	422
	429	431 Water pouring	430 432
	435 Tea cup	433	Door knock 434
	436	438 Door open	442 Carrier bags
		439	445
		455 Door close	457
	457	457	
		462 glasses chink	
INT. HOTEL BAR	Bar ATmos	464	TV - football match

As a strip of magnetic tape hits the sound head on the pic sync we hear the treated sound of gulls shrieking. The flickering image of a figure thrashing frantically under the water is seen on the tiny screen.

INT. HOTEL ROOM NIGHT

Bubbles churn inside a kettle as it boils. JOHN pours the hot water onto a tea bag in a cup. The tea slowly diffuses turning the water brown. There is a knock at the door. JOHN answers it. It's BECKY.

BECKY

Sorry to disturb you but I forgot to give you these.

She hands him a carrier bag.

BECKY (CONT.)

Scripts for tomorrow.

JOHN

Oh. Thanks. Great.

BECKY loiters by the door.

BECKY

Tubes are up the spout again. They've shut Oxford Circus.

JOHN

Oh. What a pain.

BECKY

Don't fancy a drink, do you? Kill some time.

JOHN hesitates.

JOHN

Oh right. Err...

BECKY

No point going anywhere for a while.

JOHN

Sure. I was going to get an early night – but it seems a bit tragic.

INT. HOTEL BAR NIGHT

A group of men sit around a TV screen watching football. JOHN and BECKY sit in a corner laughing together - each half way through their drinks.

JOHN

Are you a fan?

BECKY

Not really. World cup - that's about it.

JOHN

I've never been one for sport myself. Always hated the cold showers.

BECKY laughs again.

BECKY

Unlike your Dad.

JOHN

What?

BECKY

In the script. Didn't he used to play tennis?

JOHN

Oh yes. For the school team.

BECKY

I've never got tennis.

JOHN

Me neither. I think I was always a bit of a disappointment in that respect.

BECKY

I bet he's proud of you now though? A writer.

JOHN

Not really.

BECKY

I don't believe that.

JOHN

As far as he's concerned radio's something women listen to while doing the ironing. Now if I was a doctor, or a dentist - that'd be a different matter - something to brag about at the golf club.

BECKY

I bet that's not true.

JOHN

How much?

JOHN puts his hand out to shake on it. BECKY takes it jokingly.

BECKY

I'll ask him.

JOHN

You wouldn't dare.

BECKY

At Imran's tomorrow night.

JOHN

Imran's?

BECKY

Didn't Sally mention it?

JOHN

What?

BECKY

We're all going for a curry.

JOHN

Oh right.

BECKY

Like as a chance to get to know everyone.

JOHN

I'm not sure they're really that into curry - not unless it's from M&S.

BECKY

Oh but it'll be fun.

JOHN

I'll see what they say – they
might just want to eat here.

Becky smiles.

BECKY

You obviously get on though – I
mean assuming it is you in the
play – the protagonist.

JOHN

We do and we don't. It's
complicated.

Pause.

BECKY

How old were you when your brother
died?

JOHN

Three. He was two years older than
me.

BECKY

And they never talked about him,

JOHN

No.

BECKY

Or had any pictures round the
house?

JOHN

No. Just the album.

BECKY

Hidden away.

JOHN

Yeah.

BECKY

Do you remember him at all?

JOHN

Not really.

BECKY

Do you remember what happened?

JOHN

I remember people coming to the house - police, I imagine. And being sent away to stay with an aunt. I guess they didn't want me around. I used to lie awake at night listening to them talking.

He takes a sip of his beer.

BECKY

You said she blamed him - in the script - your mother.

JOHN

Yes.

BECKY

Why?

JOHN

For not doing enough. That was the impression I got anyway - that he could've done more to save him.

JOHN's mobile begins to vibrate, turning on the table in front of them. VAL's name appears on the screen. JOHN switches off the phone and puts it in his pocket.

BECKY

Aren't you going to answer it?

JOHN

Fancy another?

BECKY hesitates.

BECKY

I'll get these.

JOHN

No. Let me.

BECKY

Don't worry, I've got I.D.

BECKY jumps up and goes to the bar. JOHN watches her as she orders. She turns and smiles at him. He smiles back.

INT. KITCHEN NIGHT - FLASHBACK

A telephone's coiled chord stretches as JOHN leans back on a kitchen chair and whispers into the receiver. The house is still - the lights are off. On the table in front of him lies the unfinished jigsaw of the young woman. Only a few of the pieces have been joined together - an eye - part of the woman's ear.

JOHN

Maybe I'm expecting too much. I dunno. It's ironic - I always meant to write all this stuff down years ago - for the record - about his past - who was who - and now that I've finally got round to it he doesn't have a clue. Anyway - what have you been up to?...(concerned) Have you seen the doctor? What did she say?

INT. STUDIO - CUBICLE DAY

VAL 2 sits in the sound cubicle wearing a pair of headphones as she talks into the microphone. JOHN 2's voice is heard as if down the receiver.

VAL 2

Nothing.

JOHN 2

She must've said something.

VAL 2

She said it was nothing to worry about. Anyway it doesn't hurt anymore.

JOHN 2

You're sure?

VAL 2

Sure.

JOHN 2

What sort of pain?

VAL 2

What are you doing now?

As the camera tracks slowly around the microphone we cut back to JOHN sat in the hallway – mixing past and present – reality and artifice.

INT. KITCHEN NIGHT – FLASHBACK

As JOHN sits in the dark we hear VAL 2's voice on the other end of the line.

JOHN

Not a lot. Maybe you should take some time off...

VAL 2

I bet they're enjoying having you to themselves - your mum anyway.

JOHN

Do you want me to come home?

VAL 2

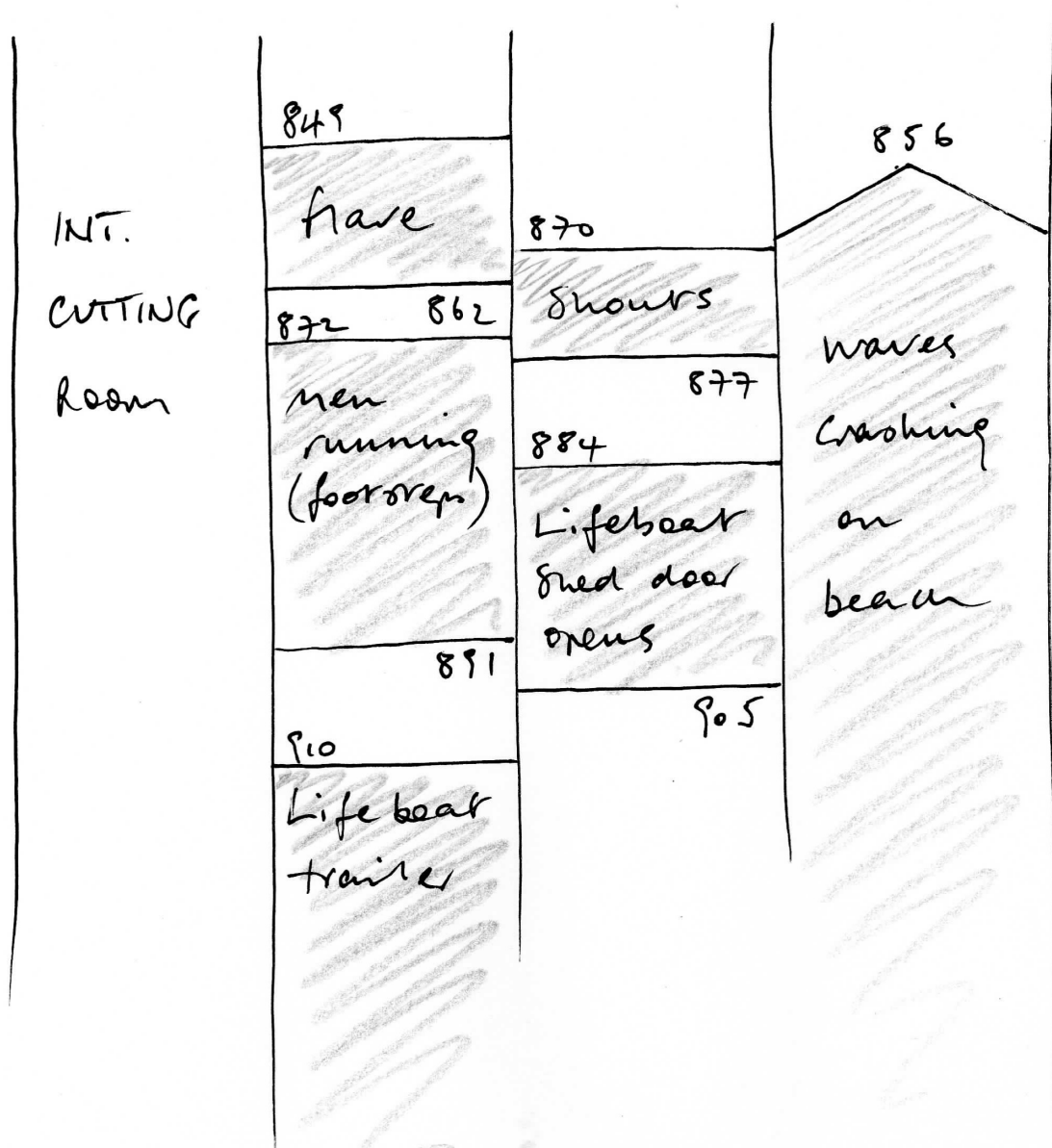
And start ordering me around? No thanks. Look - forget I mentioned it. It's nothing.

INT. BATHROOM NIGHT - FLASHBACK

There is loud groaning sound. The copper pipes vibrate as JOHN turns on the bath taps. Scolding hot water rushes out. He then opens the door to the medicine cabinet and looks inside at the various bottles of pills – each with a label with his father's name printed on it. He angles the mirror door in line with another, larger, mirror on the wall behind to create an endless number of framed portraits disappearing into infinity. JOHN studies himself, itching his stubbly cheek as steam from the bath begins to fog up mirror – eventually obscuring his own reflection.

INT. CUTTING ROOM NIGHT

Extreme close up of a pen as it marks a line on the dubbing chart – black ink flowing from its nib. Inside the shaded box it then writes the word 'FLARE'.



As a strip of magnetic tape passes across the sound head of the Compeditor there is a loud bang.

A marine flare shoots up into the sky – an explosion of intense white light in the night sky.

Phosphorous trails from the flare fade to reveal the muscular patterning across the iris.

As the camera pulls out to reveal JOHN's eye, we hear the sound of the turning tide.

INT. HOTEL BATHROOM DAY

Water streaked with toothpaste and blood runs down the plughole as JOHN brushes his teeth in the brightly lit bathroom. He squints as he looks at himself in the mirror; bags under his eyes – hung-over. He then glances at Becky's reflection as she's seen changing in the bedroom. She pulls on her jeans and jumper and puts her head round the bathroom door.

BECKY

See you there.

JOHN

Okay.

We hear the hotel room door close as BECKY leaves. JOHN looks back at himself and closes his eyes in shame. The sound of the station tannoy is heard as the camera moves slowly from the mirror to the open frosted window, through which BECKY is seen in the street below, walking away beside the high concrete wall.

STATION ANNOUNCER

Platform 1 for the 8:35 service to
Glasgow Central calling at
Warrington Bank Quay, Wigan North
Western, Preston...

EXT. HOUSE DAY - FLASHBACK

JOHN looks out of the large plate glass window; the bare branches of a cherry tree, swaying in the breeze, reflect across his face.

INT. KITCHEN DAY - FLASHBACK

JOHN watches MOTHER and FATHER sat together on a bench in the garden. MOTHER fusses with FATHER's coat, tenderly rearranging his scarf to keep him warm. JOHN takes a plate from the washing up bowl and places it on the rack. Soapsuds slide off onto the wet draining board. A bubble bursts.

INT. STUDIO DAY

Bubbles rise in a glass as CAZ blows through a straw. A green light flashes beside her. SALLY's voice is heard over the speakers.

SALLY

I think that's enough of that.
Thank you. Okay. Let's have some
running on gravel.

Caz lifts a panel in the floor to reveal a tray of gravel. She puts on a pair of oversized men's boots and steps onto it.

SALLY

Ready when you are. Just give me
a few.

CAZ starts running, stumbling about on the spot.

SALLY

Faster. More frantic.

The camera pans slowly across the faders on the mixing desk as the levels are adjusted. Close up on VU meters.

INT. CORRIDOR DAY

Silence. JOHN peers into the studio from the other side of the door. The red 'RECORDING' light shines above his head. He watches CAZ'S reflection in the glass partition as she runs faster and faster.

INT. SITTING ROOM NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Celluloid clatters through the projector. JOHN sits with FATHER in the dark - their faces illuminated by the light spilling from the white bulb.

JOHN

What about this?

FATHER

No idea.

JOHN
Yes you do.

FATHER
Is it in this country?

JOHN
Yes.

FATHER
Cornwall.

JOHN
No.

FATHER
That's the only place I know.

JOHN
Think.

FATHER
Anglesey.

JOHN
Getting warmer.

FATHER
Somewhere near Anglesey?

JOHN
I'll give you a clue. It's in
Wales.

FATHER
Wales.

JOHN
A place in Wales.

FATHER
Oh.

JOHN
Do you know where?

FATHER
Not a clue.

JOHN
Little Haven.

FATHER

Little Haven.

JOHN looks at FATHER, searching for a flicker of recognition in his eyes, as he stares at the images on the screen.

INT. CUTTING ROOM NIGHT

The camera pans down the dubbing chart.

	921		921
	Footsteps on Grumpy - running	928	Heavy Rain
934	Spraying turn puddles.	934	
Operator Dialogue "Wick series..."		945	
949		Disrupt Camer "There's a boy..."	

FX Track 2 - Footsteps. The sound of a person running cuts in hard.

Feet pounding across shingle fill the screen – stumbling – sliding – in the pouring rain.

Dubbing chart. FX Track 3 – Dialing. Dialogue Track 1 – Operator.

OPERATOR

Which service do you require?
Police, ambulance, fire brigade or
coast guard?

Sounds merge. Words are repeated, building to a crescendo. As the motorised Compeditor advances the magnetic tape suddenly jumps out of the gang. Metal teeth perforate the soundtrack.

A splicer blade slams down cutting the chewed up tape in two.

Strips of film of differing lengths hang in the trim bin – each one labeled – 'Beach' – 'Road' – 'Point'...

JOHN (O/S)

Do you remember?

Neurons, seen magnified thousands of times, flood with chemicals as they transmit signals from one to the other. Electrical pulses spark as they travel across synapses.

INT. SITTING ROOM NIGHT - FLASHBACK

FATHER sits beside JOHN looking through a family photograph album – snapshots of the beach, people sunbathing on the rocks, eating ice-cream on The Point.

JOHN

We used to buy mackerel from the
fisherman and barbecue them on the
beach.

The sudden flash of a knife is seen as it slits open the stomach of a fish. Guts spill onto a bloody newspaper.

INT. BBC CORRIDOR DAY

Bubbles rise inside a water cooler as JOHN fills a plastic cup. He picks it up and takes a sip as he talks on his mobile.

JOHN

Just come to reception and someone will be down to collect you. Well it might be me – probably will be – depends what we're doing.

Becky brushes past in the corridor carrying a pile of scripts. JOHN glances up. She doesn't acknowledge him.

JOHN (CONT.)

The hotel's all booked. Yeah it's fine. Next to the station. Is Dad alright? I mean he's not working himself up?

SALLY emerges from the control room.

JOHN (CONT.)

Okay. Look I've got to go. I'll see you later.

SALLY

Good night?

JOHN

I don't remember much about it.

SALLY

The dangers of the mini-bar.

JOHN

Something like that.

BECKY glances back at JOHN before disappearing into the control room.

SALLY

I thought we'd make a start with some wild tracks while we're waiting for everyone. Apparently the central line's up the spout. How are your parents getting here?

JOHN

Taxi.

SALLY

Oh that's fine then. We might as well get the narration out the way as well.

JOHN

Okay.

SALLY

We're in the dead room.

INT. STUDIO DEAD ROOM — DAY

Grey foam wedge-shaped acoustic tiles line the walls of the dead room killing any ambient sound. JOHN 2 sits at a table whilst CAZ resets the height of his microphone.

JOHN 2

How close do you want this, Sally? I mean is this all internal, or am I actually speaking to him — to Matthew?

SALLY

Umm...That's how I'd imagined it. John?

JOHN

Yes. That's what I was thinking originally.

JOHN 2

Okay. So as if he were still alive?

SALLY

Obviously he knows he's not.

JOHN 2

Sure.

JOHN

But I imagine it's just something
he does. Has done for years.

SALLY

Okay then – let's give it a go.

JOHN

I might stay in here if that's
okay?

SALLY

So long as your tummy doesn't
start rumbling.

SALLY smiles and leaves. JOHN 2 whispers as they wait for
the green light.

JOHN 2

So you live up in the Lakes, I
hear?

JOHN

That's right.

JOHN 2

Gorgeous part of the world. My
wife's from Perth.

JOHN

Scotland?

JOHN 2

Australia.

JOHN

Oh right.

JOHN 2

You married?

JOHN

Yes.

JOHN 2

Kids?

JOHN hesitates.

JOHN

No.

JOHN 2

Oh well – plenty of time.

JOHN

Yeah.

JOHN 2

So how long ago was all this –
your father's stroke?

JOHN

Two years. Just over.

SALLY's voice is heard over the speaker.

SALLY

Ready for a go? Just give a bit of
a pause between each one.

JOHN 2

Yep. (to JOHN) But he's ok now?

SALLY

Stand by for a green.

The green light illuminates on top of the pole. JOHN
watches as JOHN 2 leans into the microphone.

JOHN 2

Sometimes I think I hear you –
your voice in my head. But when I
try to imagine your face –
remember what you looked like –
all I see is the photograph of you
on the beach – smiling for the
camera. A split second as the
shutter snaps – a single frame to
last a lifetime.

INT. CUTTING ROOM NIGHT

The splicer slams shut as the handle is forced down on
two strips of celluloid.

Bright white light spills out of the Compeditor as film rattles through the gate.

A boy in a pair of swimming trunks digs in the sand. The picture cuts abruptly. Next he is seen running at the camera - grinning - holding a multi-coloured plastic windmill that spins in the wind.

INT. CAR DAY - FLASHBACK

Blinding sunlight streams in through the windscreen as JOHN sits behind the wheel. He glances to see FATHER'S reflection in the rear view mirror. FATHER looks out of the window at the passing countryside as the car winds its way over the North Downs. MOTHER sits beside JOHN in the passenger seat.

MOTHER

Where are we going?

JOHN

A ride out.

MOTHER

I wish you'd tell us.

JOHN

St. Martha's.

MOTHER

We haven't been there for years.

JOHN

I thought a bit of fresh air might do us good.

MOTHER

I'm not sure I'll make it to the top.

JOHN

We can take it slowly. You'll be able to see for miles today.

FATHER stares out of the window as the car approaches a level crossing. He looks down the line as they cross the track - his face reflected in the glass.

A sudden flash as sleepers rush through frame - the steel track weaves from side to side - the same recurring image

as before - getting ever closer to a dark shape on the horizon.

INT STUDIO DAY

VU meters peak as the sound of crows is heard over the speakers. A car pulls into a car park. JOHN gets out and opens FATHER's door before helping him out.

JOHN 2

Here we are. Out you get.

SALLY

Can we bring the crows down a bit?

SALLY and JOHN sit beside each other following their scripts whilst the actors stand around the microphone on the other side of the glass.

MOTHER 2

It hasn't changed.

JOHN 2

I thought we could walk to the top. See the view.

JOHN's phone vibrates on the desk. He picks it up and reads the text.

JOHN

They're here.

BECKY

I'll go and fetch them if you like.

JOHN

No. It's fine. I'll nip down.

BECKY

Sure?

JOHN

Yeah. Thanks.

JOHN looks embarrassed – unable to meet BECKY'S eye.

INT. BH LIFT/RECEPTION DAY

JOHN stands in the lift – his face reflected by mirrors on all sides. The numbers change as the lift descends to the ground floor. The lift doors open to reveal a commotion in the foyer as a security guard attempts to extract FATHER from inside the revolving doors.

LUCY

Just stay there! Don't move!

FATHER pushes against the glass panels. He's trapped, unable to find his way out. On the other side of the glass LUCY signals frantically in an attempt to help. Her words, however, go unheard. The security guard swipes his pass and the doors start moving again.

JOHN

What's happened?

LUCY

He got his coat stuck in the door.
It's alright now.

FATHER emerges looking shaken.

JOHN

Are you okay?

FATHER

Not enough bloody room.

JOHN

How was the journey?

MOTHER

Train was empty – had the whole carriage to ourselves practically.

JOHN

Well everyone's looking forward to meeting you. You've checked into the hotel?

LUCY

Just dumped the bags and came straight here. They asked if we wanted a table for dinner – I wasn't sure what we were doing.

JOHN

I thought we might go for a curry.

LUCY

You're joking?

JOHN

Why not?

LUCY

He hates that sort of thing.

JOHN

How do you know – he's never had one. Not a proper curry anyway.

LUCY

With good reason. He won't eat anything he can't pronounce. What's the matter with a carvery?

JOHN

It'll be good for him. An education. Besides, everyone's going.

LUCY

Who's everyone?

JOHN

On the production.

LUCY

Actors?

JOHN

Probably.

LUCY

Oh God.

JOHN

Why? What's the matter with actors?

LUCY

They're all so self-obsessed. Probably why you get on with them.

FATHER interrupts holding his ID badge.

FATHER

What do I do with this?

JOHN

Pin it to your coat.

FATHER

Who's Becky?

JOHN

What?

FATHER

It says Becky Thomas.

MOTHER

Mine does too.

JOHN looks at the badge on which is printed BECKY'S name.

JOHN

Oh. She's the Broadcast Assistant. She was probably thought it was easier just to do it in her name.

FATHER

Shouldn't it say my name?

JOHN

I doesn't matter – no one reads them.

FATHER

People won't know who I am.

JOHN

I wouldn't worry about it.

JOHN pins the badge to FATHER's lapel.

FATHER
Are you sure?

JOHN
Quite sure.

MOTHER
How's it going?

JOHN
Fine. I just hope you're not going to find it dull. There's quite a lot of going over things – retakes.

LUCY
(SOTTO)
I still don't get why you were so keen for them to come.

JOHN
(approaching the lift) Quick – before it shuts again.

JOHN hurries to the lift and holds open the doors. Once everyone is inside he lets them close.

INT. BBC CORRIDOR DAY

JOHN leads MOTHER, FATHER and LUCY along a corridor and through a busy production office.

JOHN
Does anyone want a tea or coffee before we go in? Dad?

FATHER
Please.

MOTHER
You've just had one.

FATHER
When?

MOTHER
On the train.

FATHER

Well can't I have another one?

MOTHER

I don't think it's a good idea, do you?

JOHN

All the actors wait through there
– in the green room. This is the
production office.

They turn a corner towards the studio.

JOHN

Loos are at the end there – if you
need them.

The red recording light is illuminated above the door.

JOHN

We'll just have to wait a minute.

FATHER peers into the studio through a narrow window in
the door at the actors who are in the middle of a take.
He watches them move in and out of view, silently running
through their lines.

FATHER

And this is one of yours is it?

JOHN

What?

MOTHER

Yes. This is one of John's plays.
(whispers to JOHN) I keep telling
him.

The red light switches off.

JOHN

Okay. We're alright now.

JOHN pushes open the heavy door into the control room.

INT. CONTROL ROOM DAY

SALLY stands as they enter. JOHN introduces everyone.

SALLY

Hi.

JOHN

This is Sally – the director. This is my dad, my mum and sister, Lucy.

LUCY

Hello.

MOTHER

Hello.

SALLY

Hi. Lovely to meet you all. Come in – take a seat. So glad you could come.

BECKY

Can I get anyone a drink?

JOHN

Oh and this is Becky.

LUCY

No thank you.

FATHER

Coffee would be lovely.

MOTHER

He's fine.

BECKY

Sure?

MOTHER

Quite.

BECKY

Okay. Cool.

SALLY

We're just about to go again on
Scene 29.

JOHN

Right.

JOHN takes his seat at the desk whilst the others settle themselves on a line of chairs at the back of the room. SALLY presses the intercom.

SALLY

Okay? Ready for another go?

The red 'RECORDING' light flashes on. MOTHER and FATHER sit with their faces reflected in the glass partition as the actors take their positions round the microphone, scripts in hand. As the faders on the desk move up we hear the sound of crows and the wind in the trees. The green light flashes.

JOHN 2

Nearly there.

FATHER 2

I have to say I didn't think I'd
make it.

JOHN 2

Neither did I?

FATHER 2

Worth the climb.

FATHER leans towards MOTHER.

FATHER

Are they meant to be us?

MOTHER puts her finger to her lips – signaling to be quiet.

MOTHER

Just listen.

FATHER

Chap doesn't look the least bit like me.

JOHN

It's radio, Dad. It doesn't matter what they look like. No one's going to see.

FATHER

Doesn't sound like me either?

MOTHER

Shhh.

JOHN

It's not important.

FATHER

Should've got Mike Yarwood.

JOHN

(TO SALLY)

He remembers Mike Yarwood.

MOTHER

He remembers the Coronation too but get him to boil an egg and he'll forget to take the pan off the ring.

FATHER

He had Harold Wilson down to a T.

JOHN

He was an impersonator. This is different. They're not doing impressions.

FATHER

Obviously.

JOHN

It's more about getting a feel for the character.

FATHER

He used to do a very good Jimmy Hill as well.

JOHN

Why don't we talk about it later.
Let's just listen for now.

As the actors' voices fill the control room the camera slowly moves in on FATHER's reflection as he listens.

JOHN 2

Do you remember this place?

FATHER 2

St. Martha's.

JOHN 2

And down there.

FATHER 2

Chilworth and the millponds.
Used to be a gunpowder factory
before the war.

JOHN 2

And over there.

FATHER 2

Blackheath. Winterfold. Ewhurst.
And beyond that the South Downs.
Not bad eh?

JOHN 2

What's my name?

FATHER 2

What?

JOHN 2

What's my name?

FATHER 2

Don't be silly.

JOHN 2

Tell me.

FATHER 2

Simon.

JOHN 2

No.

FATHER 2
Steven.

JOHN 2
No.

He sighs - frustrated.

JOHN 2 (CONT.)
John.

FATHER 2
John.

JOHN 2
That's right.

FATHER 2
John.

JOHN 2
What?

FATHER 2
Can't even remember your damn
name.

JOHN 2
It'll come.

FATHER'S face is reflected on the glass as he watches
JOHN 2 hug FATHER 2 in the studio.

JOHN 2
It's alright.

Pause.

SALLY
Lovely. Can we just check there
wasn't a script at the end?

The green light flashes to end the take.

FATHER

I still have problems with names,
you know. (To SALLY) Forgotten
yours already.

MARTHA

Do you want to hear it again?

FATHER

Please.

MARTHA

No – I meant the take.

FATHER

Oh.

SALLY

Thanks.

Martha presses play on the computer. The red cursor moves along the Pro Tools timeline tracing the dialogue like a heartbeat on a cardiograph machine. We hear the sound of crows – the wind..

JOHN

Do you remember that day?

FATHER

I wouldn't have sworn like that,
I'm sure.

LUCY

It's artistic license.

EXT. ST. MARTHA'S DAY - FLASHBACK

JOHN, FATHER and MOTHER sit on a bench on top of St. Martha's Hill taking in the spectacular views across the Surrey hills.

FATHER

Blackheath. Cranleigh. Ewhurst.
And beyond that the South Downs.

MOTHER

Isn't it beautiful?

FATHER

You know they used to make
gunpowder down there before the
war. Chilworth Mills.

JOHN

You'd have made a good historian.

FATHER

Well I always enjoyed history at
school. The kings and Queens of
England. I bet you couldn't list
them all.

JOHN

Could you?

FATHER

Used to be able to - once upon a
time.

MOTHER

I'm going to have a look in the
church.

MOTHER wanders over to the Norman church that stands
behind them with its low-walled churchyard surrounded by
Scots pines.

JOHN

Do you remember when we used to
come up here for midnight mass on
Christmas Eve?

FATHER

Did we?

JOHN

Straight from the pub.

FATHER

I bet the vicar was chuffed.
Church full of drunks.

FATHER chuckles to himself at the thought. JOHN watches
FATHER as he stares out across the landscape - at the
mist hanging in the valley bottom - lost in his own
world.

FATHER

We used to come up here when we were first married.

JOHN

Really.

FATHER

I remember.

JOHN

Do you remember your wedding?

FATHER

I can picture the dress your mother wore. Ivory lace. She was mortified.

JOHN

Why?

FATHER

She'd had to let it out. She was terrified they'd all notice.

JOHN

What?

FATHER

That she was pregnant.

JOHN

With Matthew?

FATHER

It was our secret.

JOHN is stunned by the revelation.

FATHER

They all found out soon enough. Your grandfather was outraged – said I'd brought shame on the family. Refused to even come to the christening.

JOHN

What about Gran?

FATHER

She came. She said he was in bed with flu – everyone knew the truth of course. It was months before he'd even hold him – his first grandson.

The camera slowly pulls back as they sit together in silence. The mist gradually shrouds the hillside. A distorted telephone conversation between JOHN and SALLY is heard as JOHN and FATHER eventually disappear in a blanket of fog.

JOHN (O/S)

I remember him saying he wasn't there when Matthew was born – that he dropped mum at the hospital – went home and lit a bonfire – but I'm not sure if that's too much.

SALLY (O/S)

In what sense?

JOHN (O/S)

Well if he's sat there – reminiscing – and the fog is closing in.

SALLY (O/S)

Which is a lovely metaphor, by the way.

JOHN (O/S)

I wondered whether the smell of a bonfire somewhere triggers the memory. The fact that he was absent for the birth – that he wasn't involved. I know it's something he regrets now. What do you think? Do you think it's too much?

SALLY (O/S)

Possibly. Unless you can find a place for it elsewhere.

EXT. CAR PARK DAY - FLASHBACK

Thick fog. The car stands alone in the car park. The sound of the engine is heard repeatedly failing to turn over.

INT. CAR DAY - FLASHBACK

They all sit inside the car as JOHN tries the ignition once again. Nothing.

JOHN

Battery's dead.

FATHER draws a line with his finger across the steamed up window, wiping the condensation from the glass.

The camera speeds along the railway tracks - sleepers flashing past.

JOHN gets out his mobile.

JOHN

No signal. There's a farm down the lane. I'll see if I can use their phone to ring the garage. Stay here.

JOHN gets out of the car and slams the driver's door shut. FATHER looks out through the misted window - his face partially obscured.

The picture fades to white. From the bleached out frame the dark shape emerges in the distance getting closer all the time.

INT. BBC CORRIDOR DAY

We cut hard to an exit sign. FATHER wanders down the corridor looking in at different doors. JOHN emerges from the control room and follows after him.

JOHN

Where are you going?

FATHER

Toilet.

JOHN

Next on the right. Are you going to be okay?

FATHER

Fine.

FATHER goes into the toilet and closes the door behind him.

JOHN

Don't lock it, will you? I'll wait out here.

JOHN checks his mobile as he waits in the corridor.

INT. STUDIO DAY

JOHN 2 approaches MOTHER 2 at the microphone. MOTHER watches from the other side of the glass.

MOTHER 2

Did you get through?

JOHN 2

They'll be about half an hour.

JOHN 2

Where's Dad?

MOTHER 2

Call of nature.

JOHN 2

Where?

MOTHER 2

He just went behind that tree.

JOHN 2

Dad? Dad! He's gone.

MOTHER 2

He can't have.

JOHN 2

Well I can't see him anywhere.
Dad! Dad!

They begin to search the area.

MOTHER 2

He can't have gone far.

JOHN 2

I thought I said to stay put.

MOTHER 2

Well you know what he's like.

JOHN 2

Dad!

MOTHER 2

What's that?

JOHN 2

Where?

MOTHER 2

I thought I saw something – down
in the dip.

JOHN 2

Careful – it's slippery. There's an
old pillbox round here somewhere.
Maybe he's found that.

The green light flashes just as JOHN enters the control room and whispers in MOTHER's ear. SALLY's voice is heard over the speakers.

SALLY

Okay. I'd like to go once again
straight away. And this time if we
could have more panic from you,
Robin, once you realize Father's
missing.

SIMON

Stand by for a green.

INT. BBC CORRIDOR DAY

MOTHER looks anxious as she follows JOHN down the corridor.

JOHN

I think he's had an accident. He won't let me in.

MOTHER

Trouble is, he forgets.

JOHN knocks on the toilet door.

JOHN

Dad. Mum's here. Come on - open the door.

The door is unlocked from the inside and MOTHER slips in, quickly closing it behind her again. As JOHN waits in the corridor BECKY emerges from the control room.

BECKY

Everything alright?

JOHN

Fine. Listen - about last night.

BECKY

Forget it. Honestly.

JOHN

Really?

BECKY

I have already.

JOHN

Right.

BECKY

I think we're breaking for lunch in a minute. I'm doing a sandwich run if anyone wants anything.

JOHN

I think we'll go to the canteen. But thanks.

BECKY

Cool.

BECKY leaves. The toilet door opens.

MOTHER

He's going to need another pair of trousers. There's some at the hotel.

JOHN

Okay. Give me ten minutes.

MOTHER

Lucy can go.

INT. HOUSE DAY - FLASHBACK

JOHN finds LUCY stripping the sheets off FATHER's bed.

JOHN

What are you doing?

LUCY

What's it look like?

JOHN

I didn't realize he was that bad.

LUCY

If he gets any worse he'll have to go into a home.

JOHN

Mum won't like that.

LUCY

There'll be no choice.

JOHN

Have you've talked about it?

LUCY

Not properly. She just starts crying.

JOHN

You can understand it.

LUCY

So long as I'm here to mop up.

JOHN

Is there anything I can do?

LUCY

You can put these in the wash.

INT. BBC CANTEEN DAY

JOHN leads FATHER, MOTHER and LUCY through the canteen. FATHER is wearing a different pair of trousers. LUCY is clearly not happy.

JOHN

You can have either hot or cold.
I'll grab a tray.

FATHER

What's that?

JOHN

Chilli con carne.

FATHER

Never heard of it.

JOHN

I don't think you'd like it.
Soup.

MOTHER

What sort?

JOHN

Minestrone, or carrot.

FATHER

I'll have carrot.

JOHN

You get a bit of baguette with it
as well.

MOTHER

Oh he won't manage that with his
teeth.

JOHN

I'll see if there's a soft roll.

LUCY

What about you, Mum? There's sandwiches. Jacket potato with various fillings.

MOTHER reads off the menu board on the wall.

MOTHER

I think I might try a Panini. Someone at embroidery was talking about them the other day – they're supposed to be very nice.

JOHN

Why don't you go and find a table I'll bring the food.

MOTHER

You can't manage on your own. I'll help you.

LUCY

Come on then, Dad. Where do you want to sit? By the window?

LUCY steers FATHER towards a table by the window whilst JOHN and MOTHER queue for food.

JOHN

One soup and one cheese Panini please.

CANTEEN WOMAN

Help yourself to soup – bowls at the end.

JOHN ladles soup from a pan into a bowl.

MOTHER

All that business on St. Martha's. I don't remember any of that. He was only gone five minutes.

JOHN

I know.

MOTHER

And there is no pillbox – not there anyway. It's round the other side.

JOHN

It's what you do though, writing – take bits from all over – and cobble them together.

MOTHER

That's dishonest.

JOHN

Not really. People do it all the time.

MOTHER

He was just watching a squirrel.

JOHN

Look – don't worry about it.

MOTHER

Do they think it's true?

JOHN

Who?

MOTHER

Sally – all of them. Should I keep quiet?

JOHN

It's fine.

MOTHER

I wouldn't want you getting into trouble...

JOHN

I won't – really.

MOTHER

Even if you are lying.

JOHN

Look just forget it. Okay? It's drama.

MOTHER

I'm sure Robert Dougall wouldn't lie.

JOHN

It's not lying and anyway Robert
Dougall's dead.

MOTHER

Richard Baker then. You know what
I mean. People trust the BBC to
get it right.

The CANTEEN WOMAN passes JOHN a hot Panini on a plate.

CANTEEN WOMAN

There you go love.

JOHN

Thanks. There you are - one
Panini.

MOTHER

That's a cheese-toastie.

JOHN

Same thing.

MOTHER

Then why don't they just call it
that?

JOHN

Panini sounds better. Continental.

MOTHER

I think I'd rather have the soup.

INT. CONSERVATORY DAY - FLASHBACK

JOHN looks out into the garden as LUCY hangs sheets on
the line. They blow about in the wind - wrapping around
her - completely obscuring her from time to time.

FATHER (O/S)

Tell me again.

JOHN turns away from the window and back to FATHER who
sits opposite him at the table. In front of them is a
tray of objects.

JOHN

Last time. I want you to look at the tray – okay?

FATHER

Right.

JOHN

Have a proper look. Then you're going to shut your eyes and while they're closed I'm going to take one of the objects away. And you have to tell me what's missing. Clear?

FATHER

Right.

FATHER looks at the objects on the tray.

JOHN

Ready? Close your eyes.

FATHER closes his eyes as JOHN removes a seashell from the tray.

FATHER

Can I open my eyes yet?

JOHN

Yep.

FATHER opens his eyes. JOHN studies his face as he carefully examines each object – a clothes peg, an egg cup, a matchbox car...

FATHER

Well there's nothing missing – it's all still there.

JOHN

Look carefully – you have to try and remember.

FATHER

Are you playing?

JOHN

No. I'm just watching.

FATHER

That doesn't seem very fair.

JOHN

The doctor wanted you to do it.

FATHER

Why?

JOHN

Come on. Concentrate. One thing.

FATHER

That's not there?

JOHN

That's right.

FATHER

Well how am I supposed to know?

JOHN

(FRUSTRATED)

Because it was there before and now it's gone.

FATHER

Matthew.

INT. BEDROOM NIGHT - FLASHBACK

JOHN sits at his laptop writing. He presses the 'Play' button on the tape machine. He listens to a conversation with FATHER.

JOHN

You were playing in the sand.

FATHER

No.

JOHN

You were playing in the sand - seeing how deep you could dig.

FATHER

I don't remember.

JOHN

There's a picture - a photograph -
in the album.

INT. CUTTING ROOM DAY

The image of a brain scan fills the screen - the folds of the cerebral cortex curve like patterns in the sand. Waves, seen in negative (white on black), wash over the sandy ridges. Frames flicker as a boy runs towards the camera - grinning - holding a multi-coloured plastic windmill that spins in the wind.

The picture cuts to a shot of FATHER in a pair of shorts and T-shirt holding a garden spade. The camera follows him as he traces a line in the sand with the edge of the spade.

The picture cuts again. He is digging a hole - cutting into the wet sand and piling it up in a mound - the mound gets higher until it eventually fills the frame.

INT. UNIVERSITY SEMINAR ROOM DAY

Black screen. The same voices are heard as the WRITER defends his idea.

TUTOR 1

Can you talk to us a bit about the ending? Or rather, the movement towards the end.

WRITER

I'd always imagined Father being unconscious throughout and that by the end we finally catch up with ourselves.

TUTOR 1

So thinking about the different layers you've got here - the recursive nature of this whole thing - you've got Father, unconscious throughout - and we see flashes - a train track hurtling through frame. This recurring image and all the while we feel that we're somehow getting closer to the truth perhaps?

TUTOR 2

Just like the rear gunner in Catch 22.

WRITER

Exactly.

TUTOR 1

So that initially we see, say the first ten seconds of it and then you see a bit more each time so that by the time we get to the end we are thoroughly prepared for it - primed, if you like.

WRITER

Yes. That's the way I'm thinking. Because originally, as you know, I had it that the cutting room was inside Father's head - that as he lies unconscious we see him piecing together what happened - prompted by watching the home-movies - by talking to John.

TUTOR 1

Right.

TUTOR 2

But then I wondered whether, in fact, it's John who is assembling these fragments of memory in his own mind - not Father.

WRITER

So he's piecing things together for himself?

TUTOR 2

Based on what he's been watching
and what he thinks he remembers -
what he thinks he knows of the
past.

WRITER

Right.

TUTOR 2

So we have John on several levels
then - we see him in the present
recording the play and in the past
in flashback where he's looking
after his father and showing him
the home-movies.

TUTOR 1

And we also see his other self,
The Writer, it seems, disappearing
into a studio.

WRITER

Yes. I wondered in fact whether to
make more of that - to introduce
another layer to this recursive
structure, so that I refer to the
PhD itself - so that the whole
thing is framed within the context
of the PhD.

TUTOR 2

You mean have two Johns?

TUTOR 1

You've already got John 1 and John
2.

WRITER

Although John 2 is an actor. I was
thinking about showing the Writer,
himself - the author of this
entire thing.

TUTOR 2

As Alan Bennett does, of course,
in *The Lady in the Van*.

WRITER

Exactly. That's what I thought.

TUTOR 1

Do you think the audience -
assuming this is ever made - would
be able follow what was going on?

WRITER

I've no idea.

EXT. BBC BROADCASTING HOUSE DAY

A fork cuts into a piece of chocolate fudge cake. SALLY
takes a bite as she sits with JOHN at a café table
outside Broadcasting House.

JOHN

I guess it's also about loss -
about a family coming to terms
with grief - or not, as the case
may be - I mean it's about all of
those things. So what did you
think?

SALLY

(finishing her mouthful)
Hmm...sorry?

JOHN

I mean it's only initial thoughts
but...

SALLY

I think it's interesting.

JOHN

You do?

SALLY

Definitely. In terms of the
relationships between the father
and the son - and his attempts to
help him regain his memory - all
that I think is great.

JOHN

Oh good. I just thought it'd be interesting to write something that looks at how we remember things, particularly traumatic events – and how it's possible to bury them. But also I think it needs to be about how we all remember things differently – how the truth obviously depends on point of view. I've started writing already – just a few scenes.

JOHN rummages in his satchel and pulls out a notebook.

JOHN

I've not yet decided on a structure though. I could take it chronologically – start with news of his fall and then go from there.

SALLY

Where do you see it ending?

JOHN

Well I hope he recovers – obviously.

SALLY

No. In terms of the story.

JOHN

Oh I see. Umm...I'm not sure.

SALLY

Because you could do it so that we see the script being produced.

JOHN

A play within a play?

SALLY

Why not? Pirandello did it. You show the recording – the writer, the actors...

JOHN

I hadn't thought of that.

SALLY

As a way of questioning what happened – the truth – from different perspectives – or rather different versions of the truth. False memory too.

JOHN

What do you mean?

SALLY

I read something the other day about a group of people – about an experiment, a study at some university or other, where a group of students were fooled into believing they'd committed a serious crime.

JOHN

Really?

SALLY

It was extraordinary. Researchers managed to plant false memories – and not just minor offenses either, but assault – that they'd actually assaulted someone in the past when in fact they hadn't at all. It was amazing. I think they interviewed the parents and gathered various true facts about each of them, which they then included in the interview alongside false memories – and the students accepted the false memories as having taken place. Absolutely convinced. It's bizarre.

JOHN

But this isn't about that though.

SALLY

No. But it's interesting, don't you think? That just based on the tiniest thing we can convince ourselves that something happened – something terrible in this case. (Taking another mouthful of cake) Are you sure you don't want any of this – it's delicious.

JOHN

No. I'm fine.

SALLY

Sorry. You were saying?

JOHN

Well I quite wanted the son to narrate it – so it's very much told from his point of view.

SALLY

Right.

JOHN

You don't like that idea?

SALLY

No. It's fine. I'd just be wary of having too much voice over. 'Show don't tell.'

JOHN

Right. I've already started jotting a few things down, if you want to have a quick read? Just a couple of scenes.

SALLY

Oh okay.

JOHN passes the notebook to SALLY.

JOHN

Umm. The first one is where he's in the garage and he finds the rolls of film.

SALLY

Alright.

As SALLY starts to read JOHN sits back and watches people walk in and out of Broadcasting House while a news crew interviews someone on the other side of the walkway.

SALLY

You don't think it's a bit convenient?

JOHN

What?

SALLY

That he comes across the home-movies as soon as he gets back from the hospital.

JOHN

But that's exactly what happened. I was looking for a screwdriver and I found these rolls of 16mm film he'd taken. That bit's actually true.

SALLY

Do you think you need it?

JOHN

You mean cut it?

SALLY

I'm just wondering whether it might be enough to just have them watching the films together — you'd assume John had found them somewhere — in the attic, or wherever.

JOHN

Maybe.

SALLY

Or it could be tapes.

JOHN

What do you mean?

SALLY

What if he came across a box of tapes, rather than film? Given that it's radio.

JOHN

Did people record things in the same way?

SALLY

I think so. On quarter-inch. With reel-to-reels.

JOHN

But he would've had to have been an enthusiast.

SALLY

It's just a thought. I think the best thing is to write it – all – and then we can see what we're dealing with in terms of structure as well. You know, you could play around with that quite a bit – cutting back and forth.

JOHN

Yeah. Maybe.

SALLY

Because of course that's something you might want to think about – time itself. What it means for Father once he's had his stroke. I imagine his perception of time changes – and also I think somewhere John talks about how those summer holidays seemed to last forever – two weeks in August, to a child, seemed like an age. Just a thought anyway. Speaking of which I was supposed to be in an edit half an hour ago.

SALLY slurps down her coffee.

SALLY

How's Val – by the way?

JOHN

Good. Yeah.

SALLY

When's the baby due?

JOHN

Not for a while yet.

SALLY

Okay – well I've got to go. Email me, yeah?

JOHN

Sure.

They kiss on the cheek and John watches Sally head back into the building. He glances at her finished coffee cup. He reaches across, takes the wrapped Amaretto biscuit from the saucer and puts it in his pocket.

INT. BEDROOM DAY

The word 'VAL' is written in black pen on a yellow post-it note. JOHN then sticks it on the wall. As the camera pulls out from the yellow square of paper it reveals a line of post-it notes all with words scribbled across them. 'FATHER FALLS' - 'BRAIN SCAN' - '16MM FILMS' - 'MATTHEW' - 'BEACH' - 'RESCUE' - JOHN stares at them all - a jigsaw of scene headings - before removing the word 'RESCUE' and moving it earlier in the sequence. He looks at them all again before reshuffling them into a new order.

INT. GARAGE DAY - FLASHBACK

JOHN empties out a cupboard full of brown paper bags and stuffs them into a refuse sack. He clears empty paint tins, bits of old wood and junk from shelves.

MOTHER

You don't have to do this you know.

JOHN

I might as well while I'm here - make myself useful.

JOHN picks up an old tennis racket.

MOTHER

You're not throwing that out, are you?

JOHN

He doesn't play anymore.

MOTHER

He might.

JOHN

Mum – he can't even make it to the toilet. I can't see him dashing to the net.

MOTHER

You never know.

JOHN

Besides, it's full of woodworm.

MOTHER

He was captain at school.

JOHN

It's just gathering dust.

INT. BBC CONTROL ROOM DAY

There is a clatter over the speakers as CAZ throws a tennis racket onto a pile of rubbish heaped on the studio floor. MOTHER 2 breaks down in tears as she stands with JOHN 2 by the microphone. MOTHER, LUCY and FATHER watch through the glass. The camera moves slowly from one to the next as the actors speak their lines.

MOTHER 2

I'm sorry.

JOHN 2

Hey. It's alright.

MOTHER 2

There's just too much to think about.

JOHN 2

I know.

MOTHER 2

I'm not sure I'll be able to cope when you're gone.

JOHN 2

Lucy will be here.

MOTHER 2

She says we should move – somewhere smaller.

JOHN 2

There's no rush.

MOTHER 2

That's what I told her.

LUCY turns to JOHN and whispers as the actors continue with the scene.

LUCY

I never said that.

JOHN

It doesn't matter.

LUCY

It matters to me.

JOHN

We can talk about it later.

MOTHER

It's what you were thinking.

LUCY

I would never have said it though.

SALLY

Sorry. Do you mind?

LUCY sits back, clearly furious at the actor's portrayal of her. The scene continues.

JOHN 2

Hey come here. I'm not going anywhere.

JOHN 2 and MOTHER 2 hug.

EXT. BBC BROADCASTING HOUSE – ROOF TERRACE DAY

JOHN finds LUCY lighting up a cigarette on the roof terrace.

JOHN

It's just a play.

LUCY

It's not just a play. She's been talking about this for weeks. She's told all her friends too.

JOHN

I thought they might find it interesting.

LUCY

Re-writing history?

JOHN

Don't be like that.

LUCY

Why can't you just write about something else. Make it up. Or don't you have the imagination? Actually, forget that - clearly you do. This whole thing's a work of fiction - none of it happened - not in the way you remember it anyway. They'll listen to it when it's broadcast and this is how they'll remember things. Never mind how it was - what actually happened.

JOHN

Of course they won't.

LUCY

You think he's bad - well she's no better - not really. She gets by - day to day - but you end up talking round in circles half the time. You agree something and a week later you're back to square one. She'll have forgotten.

JOHN

She's seventy-seven.

LUCY

Seventy-eight. You don't even know how old she is.

JOHN

You're right, that house is too big for them.

LUCY

Then why make me out to be the villain?

JOHN

I'm not.

LUCY

That's what it sounded like in there. 'The world according to John.' You sit there and you make all this stuff up. It's like we're not real – just characters. People will think I'm a right cow.

JOHN

You're over reacting.

LUCY

You come out of it jolly well. The sympathetic son. Is that how you see yourself?

JOHN

I did spend six months with them.

LUCY

You had nowhere else to go.

JOHN

That's not true.

LUCY

God. You've even managed to convince yourself now. Doesn't take long, does it?

BECKY appears from inside.

BECKY

We're starting again.

JOHN

Okay – I'll be down in a minute.
(To LUCY) Why don't you come back
in?

LUCY

And listen to that bullshit? No
thanks – I'd rather catch
pneumonia.

LUCY takes another drag of her cigarette.

EXT. GARDEN DAY - FLASHBACK

Flames lick around rubbish from the garage. The gut
strings of the tennis racket catch alight and snap in the
heat. Smoke curls as it billows into the sky.

INT. CONSULTING ROOM DAY - FLASHBACK

FATHER lies on a DOCTOR'S couch looking up at a
fluorescent strip light.

DOCTOR

Do you know where you are?

FATHER

No.

DOCTOR

Do you know who I am?

FATHER

No.

DOCTOR

Do you know what day it is today?

FATHER

No.

DOCTOR

Do you know what year is it?

FATHER

Nineteen fifty-three.

DOCTOR

Do you know who the name of the
prime minister?

FATHER

No.

DOCTOR

Can you tell me your wife's name?

FATHER

Jean.

DOCTOR

And how long have you been
married?

FATHER

I don't know.

DOCTOR

Do you feel happy?

FATHER

Sometimes.

DOCTOR

Do you feel that your life is
empty?

FATHER

I don't know.

DOCTOR

Do you feel that something bad is
going to happen?

FATHER

Should I?

DOCTOR

Okay now we're going to do a
series of simple exercises.
Firstly I'd like you to have a
look at these words.

The DOCTOR shows FATHER a card with the words: BANANA,
APPLE, GRAPES and ORANGE, printed on it. FATHER reads
them before the DOCTOR covers the card again.

DOCTOR

Now can you tell me what was
written on the card.

FATHER

Banana, apple, orange...

DOCTOR

One more.

FATHER

I can't remember.

DOCTOR

Okay. Here are some more.

The DOCTOR shows FATHER a second card on which is printed
the words: PARSLEY, OREGANO, ROSEMARY and THYME. FATHER
looks at the card before the DOCTOR takes it away again.

FATHER

Parsley...coriander and thyme.

DOCTOR

Okay. Thank you. And now I'd like
you to draw a clock for me. Just a
simple clock face with the hours
of the day.

The DOCTOR hands FATHER a pad of paper and a pencil.
FATHER confidently draws a large circle that fills the
page. He then pauses. He looks down at the empty clock
face unable to remember the numbers.

INT. SITTING ROOM NIGHT - FLASHBACK

FATHER sits in an armchair by the window staring at his
reflection in the window. JOHN enters and draws the
curtains. He looks at FATHER and smiles.

FATHER

You know what the Eskimos used to
do?

JOHN

What?

FATHER

Soon as your teeth had dropped out
they'd push you out of the igloo -
leave you to die in the cold.

JOHN

Lucky you're not an Eskimo then.
You've got your jumper on back to
front.

FATHER

Have I?

JOHN

How about some music?

FATHER

If you like.

JOHN

What do you want to listen to?

FATHER

What is there?

JOHN

Let's see.

JOHN opens the wooden record cabinet and begins flicking
through LPs.

JOHN (CONT.)

James Last. Do you remember him?

FATHER shakes his head.

JOHN (CONT.)

'Hooked on Classics. You used to
play that all the time.

FATHER

Did I?

JOHN

And this. I haven't heard this in
ages.

FATHER

What is it?

JOHN

You tell me.

He puts on 'Miserere mei, Deus' by Gregorio Allegri.
FATHER begins to listen. JOHN watches him.

FATHER

I don't know.

JOHN

Yes you do. Everyone knows this.

As FATHER continues to listen to the music the camera tracks slowly in towards him, until his face eventually fills the screen. Tears well up in his eyes. The camera moves in closer still. Silently, he begins to cry.

INT. CUTTING ROOM

The music continues. Flickering images of waves washing over ridges in the sand are seen on the tiny screen, this time in positive. As the film rattles through the Compeditor we hear the DOCTOR'S voice as he questions FATHER.

DOCTOR (O/S)

Now I'm going to give you a letter of the alphabet and I want you to generate as many words as you can think of beginning with that letter. Okay?

FATHER (O/S)

Yes.

DOCTOR (O/S)

And the letter is P.

FATHER (O/S)

Pain. Promise. Person. Pull.
Police. Pale. Picture. Priest.
Pray...

The picture cuts. FATHER digs a hole in the sand. Smiling children in swimming trunks crowd the camera. Amongst them is the boy with the windmill. FATHER picks him up and holds him upside down. The boy wriggles, laughing, as he's lowered into the hole. The grainy footage becomes blurred as the film jumps the gate.

INT. SITTING ROOM NIGHT - FLASHBACK

JOHN sits alone watching a series of abstract shapes flickering on the screen.

EXT. GARDEN NIGHT - FLASHBACK

A breeze blows grey ash across the glowing embers of the bonfire as it gradually dies.

INT. BEDROOM DAY - FLASHBACK

The words 'PHONE CALL' are scribbled on a yellow post-it note, beneath the word 'VAL'. JOHN then sticks it beside one that reads 'HOSPITAL'. Sunlight casts shadows across dozens of post-it notes covering the bedroom wall - a patchwork of characters and interwoven storylines.

The light begins to fade and we hear a telephone ring somewhere in the house. As the camera continues to pan across the post-it notes we hear JOHN hurry downstairs and pick up the receiver.

JOHN (O/S)

Hello...Speaking...

INT. STUDIO DAY

JOHN 2 approaches a NURSE who stands at the microphone.

JOHN 2

Excuse me I'm looking for Valerie Hughes. She was admitted late last night.

NURSE

Byron ward. End of the corridor. On your right.

JOHN 2 walks on the spot. SALLY's voice is heard over the speaker as the green light flashes repeatedly.

SALLY

Sorry. I'm going to have to stop you. I can't hear your footsteps, Robin. Let's go again from the top. And a bit more urgency.

JOHN 2

But at this point he's no idea what's happened.

SALLY

No. Just that Val's been taken into hospital. He's obviously worried though.

INT. CONTROL ROOM DAY

JOHN puts a pencil line through the scene before writing 'T1 - NG.'

SIMON

Okay - standby by for a green.

The green light flashes. JOHN 2 approaches the microphone - this time he appears to be more anxious.

JOHN 2

Excuse me - I'm looking for Valerie Hughes. She was admitted last night.

NURSE

Just a minute.

CAZ taps a computer keyboard beside the actors.

NURSE (CONT.)

Byron ward. End of the corridor. On your right.

JOHN 2

Thank you.

SALLY listens over the speakers as JOHN 2 walks on the spot, breathing heavily.

SALLY
(TO SIMON)

Can we have a bit more corridor
atmos? I think it needs to feel
busier.

SIMON

Sure.

As SIMON pushes the faders up on the desk the noise in
the corridor becomes louder – an orderly with a trolley –
passing nurses. JOHN 2 stops walking.

SALLY

Is there a door?

MARTHA

Sorry. My fault.

SIMON

We can drop one in in the edit.

JOHN 2

Val? What's happened?

VAL 2

I'm sorry.

JOHN 2

I just got a message that you'd
been admitted with stomach pains.

VAL 2

I've lost him, John.

JOHN 2

How do you know?

VAL 2

I can feel it. He's gone.

JOHN 2

What have they said?

VAL 2

They're doing a scan.

JOHN 2

Why didn't you ring me?

VAL 2

I thought it would pass – like
before. I'm sorry.

JOHN 2

It's no one's fault.

JOHN 2 hugs VAL 2 as she cries.

SALLY

Lovely. I'd like to do it again,
if you can bear it. I just want to
ask John something.

SALLY turns to JOHN.

SALLY

Cue 3. When he says 'I just got a
message that you'd been admitted
with stomach pains.' Would he say
that?

JOHN

What do you mean?

SALLY

I'm just wondering if it sounds a
bit formal – he's just got there –
he's relieved to see her, etcetera
etcetera...

JOHN

Umm. I don't mind. He could say,
'I heard they brought you in with
stomach pains,' or something. Is
that any better? I mean I think
it's pretty much what I said.

SALLY

Do we need it at all though? What
about if he says, 'What's
happened'. And then she says, 'I'm
sorry. I've lost him.'

JOHN

Yeah. I suppose so.

SALLY

Okay.

SALLY presses the intercom button.

SALLY (CONT.)

Robin can we cut 3 on page 93,
please. So we'll just run cue's 2
and 4 together. And cue 9 'Why
didn't you ring me...' I think there
ought to be a sense of 'you
should've called me'. Of course he
couldn't have done anything but
perhaps he feels he may have been
able to prevent this from
happening had he been there.

JOHN 2

Sure.

SALLY

So that we seed the idea of blame
early on – even though he says
'it's no one's fault' – as things
progress it's clear that he does
blame her to an extent. And of
course she's wracked with guilt.
Let's go again.

SIMON

Roll 3 ID 7 Scene 56 Take 2

SIMON pushes up the faders on the desk. The needles on
the VU meters flicker as we hear the voices of a NURSE,
VAL and JOHN. VAL is in tears. The camera moves in slowly
towards the loudspeaker – the black cone vibrates as it
fills the screen.

NURSE

Baby's heart has stopped beating.

VAL

When?

NURSE

In the last day or two.

VAL struggles to cope with the news.

INT. ULTRASCAN SUITE DAY

An ultrasound image of a foetus appears from out the blackness.

JOHN

Can you tell what it was?

NURSE

A boy.

VAL

What happens now?

NURSE

You'll be given some mifepristone,
which induces baby.

VAL

So I give birth to him as if he
were alive?

NURSE

Yes.

VAL

How long will it take?

NURSE

Not long.

VAL lies on a bench as the mid-wife moves the transducer across her stomach. She stares at the image on the monitor. JOHN sits beside her holding her hand.

VAL

We'd like to bury him.

NURSE

Of course. The chaplain will talk
to you about funeral arrangements,
if that's what you'd like.

VAL

Yes.

INT. CONTROL ROOM DAY

The audio track advances – a green line marking numerous peaks and troughs on the timeline as the dialogue continues.

NURSE

And that could take place either here at the hospital, or elsewhere, if you wish, with your own priest.

VAL

I'd like our own.

NURSE

That's fine. Now baby will need to stay here for a few days for the post mortem to be carried out to determine cause of death.

INT. STUDIO DAY

The red 'RECORDING' light reflects in the glass. VAL 2 stands in front of the microphone. She cries out in prolonged pain.

The VU meters peak into the red as the sound distorts.

A splicer cuts a strip of magnetic tape in two. The sound of screaming stops dead. Silence.

EXT. CHURCH YARD DAY

JOHN and VAL stand together as a tiny white coffin is lowered silently into a grave.

INT. CONTROL ROOM DAY

The sound of earth hitting the coffin lid is heard over the loudspeakers as CAZ throws handfuls of grit onto a plank of wood. JOHN listens with his eyes closed.

CAZ

Enough?

SALLY

I think so.

SALLY presses the intercom through to the Green Room.

SALLY (CONT.)

Could we have Sheila and Robin
through to studio for scene 87.
I'm afraid we're jumping around a
bit now. (turning to the others)
Would anyone like a tea?

BECKY

I'll get them.

INT. BEDROOM NIGHT - FLASHBACK

JOHN lies in bed staring up at the ceiling. A model Spitfire, with a piece of red cotton wool trailing from its tail, dives towards the ground pursued by a German Stuka. Rain runs down the window causing shadows on the walls from the street lamp outside. We hear voices arguing.

VAL (O/S)

I just don't see why you have to
keep going down?

JOHN (O/S)

It's only for a couple of days.

VAL (O/S)

You were down last week. And the
week before that. It's not as if
they're not coping. And they've
got Lucy.

JOHN (O/S)

It's not fair on her though, is
it?

VAL (O/S)

And what about me?

JOHN (O/S)

They're old. I don't imagine it'll
be long.

VAL (O/S)

That's what you said after the fall. You thought it'd only be a matter of weeks.

JOHN (O/S)

It's just taking longer that they thought.

VAL (O/S)

I mean what do you do down there anyway?

JOHN (O/S)

You're talking as if you'd rather he weren't around anymore.

VAL (O/S)

Don't twist my words. You know what I mean. He's not getting any worse though, is he?

JOHN (O/S)

Maybe not – but it's not just him – it's mum as well.

VAL (O/S)

Then why doesn't she get some proper help?

JOHN (O/S)

You know why. It's what she does, look after him. If she didn't, she'd feel...redundant.

VAL (O/S)

She can't expect you to keep flogging up and down. We've got our own lives to get on with.

INT. JOHN'S KITCHEN NIGHT - FLASHBACK

The exchange continues as we cut to VAL standing at the sink washing up, whilst JOHN sits at the table.

JOHN

It's hard for them.

VAL

I'm beginning to wonder whether
it's got anything to do with him.

JOHN

What do you mean?

VAL

Or just a way of avoiding me.

JOHN

Now who's being silly?

VAL

Am I? When you are here you work
late every night. I barely see
you.

JOHN

I'm just trying to get this script
done.

VAL

So you keep saying.

JOHN

It's true.

VAL

You're no different to them.

JOHN

What?

VAL

Refusing to talk.

INT. TRAIN DAY - FLASHBACK

JOHN sits on the train staring out of the window as the countryside hurtles by. Raindrops are blown horizontally across the glass. He sees narrow boats moving slowly along a canal - men playing golf in the shadow of a power station, its vast cooling towers emitting plumes of water vapour.

EXT. LEVEL CROSSING DAY - FLASHBACK

A car waits at a level crossing. Beside the car stands a man. It is FATHER, forty years younger, holding MATTHEW'S

hand (recognizable from the photographs). The sound of a train is heard as it approaches.

INT. TRAIN DAY - FLASHBACK

JOHN cranes to look as the train speeds past the level crossing. The two blurred figures are gone in a flash. JOHN sits back clearly puzzled. He looks at the empty seat opposite; The Writer's effects - an annotated script, notepad and pen - lie on the table in front of him.

INT. BBC PRODUCTION OFFICE DAY - FLASHBACK

An office printer spews out pages of the script that collect in the paper tray. Lines of dialogue - scene headings and paragraphs of action land on top of each other until eventually the machine stops printing.

A message flashes up on the display - 'Attention! Paper Jam.' BECKY opens up the machine and pulls out a crumpled page of script with black ink smeared across it. She glances at it. It reads: INT. OFFICE DAY - VAL PULLS OUT A PILE OF PAPERS FROM A DESK DRAWER.

INT. JOHN'S OFFICE DAY - FLASHBACK

VAL stands in the small office, which is piled high with books and clutter. She flicks through a notebook as JOHN appears in the doorway.

VAL
What's this?

JOHN
A script.

VAL
I can see that.

JOHN
It's just an idea.

VAL
A commission?

JOHN
Not yet. No.

VAL
You've obviously spent some time on it.

JOHN

What's the problem?

VAL

Don't you think you should've told me?

JOHN

Told you what?

VAL

It's about us! About me!

JOHN

Not really.

VAL

I'm not stupid, John. How many other women do you know who've miscarried? This is what you do. Don't lie.

JOHN

It's not like that.

VAL

It's too close. You can't do it.

JOHN

You're being silly.

VAL

You haven't even bothered to change the names.

JOHN

'I am not I, thou are not thou.'

VAL

It's our fucking life! It's all here.

JOHN

It's not.

VAL

Well if you're stuck for an ending I can help you out - although I'm warning you it's not going to be a happy one.

JOHN

I knew this would happen.

VAL

Then why write it? You must have other ideas.

JOHN

Write about what you know - isn't that what they say?

VAL

So I'm right then?

JOHN

No.

VAL

Make up your mind.

JOHN

I've changed things.

VAL

Not enough.

VAL starts to rip out the pages of the notebook.

JOHN

What are you doing?

VAL

Half of it's not even true.

EXT. EUSTON STATION DAY - FLASHBACK

The digital clock on the departures board changes as destinations appear and disappear. JOHN emerges onto the concourse and makes his way out towards the Euston Road carrying a large rucksack on his back.

SALLY (O/S)

You've been busy.

JOHN (O/S)

Yeah.

SALLY (O/S)

Do you fancy a tea?

JOHN (O/S)

Sure.

INT. PRODUCTION OFFICE - FLASHBACK

JOHN takes his rucksack off his back.

JOHN

Is there somewhere I can dump
this?

SALLY

Just bung it by my desk. It'll be
fine.

JOHN puts his rucksack down and follows SALLY out of the
large open-plan office.

SALLY

How long are you down for?

JOHN

I'm not sure. Rather depends.

SALLY

Val?

JOHN

Yeah.

SALLY

I wasn't sure if you'd made that
bit up.

JOHN

What?

SALLY

In the script.

JOHN

Oh. No. Unfortunately not. Things
are a bit 'fragile' at the moment.

SALLY

Well she's been through a lot.

JOHN

Yeah.

SALLY

Where do you want to go?

JOHN

Don't mind.

As they walk out towards the lifts they pass BECKY by the printer.

SALLY

Oh this is Becky, by the way. Our new trainee.

JOHN

Hi.

BECKY

I've printed off the studio scripts for next week – shall I send them out to the actors?

SALLY

That'd be great. Thanks.

SALLY and JOHN continue on.

SALLY (CONT.)

She's a real find. I just hope she doesn't defect back to tele.

As they reach the lift JOHN catches sight of The Writer at the other end of the corridor. He pauses for a moment. SALLY calls from inside the lift.

SALLY

You coming?

JOHN

Yeah.

JOHN joins SALLY in the lift just as the doors close.

INT. LIFT DAY - FLASHBACK

SALLY
You look tired.

JOHN
Do I?

SALLY
Maybe you should go away
somewhere. Long weekend.

JOHN
I'm fine.

SALLY
How's your Dad?

JOHN
No change.

The lift descends towards the basement. 6...5...4...

INT. SITTING ROOM DAY - FLASHBACK

A series of slides flick up on a screen in the darkened room. The noise of the projector is heard as, one by one, the slides drop in front of the lens. Transparencies of the picturesque cove: the beach – the point – a house with a wooden balcony – a group sunbathing on a large flat rock. FATHER stares at the still images projected onto the wall. MOTHER sits quietly in the corner.

JOHN
Recognise anyone?

A man in swimming trunks and sunglasses waves at the camera.

FATHER
Should I?

MOTHER
That's you.

FATHER

Is it? Where are you then?

MOTHER

Taking the picture probably.

JOHN

And there's Matthew – with the net.

On the edge of the frame a boy sits with a shrimping net looking down into a large rock pool.

FATHER

Matthew.

JOHN

Yes.

MOTHER

He used to spend hours in rock pools.

FATHER

He's looking for something.

MOTHER

A fish.

JOHN

Or a crab.

FATHER

Maybe.

MOTHER

Do you remember? You used to race them across the beach.

FATHER

Looks sunny.

JOHN

Always was. A fortnight in August without a drop of rain.

JOHN stares as the camera gradually moves in on the screen – the boy with the net becoming bigger all the

time. The distant rumble of thunder is heard together with the shipping forecast.

ANNOUNCER

Lundy, Fastnet, Irish Sea.
Southwest gale 8 to storm 10,
veering west. Thundery showers.
Poor, becoming moderate..

INT. CUTTING ROOM

Electrical pulses flash between neurons crisscrossing the dark folds of the brain like lightning.

A train connects with overhead wires sending sparks flying.

The blinding white light of the Compeditor's bulb shines directly into the camera lens causes it to flare.

Film rattles through the gate at 25 frames per second.

The numbers on the footage counter rotate.

On the tiny screen the image of a metal bucket is seen as raindrops splash silently into water – a moment later the sound of heavy rain is heard as picture and sound run out of sync.

The camera tracks along the wooden floor revealing pots and pans catching water from a leaky roof.

A strip of magnetic tape reaches one of the sound heads. We hear voices arguing - the lines of dialogue alternating between two tracks.

MOTHER (O/S)

Where's Matthew?

FATHER (O/S)

I thought he was with you.

MOTHER (O/S)

No. He was with you.

FATHER (O/S)

I didn't see him.

MOTHER (O/S)

Well then where is he?

A marine flare shoots up into the air and explodes – phosphorous trails spread out across an ominous grey sky like the patterning of an iris radiating towards the pupil.

Another piece of magnetic tape marked 'OPERATOR' hits the sound head.

OPERATOR (O/S)

Which service do you require?
Police, ambulance, fire brigade or
coast guard?

A distorted voice is heard on the other end of the line.

CALLER (O/S)

There's a boy in the water.

Tangled magnetic tape collects in the trim bin beside the Competitor as it rattles through the gate.

A network of illuminated pathways spreads across the cortex as neurons travel at the speed of light.

A series of still images flash up on the screen in quick succession: Lifeboat men. A rigid inflatable dinghy. The anxious faces of on-lookers before blinding white light spills from a slide projector signaling a missing slide from the carousel.

An audio timeline peaks with each cry. The counter registers the frames, seconds and minutes of passing time.

Neurotransmitters carry urgent signals between neurons.

FATHER races along the point in a blind panic – the sound of men shouting is heard in the distance. Confusion.

FATHER (O/S)

Where is he?

LIFEBOAT MAN (O/S)

Get back!

FATHER (O/S)

No!

Waves crash as the rescue party wades into the surf. We hear the metallic clanking of oxygen cylinders being loaded on board. The roar of an outboard engine. FATHER tries to clamber on board.

LIFEBOAT MAN 2 (O/S)

What the hell's he doing?

FATHER (O/S)

It's my son out there.

LIFEBOAT MAN (O/S)

Get him off the boat!

There is a loud splash.

INT. BBC CANTEEN DAY - FLASHBACK

A can of coke explodes over JOHN's lap as he opens it.

JOHN

Bugger.

SALLY

Here. Use this.

SALLY passes a napkin across the table.

SALLY (CONT.)

Are you alright?

JOHN

Someone must've dropped it.

JOHN mops the coke from his trousers.

SALLY

You were saying...about the accident.

JOHN

I'd quite like it to be – well I'm not sure how much we should really explain. I imagined a scene on the beach where the father is digging a hole with his son and then when it starts to rain they make a dash for the house.

SALLY

But the boy stays behind?

JOHN

I think he's so engrossed in what he's doing he doesn't really notice. Doesn't realize.

SALLY

Wouldn't he notice the tide coming in though? Especially when the water starts pouring in.

JOHN

Except that by then he's in the hole and it's too late. He's started to fill it back in – to bury himself.

INT. CUTTING ROOM

Metal sprockets pull the magnetic tape through the gang. We hear the sound of bubbles escaping from a diver's aqualung. The diver surfaces and calls to the lifeboat nearby.

DIVER

Over here! I've found him!

MOTHER (O/S)

John! John!

INT. BATHROOM DAY - FLASHBACK

Extreme close up on FATHER's face as he sits in the bath. We hear MOTHER's voice as she calls for JOHN. We remain tight on FATHER as JOHN enters, wiping the frame.

JOHN (O/S)

What is it?

MOTHER (O/S)

I can't get him out the bath.

JOHN (O/S)

Okay.

As they move about, trying to manoeuvre FATHER out of the bath, they block the frame – the effect is that of a strobe light flashing in the darkness – occasionally revealing FATHER'S face.

JOHN (O/S)

Put your arm around me. Come on – you're not trying. Up we get. One two three...

JOHN heaves FATHER up out of the water.

INT. STUDIO DAY

CAZ pulls a heavy wet towel out of a large basin of water as JOHN 2 and FATHER 2 act out the scene in front of the microphone, watched by JOHN and FATHER in the cubicle.

JOHN 2

That's it. Now let's get a towel around you before you catch your death of cold.

CAZ ruffles a towel and rubs her own arm as if drying herself.

FATHER 2

There was nothing I could do.

JOHN 2

What do you mean?

FATHER 2

It was too late. I couldn't save him.

As the two actors continue, the camera tracks from the studio and passes through the glass window into the cubicle where FATHER becomes increasingly agitated. MOTHER takes his hand. LUCY leans forward and whispers in JOHN's ear.

LUCY
Dad wants to go.

JOHN
What?

LUCY
It's too much for him.

JOHN
We're nearly done.

LUCY
Then it won't matter.

SALLY
(TRYING TO CONCENTRATE)
Sorry. Do you mind?

JOHN (TO LUCY)
Let's talk outside.

JOHN steps out into the corridor with LUCY.

LUCY
He's had enough. You can tell.

JOHN
He's fine. Besides you can't go yet.

LUCY
Why not?

JOHN
They're expecting us.

LUCY
What?

JOHN
For the meal.

LUCY

Well then you just have to tell them we're not coming. For God's sake - he's in no fit state.

JOHN looks through the window at FATHER.

JOHN

He'll be fine.

LUCY

What's this about?

JOHN

What do you mean?

LUCY

You get us all up here - you make them sit through some total fucking fantasy - for what? What are you trying to do to him?

JOHN

It's the truth.

LUCY

According to who?

JOHN

I remember it.

LUCY

What?

JOHN

Bits.

LUCY

How could you? Bullshit.

JOHN

Why won't they talk about it?

LUCY

Isn't it obvious?

JOHN

Not to me.

LUCY

It still hurts.

JOHN

It affects us all.

LUCY

Then ask them if you're that
curious. Better that than all
this.

JOHN

I've tried - and every time they
change the subject.

LUCY

So you thought you'd write a play.

JOHN

They can't avoid it then.

LUCY

And what if you've got it wrong?

JOHN

I remember the beach.

LUCY

You were two for God's sake.
You've convinced yourself about
something you wouldn't even have
been aware of - that most likely
never happened.

Catches sight of his other self at the end of the
corridor.

JOHN

Alright - I'll prove it. Wait
there.

LUCY

What?

JOHN

Don't move!

JOHN hurries off down the corridor leaving LUCY stood
alone as actors emerge from the studio at the end of the
take.

JOHN 2
Hi. You must be Lucy.

LUCY
That's right.

JOHN 2
Robin. And this is Dan.

FATHER 2
Lovely to meet you. I have to say
I've never worked on anything
quite like this before.

LUCY
I bet.

INT. STAIRWELL DAY

JOHN catches up with the WRITER on the stairs.

JOHN
Hey! Wait!

The WRITER stops and turns.

WRITER
What is it?

JOHN
You have to tell her.

WRITER
Tell her what?

JOHN
That I'm right.

WRITER
I can't.

JOHN
What do you mean? You can do
whatever you want.

WRITER
It's nothing to do with me.

JOHN

What?

WRITER

What you say, or do - is up to you.

JOHN

But I'm you - we're one and the same.

WRITER

No. We might look the same - but that's as far as it goes. You're just a persona.

JOHN

But what about Dad? What happened.

WRITER

What about it?

JOHN

They need to know.

WRITER

I'm afraid you've rather let your imagination run away with you.

JOHN

What?

WRITER

Where's your evidence? An old photograph - a few faint memories. It wouldn't stand up in court.

JOHN

It's the truth - he drowned.

WRITER

She did try to warn you.

JOHN

Who?

WRITER

Sally.

JOHN

About what?

WRITER

False memory.

JOHN

What are you talking about?

WRITER

All those students who were convinced they'd committed a crime. They believed it one hundred percent.

JOHN

This isn't the same at all. It's what happened.

WRITER

According to you.

JOHN

He feels guilty. He always has.

WRITER

That's you filling in the gaps.

JOHN

Then what did happen?

WRITER

You've no idea, have you?

JOHN

Tell me.

WRITER

You're sure you want to know?

JOHN

Positive.

WRITER

You might not like what you hear.

JOHN

Look I haven't got much time. Please.

WRITER

Alright.(Pause) He used to take you both to watch the trains - every Sunday - there were no barriers in those days. The car stalled as he was crossing the tracks. The engine wouldn't start. There was no time to save you both. He had to make a choice.

JOHN

No.

WRITER

You see.

JOHN

(CONFUSED)

But...

WRITER

You were way off the mark.

Sleepers rush through frame - the same recurring image as seen before. Steel tracks weave silently from side to side. There is no sound. As the camera moves along the track the blurred dark shape becomes clearer - the shape of a car. A figure pulls a child from inside and runs with him in his arms to the side.

WRITER

He grabbed you from the front seat and ran to the side of the track but before he could make it back to the car, the train came - dragged it two hundred yards down the line. He ran all the way - as fast as he could - but there was nothing he could do.

We hear the sudden loud rush of wind as a train passes at speed.

WRITER

He remembers none of this, of course. Just as you constructed your memory - he wiped his - blocked it out completely.

JOHN

Why?

WRITER

Survival.

A voice calls out. It is SALLY, standing at the top of the stairs.

SALLY

John. Are you coming?

JOHN

What?

SALLY

We're going.

JOHN

(TO HIMSELF)

I don't understand how I got it so wrong.

JOHN turns back at the WRITER but he has gone. He stands alone in the stairwell stunned by the revelation.

EXT. BBC BROADCASTING HOUSE NIGHT

FATHER appears through the revolving doors, helped by LUCY and followed by members of the cast. JOHN watches anxiously as FATHER climbs into a waiting MPV. He catches SALLY as she passes.

JOHN

Listen, Sally - I'm not sure this is a good idea.

SALLY

Really? Your mum seemed keen.

JOHN

She wouldn't want to appear rude.

SALLY

If they want to stay behind - that's fine.

LUCY comes over.

LUCY
What's happening?

SALLY
John was just wondering if...

JOHN
I just thought they might be tired
- that's all.

LUCY
Bit late, isn't it? To show
concern.

SALLY
I'll leave you to it.

SALLY goes.

LUCY
Mum's determined. I think she's
rather enjoying the attention.

LUCY climbs into the people carrier. JOHN follows. Headlights dazzle as they pull away from the taxi rank into the stream of London traffic as seen from above - illuminated streets like glossy strips of celluloid.

INT. INDIAN RESTAURANT NIGHT

A waiter makes his way across a busy restaurant carrying a tray of food. He arrives at a long table where we see JOHN sitting in the middle, clearly shaken. As the waiter serves the various dishes everyone continues to talk. At the end of the table sits MOTHER, deep in conversation with MOTHER 2. Opposite her is FATHER who listens to FATHER 2 recounting an anecdote. JOHN watches him.

SALLY
Did you know that?

JOHN
(DISTRACTED)
What?

SALLY

A mouse's heart beats seven times faster than an elephant's. And an elephant lives seven times longer than a mouse.

JOHN

No.

SALLY

Factoid. Becky's just heard she's being seconded to Radio 2.

JOHN

Oh that's good.

SALLY

So. Are you happy?

JOHN

Yeah - of course. She deserves it.

SALLY

No. With the recording.

JOHN

Oh. Yeah. Yeah.

SALLY

Anything lined up after this?

JOHN

Not really.

SALLY

Well we should talk - once you get home.

JOHN

Sure.

Pause.

SALLY

Listen - tell me to mind my own business if you want, but I think you should see someone.

JOHN

What do you mean?

SALLY

You and Val. I mean if the script's anything to go by.

JOHN

She wants a divorce.

SALLY

Have you tried mediation?

JOHN

I think it's a bit late for that.

SALLY

It's worth a try, surely.

The WAITER returns with more food.

WAITER

Chicken tikka masala?

JOHN

I think that's Dad's.

JOHN looks down the end of the table. FATHER is gone from his place.

JOHN

(CALLS TO MOTHER)

Mum. Where's Dad?

MOTHER

(MOUTHS)

Loo.

The WAITER looks expectantly at JOHN as he holds the last remaining order.

JOHN

Down the end. Thanks.

The WAITER puts the plate by FATHER's empty seat.

INT. SITTING ROOM NIGHT - FLASHBACK

FATHER stands - looking 60 years younger - puffing on a cigarette, wearing in a blue roll-necked jumper. He smiles at the camera - mouthing long forgotten words. His movements seem jerky - unnatural somehow, as he's projected onto the screen. It is only when he begins to move that we realize the footage is running backwards; time is reversed. The smoke from his cigarette disappears back inside his mouth and down into his lungs.

The picture cuts to an orchard full of daffodils. As the spool on the projector rewinds FATHER chases MATTHEW in and out of the trees, weaving their way backwards towards the foreground, where, as they reach the camera MATTHEW springs into FATHER's arms. FATHER hugs him tightly. MATTHEW giggles as FATHER kisses him repeatedly on the cheek. As the footage continues we hear the DOCTOR'S voice.

DOCTOR (O/S)

Now I'd like you to repeat after me: Hippopotamus.

FATHER (O/S)

Hippopotamus.

DOCTOR (O/S)

Eccentricity.

FATHER (O/S)

Electricity.

DOCTOR (O/S)

Statistician.

FATHER (O/S)

Statintion (sic)

DOCTOR (O/S)

Above, beyond and below.

FATHER (O/S)

Above, beyond...no it's gone.

DOCTOR (O/S)

No ifs, ands or buts.

FATHER (O/S)

Not ifs and and...

DOCTOR (O/S)

Alright now I'd like you to name
as many animals as you can
beginning with any letter.

FATHER hesitates before slowly listing a number of
different animals.

FATHER (O/S)

Cat. Dog. Bird. Rabbit. Mouse..

The film leader suddenly breaks free of the take-up
spool. Images of FATHER holding MATTHEW vanish as the
screen turns a brilliant white.

INT. CUTTING ROOM

The camera moves through the folds of the cerebral cortex
revealing a bulge in a blood vessel, like a berry hanging
from a stem. The piercing sound of the violin bow being
played on the side of the brass plate is heard as the
blood-filled sack suddenly bursts; like tea diffusing
into water, it bleeds into the brain.

INT. RESTAURANT NIGHT

JOHN looks over at FATHER's place - he is still not back.
Everyone at the table is busy chatting. JOHN puts down
his knife and fork, stands and follows the signs to the
gents.

INT. RESTAURANT TOILETS NIGHT

JOHN enters the toilets looking for FATHER. The list of
animals continues.

FATHER (O/S)

Cow. Horse. Pig..

JOHN

Dad? Are you in here?

JOHN tries to open the cubicle door. It is locked.

JOHN

Dad?

FATHER (O/S)

Lion. Monkey. Elephant...

He looks under the door and sees FATHER slumped on the floor. He tries to barge the door open but it won't move. He goes into the next cubicle and climbs up onto the toilet. As he looks over the partition he sees FATHER on the floor seemingly unconscious.

JOHN

Dad!

JOHN climbs over, unbolts the door and pulls FATHER out into the main area where he begins to administer CPR, pushing down hard on FATHER's heart.

JOHN

Dad! Can you hear me? You can't do this. Wake up! Dad!

FATHER doesn't respond. JOHN fumbles in his pocket for his mobile and dials 999. The camera slowly moves in on FATHER's face as he lies on the floor staring up at the ceiling.

OPERATOR (O/S)

Emergency services. Which service do you require?

INT. CUTTING ROOM

Film rattles through the gate of the Compeditor – spliced footage of men pulling a boy from the wreckage of a car to the high-pitched soundtrack of the violin bow being played on the metal plate. Celluloid and magnetic tape pile up in the cotton bag beside the Compeditor.

INT. AMBULANCE NIGHT

Close-up on FATHER's face as paramedics try to resuscitate him in the back of the ambulance.

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR NIGHT

A crash team push FATHER down a corridor followed by JOHN and LUCY. As the team enter the operating theatre, JOHN and LUCY are prevented from going any further. JOHN watches through the round window as staff slide FATHER from the stretcher onto the operating table.

LUCY

Couldn't you have waited?

JOHN

What?

LUCY

This is your fault.

INT. CUTTING ROOM

The film spool stops rotating as the end of the film breaks away from the reel. A series of flashes and white dots appear before the blinding white light of the bulb fills the screen.

INT. MORTUARY DAY

FATHER lies, with his eyes closed – his skin waxy-looking and pale. An orderly covers him with a sheet before closing the drawer and shutting the heavy fridge door.

EXT. CREMATORIUM DAY

Mourners file into the chapel past JOHN and LUCY who stand in the doorway handing out Orders of Service to people as they arrive.

JOHN

Where's Mum?

LUCY

Inside.

On the front of the Order of Service is a photograph of FATHER taken years ago.

JOHN

I'd forgotten what he used to look like.

LUCY

It's how she remembers him.

INT. BBC STUDIO DAY. (A WEEK LATER)

JOHN sits with his head in his hands listening to the sound of rooks outside the crematorium. The red RECORDING light flashes above the mixing desk – signaling the end of the take. SALLY notices several new pages of script on the desk in front of her.

SALLY

What's this?

JOHN

A new ending.

SALLY

Really?

SALLY starts to read it.

SALLY

Any particular reason?

JOHN

Less predictable.

SALLY

You're sure?

JOHN

Life's never neat.

SALLY

Okay. Martha could you dig out a passing train?

MARTHA

What sort?

SALLY

John?

JOHN

High speed.

CUT TO BLACK

INT. UNIVERSITY SEMINAR ROOM DAY

Black screen. We hear the same TUTORS' recorded voices.

TUTOR 1

I think that because we've had the other death earlier on - the 'jumper' - the echoes are there - it becomes an implication - almost a false memory in the viewer - they sort of make that link.

SUPERVISOR

And there's an interesting intertextual thing going on here as well - which is the Alexander Master's book - 'Stuart: Life backwards'. That begins with Stuart jumping in front of a train - and he tells his biography backwards and the book ends with him as a babe in arms - a newborn baby.

TUTOR 1

Yeah. I mean why do people kill themselves? In a sense, it's to wipe out the memory that's making their life unbearable - which is ironic given what John's been trying to do throughout this - and I'm just wondering if there's a way that you could get us to imagine a false memory at the end? - because it's been seeded by the earlier experience - so that memory becomes instrumental in creating the ending.

EXT. STATION DAY

The WRITER stands alone on the platform listening to the upgrade discussion over headphones.

Mist hangs over the surrounding countryside. We hear the sound of the tracks vibrating – the regular musical click track emerging once again above the naturalistic sounds rural landscape.

A digital clock hangs from the station canopy. 8:23. The Writer turns to see the train approaching in the distance.

The WRITER walks through the carriage carrying a cup of coffee and bacon butty in a brown paper bag. He grabs hold of the luggage rack to steady himself as the train takes corners at speed. Reaching his seat he sits down. He takes a large envelope out of his satchel, puts the satchel on the luggage rack above and settles back into his seat, placing the envelope on the table in front of him.

He glances up at the seat opposite. It's empty. He turns to look out of the window as the countryside slips by. The regular beat of a click track fades in as the mudflats of Morecambe Bay give way to the industrial landscape of the North West. As it does so his faint reflection is brought into focus, superimposed across derelict mills and red brick chimneys. He feels the warmth of the sunlight on his face before the train plunges into a tunnel.

The landscape disappears leaving the WRITER staring at the camera - the subject of a framed portrait of a middle-aged man. He pulls a script out of the envelope and begins to read.

As he takes a bite of his bacon butty there is a sudden jolt. A single piercing note from a violin bow played on the edge of a brass plate is heard. The WRITER'S reflection suddenly vanishes as the train window shatters into a thousand pieces.

EXT. RAILWAY LINE DAY

The regular beat of a click track fades in as the camera cranes up above the railway line to reveal the overhead wires - crackling with the sound of electricity.

Sparks fly as electrical impulses travel between neurons inside the folds of the brain. As the camera moves deeper still, a film spool starts to rotate. Celluloid runs through the editing machine. Images of MATTHEW, spliced together, appear on the Compeditor's tiny screen. In each

frame he is smiling. The print jumps as the splicing tape runs over the metal sprockets. Eventually the leader slips through the gate and blinding white light fills the screen.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. PRIMROSE HILL DAY

The WRITER sits on a bench overlooking the London skyline. Joggers run through the park. Couples lie on the grass - dogs chase each other between the trees. The WRITER checks his watch then takes a mini-disc recorder from his bag. He presses record and speaks into the microphone.

CUT TO:

There's a line, at the beginning of Roland Barthes' autobiography, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, that reads: 'Tout ceci doit être considéré comme dit par un personnage de roman'³. Everything herein must be considered as though spoken by a character in a novel.

As a writer, I spend my life talking to myself - mulling over ideas - running through dialogue - and whilst debating how to tackle this reflective thesis, it struck me that perhaps Barthes' approach might be a good way of doing it - as a script - a series of conversations between characters - meetings (some of which I recorded as an aide-memoire) in order to show how the creative project has evolved over time - from its initial conception to the present.

Whilst working on *The Dead Room* I became increasingly aware of the writing process itself and, as I made

³ Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, trans. by Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), p. 1.

changes to each new draft, I gradually found myself folded within the layers of narrative. This was not my intention at the outset, but by the end it was unavoidable and perhaps inevitable. What began as a largely fictional account of a writer recording his autobiography, had taken on a life of its own. The creative project and the reflective thesis subsequently began to merge and it is only this introduction that marks the divide. Much of what I have read during the course of my research, about memory and issues of multiplicity and truth, has found its way into the script by a process of gradual osmosis and it is these influences that will be discussed during the course of the thesis. I have also decided to use one particular work as a key case study: Alan Bennett's *The Lady in the Van*, exploring, as it does, similar territory to *The Dead Room*. The timing of the film's release, in November 2015, seemed adventitious and fortuitous; Bennett's film had an unexpected but clear umbilicus connecting it with my own emerging creative project, both in terms of its themes, but also in the way it provided a direct link to my own project's origins which, until that point, had lain buried, long since forgotten. The process of excavating these fragments of memory, of dusting them off and piecing them together, has indeed been archeological - to borrow Walter Benjamin's metaphor. And in the process of digging I have discovered that my interest in this subject runs deep.

CUT TO:

CAPTION:

**Is it possible to attempt a definition
of 'truth' in autobiographical writing?
At what point does fact become fiction?**

INT. UNIVERSITY SEMINAR ROOM DAY

The WRITER sits across a large table from the two Tutors. A mini-disc recorder has been placed between them - its red light indicates it is recording. In the corner of the room, silhouetted against a large plate-glass window, sits the SUPERVISOR listening to their exchange.

TUTOR 1

The framing of the first question carries with it an underlying assumption that this thing 'truth' is out there somehow - this elusive notion - the Holy Grail, in a way - and yet it seems to me that everything you're trying to do says it's not out there. So I'm just wondering whether there's a way of reframing that question and taking away that essentialised notion altogether? Perhaps what you're really saying is 'is there a way of presenting an audience with only exploded versions of reality?' And getting rid of the quest for coherence that they must somehow come together as 'what really happened in the end'.

TUTOR 2

Do you think 'reality' would be a better word than truth?

WRITER

Possibly.

TUTOR 2

Because I wonder if we're getting bogged down with the idea that there is one 'truth' - that you can put your finger, on whereas in actual fact there's data, there's facts and then there's the other kind of truth where everyone agrees on something - everyone nods - and says 'yes, that's exactly right'. That's a truth, isn't it?

The SUPERVISOR leans forward.

SUPRVISOR

Vladimir Nabokov, the Russian novelist, famously said that *reality* is 'one of the few words which means nothing without quotes'. I think it was in the Afterword to *Lolita*.

TUTOR 2

Exactly.

TUTOR 1

Or event?

TUTOR 2

Sorry?

TUTOR 1

I was just wondering whether *event* might be a better word to use in this context.

TUTOR 2

Yes. Yes 'event' is good.

WRITER

Okay.

The WRITER scribbles in his note pad.

TUTOR 1

There's a film on the internet about Einstein's Theory of Relativity and what it suggests is that when a beam of light is shone down a train - there's no denying that there is an event because everyone perceives that there is a flashing light but they all perceive it in different ways - so it's a different flash of light in fact - so it distinguishes between an event and its perception - and I think maybe it would be useful to move more towards that kind of vocabulary.

TUTOR 2

In a way this comes back to the coroner's court - a series of witness testimonies - something that was explored in *Inquest*⁴. The question of perspective. Rather than passing a single definitive verdict, a coroner makes 'finding of fact', establishing who the deceased was, where they died and the medical cause of death - based on the evidence heard. It's not the coroner's job to apportion blame - to determine whether someone is guilty or not - they simply piece together the most likely scenario, or sequence of events, based on numerous witness statements. In fact the language used in court has recently changed to reflect this very thing. Following changes to coronial law in July 2013 coroners now give their 'conclusion', rather than a verdict, a word reserved for the law courts.

TUTOR 1

It's as much about the Rashomon principle where you have three apparently mutually exclusive stories...

SUPERVISOR

I think it's actually four stories.

TUTOR 1

Is it? Alright...four apparently mutually exclusive stories, but of course they're not, they're all partially true - and the idea that one must be true and the others not so isn't the case - the point is truth is mutable and truth is relative.

⁴ 'Inquest', *Fifteen Minute Drama*, BBC Radio 4, 17-21 November 2014.

TUTOR 2

So I think maybe there's a way to reconfigure that question - or at least acknowledge that perhaps what we're talking about here has perhaps more to do with multiplicities.

CUT TO:

Indeed a quick browse through the newspaper reviews following the release of *The Lady in the Van* bears this out. Critics, all of whom would've watched the same film, passed different verdicts on its success.

Smith is excellent as the homeless woman who parked her camper van in Alan Bennett's garden for 15 years, in this enjoyable film about their poignant relationship.⁵

It feels as if Bennett is working hard - too hard - at keeping a slightly thin concept aloft. The story of his relationship with Mary Shepherd, a houseless (if not quite homeless) woman who lived in the Bennett driveway for 15 years, first produced a slim volume for the *London Review of Books* and then a popular play. It is now running out of petrol.⁶

The idea of a coherent, stable narrative, whatever its genetic make-up, is clearly something that we find appealing - necessary, even. According to Joan Didion,

⁵ Peter Bradshaw, 'The Lady in the Van', *The Guardian*, 12 November 2015, Reviews section, p. 25.

⁶ Donald Clarke, 'Lady In the Van Review: Alan Bennett's Everywhere but Smith Shines' *Irish Times*, 11 November 2015, p. 24.

'we tell ourselves stories in order to live'⁷, suggesting that there is a strong correlation between writing and being. We construct narratives, not only as a means of understanding our own life, and the lives of others, but also as a means of survival, what Henrik Ibsen referred to as the 'life-lie' (in his play *Wild Duck*), a necessary alternative to reality.

Discussing her memoir, *A Book of Untruths*, which charts a family story through a series of lies, the author, Miranda Doyle, maintains that it is more important to have a coherent story than a truthful one, when creating one's own narrative.

All families have a fiction, a story that leads those who are inside that story to make it up...Many of us need to hold ourselves together with fiction and we organize how we see ourselves in terms of the memories we hold, discarding memories that don't seem appropriate whilst clinging onto others that do⁸.

This is certainly the case with John in *The Dead Room* as he goes about reconstructing his own childhood from on a variety of different sources out of necessity.

Perhaps the analogy of the coroner's court is as close as we may get to 'truth' - with a measured conclusion derived from a series of witness statements. The coroner's final decision is not a certainty but it's a way of knowing. So why is this so tricky for an artist? Why is it so adventurous to have that sort of coherence? Wolfgang Iser, in his writings about the reading process,

⁷ Joan Didion, *We Tell Ourselves Stories in Order to Live: Collected Non-fiction* (New York:Knopf, 2006), p. 185. cited Micaela Maftai, *The Fiction of Autobiography - Reading and Writing Identity* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 2.

⁸ 'Inventing the Self, Fact and Fiction', *Start the Week*, BBC Radio 4, 5 June 2017.

identifies the gaps, blanks and indeterminacies, in any given text, as the areas where meaning happens - the places the reader can occupy and generate meaning for themselves.

Literary texts are full of unexpected twists and turns, and frustration of expectations. Even in the simplest story there is bound to be some kind of blockage, if only for the fact that no tale can ever be told in its entirety. Indeed, it is only through inevitable omissions that a story will gain its dynamism. Thus, whenever the flow is interrupted and we are led off in unexpected directions, the opportunity is given to us to bring into play our own faculty for establishing connections - for filling the gaps left by the text itself.⁹

The text is incomplete by definition. It couldn't possibly represent real time, so is bound to be full of these spaces, where the reader is particularly active in constructing narrative sense and coherence. Iser goes on to say:

The manner in which the reader experiences the text will reflect his own disposition and in this respect the literary text acts as a kind of mirror; but at the same time, the reality which this process helps to create is one that will be *different* from his own (since, normally, we tend to be bored by texts that present us with things we already know perfectly well ourselves). Thus we have the apparently paradoxical situation in which the reader is forced to reveal

⁹ Wolfgang Iser, 'The Reading Process: a phenomenological approach' in *Modern Criticism & Theory A Reader*, ed. by David Lodge and Nigel Wood (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 1988), pp. 294-310 (p. 299).

aspects of himself in order to experience a reality which is different from his own.¹⁰

In her introduction to *The Fiction of Autobiography*, Micaela Maftei describes her unease at the word itself:

I was primarily worried about what I thought of as the issue of truth. Not surprisingly, insistence on using this multifaceted and unstable word complicated my view of the stories and my research. At first seeming to be a straightforward element of the writing, the idea of truth split into many strands when I began questioning it...¹¹

CUT TO:

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 300.

¹¹ Micaela Maftei, *The Fiction of Autobiography: Reading and Writing Identity* (Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 2.

CAPTION:

We note that Richard is proposing to interview Alan Bennett about his practice. This will need careful planning. Alan Bennett is notoriously shy and self-effacing and if he turned down the opportunity, the interview sample is weakened.¹²

¹² Upgrade Report, 18 June 2015.

EXT. STREET DAY

The WRITER, wearing jeans, blue linen shirt and black linen jacket, walks down a smart Georgian street in North London. It is hot. He stops to remove his jacket. He checks his watch.

He turns and walks back towards the park, in the direction from which he's just come. He stops again as he reaches the main road. He waits for a couple of minutes beside a notice board giving details of forthcoming events organized by the Primrose Hill Residents Association - a talk by Joan Bakewell in aid of the local library, a jumble sale and, in the top right-hand corner, a photograph of a missing cat with a telephone number to call.

The WRITER checks his watch again and starts to walk slowly back down the crescent until he reaches a red door. A bicycle is chained to the railings. He rings the bell. After a moment or two the door opens slightly. An elderly man peers out. It is ALAN BENNETT.

AB

Hello love.

WRITER

Hello, Alan. Sorry, I'm a bit early.

AB

That's alright. Come in.

CUT TO:

INT. HOUSE DAY

The WRITER follows ALAN BENNETT into the hall from which leads the sitting room that runs the length of the house.

AB

Do you want a cup of tea?

WRITER

Thank you.

AB

How do you take it?

WRITER

Just milk. Thanks.

AB

Sit down, love. I won't be a minute.

ALAN BENNETT disappears down the stairs leaving the WRITER looking around the room. A large bookcase - amongst the books are volumes on Renaissance art, novels by Philip Roth and Jean Genet whilst several of Michael Palin's travelogues balance on a small table by the sofa. On the mantelpiece, wedged into the gilt frame of a large mirror, is an invitation to the wrap party for *The Lady In the Van*.

CUT TO:

On my way to the house I'd taken a short detour via Gloucester Crescent, where Alan had been living when he first came across Miss Shepherd, before famously inviting her into his driveway. As a student at the Royal College of Art I'd interviewed him as part of my dissertation, shortly after her death. And when I visited the house I'd noticed spots of yellow paint on the curbside - the only remaining evidence of her fifteen-year residency. Twenty-five years on and, as I stopped to look at the house once

again, I saw traces of yellow on the pavement. What was impossible to tell, however, was whether these splatters were in fact the original marks, made by Miss Shepherd, or the more recent work of Maggie Smith, in her Oscar-nominated role as one of Camden's more colourful characters. If this were the case, I wondered, would it matter? How might that alter the experience? Many great artists, after all, from Leonardo Da Vinci to Damian Hurst, have used technicians to carry out their work - in Alan Bennett's 'mostly true' autobiographical tale he simply cast an actor to paint the same scenes.

Alan reappears with two cups of tea and sits down in front of the window, making it difficult to see his face clearly. It is a familiar pose - slightly slumped, head forward, with his hands resting on his lap - identical to the portrait on the cover of his first memoir - *Writing Home*. I sit opposite in a low chair, squashing a felt cushion in the shape of a dog, or a cat, possibly. He tells me later that it was made by one of Jonathan Miller's grandchildren - and passed on as an unwanted gift.

I tell him about the PhD and try to put it in some kind of context. I tell him about the creative project. He's encouraging. 'Sounds a really good idea, does that.'¹³ I tell him also about how it all began and how during the course of I had managed to trace the project back to its roots - to the last time we met, twenty-five years earlier, when, having left the RCA I was working as a freelance film editor on a series of television documentaries for the BBC called *The Village*.

¹³ Alan Bennett interview, 4 May 2016.

The premise behind the series was simple - to follow the inhabitants of a small Hampshire village in their daily lives. Whilst early documentary makers such as Robert Flaherty and John Grierson set out to highlight social issues in their work, *The Village*, presented and directed by Nigel Farrell, was something different; its primary aim was to entertain. It was the first programme of its kind to mix fly-on-the-wall observational filmmaking techniques with soap opera-style drama - a genre that was to become known as the 'docu-soap'.

Farrell copied the popular drama and soap format of featuring just a handful of main characters in each episode, constantly returning to their stories and having a cliffhanger ending. He also demonstrated the journalist's talent for spotting a good story, latching on to scandal, tensions and conflicts that would guarantee entertainment.¹⁴

Twenty years on and shows like *The Village* are a regular fixture on our television screens - although as they have evolved they have become increasingly difficult to categorise. Their taxonomy is not straightforward. The term 'Reality TV' has asserted itself in recent years - particularly since the arrival of *Big Brother* - but other shows, such as *Life is Toff* and *Made in Chelsea*, have been more difficult to pigeonhole. Interestingly, BAFTA have now introduced a new category at its annual awards called 'Reality and Constructed Factual', in recognition of the hybrid nature of such shows. Working in the cutting room on *The Village* I became increasingly aware of the debate surrounding 'truth' and, with the benefit of hindsight, am now able to trace this project back to that time, when programme-makers were beginning to blur

¹⁴ Anthony Hayward, 'Nigel Farrell Obituary', *The Guardian*, 23 November 2011, p. 29.

the boundaries between fact and fiction, by using new techniques to document real-life stories. Inevitably this raised a number of important questions, as indeed an article in *The Independent*, published at the time that *The Village* transferred from radio to television, highlights.

Most of the local criticism stems from the way the series messes about with chronology and fakes things... for example, Les Player was filmed asking his GP what a vasectomy entailed just after he had had it (and was in no little pain). Although Mr Player explained that, 'They don't film things that never happened. They just ask you to re-enact them afterwards to make them understandable.'¹⁵

There were those, however, who resented the way in which the programme played with the facts. One contributor, the director of the local panto, was particularly aggrieved with the way she'd been portrayed.

They came to one rehearsal, which they made appear to be six, cut out all the appreciative comments I made about the cast, and for the sake of some preconceived idea, made me out to be a terrifying harridan who just shouted at people...They should make up their minds whether *The Village* is documentary or fiction. At the moment it's neither.¹⁶

Despite our becoming more media savvy it is a concern that persists amongst audiences still. When it was recently revealed that Sir David Attenborough's *Frozen*

¹⁵ Nicki Household, 'Archers move to Peyton Place', *Independent*, 5 January 1996, G2 section, p. 20.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

Planet series had used 'fake' shots of newborn polar bear cubs, viewers were up in arms. Defending the use of footage taken in a zoo, and included in a sequence filmed in the Arctic, Sir David said:

The question is, during the middle of this scene when you are trying to paint what it is like in the middle of winter at the pole, to say "Oh, by the way, this was filmed in a zoo." It ruins the atmosphere you are trying to create. I mean how far do you take this? Do you say, "this is a penguin, but actually it was a different penguin colony than this one and this one is a different one?" Come on, we were making movies.¹⁷

In cinema, filmmakers such as Ken Loach have been making 'docu-dramas' for years - blurring the boundaries between genres. Films such as *Cathy Come Home* and his latest (2016) award-winning feature, *I, Daniel Blake*, owe much to journalism and to the documentary film making tradition known as *cinéma vérité*, or 'cinema truth'. Scripted as dramas, shot as documentaries (using a single camera and long takes), and conceived to highlight important social issues, Loach's work further muddies the water between fact and fiction as he weaves the two disciplines together.

In literature, too, the practice of mixing fact and fiction is commonplace, with writers basing their characters on real people and their stories on historical events. Indeed, good non-fiction shares many of the same techniques of fiction: narrative, characterization,

¹⁷ Jim Shelley, 'Frozen Planet Scandal: Sir David Attenborough defends fake polar bear footage', *Daily Mirror Online*, 13 December 2011.
<http://www.mirror.co.uk/tv/tv-news/frozen-planet-scandal-sir-david-96593>
[accessed 26 June 2016]

suspense, as well as the same common structure that goes back to the oral tradition of storytelling. Nevertheless, states the author and poet Blake Morrison, 'the truth must always be present [in autobiographical writing], although it may come refracted rather than straight and it won't be the whole truth.'¹⁸

The Australian-American writer Jill Ker Conway explains that the reason for this desire to believe stems from our 'want to know what the world looks like from inside another person's experience.'¹⁹ This is something we find immensely fulfilling. 'We crave the confirmation of like experience, or the enlargement, or transformation, which can come from a different perspective.'²⁰

It is impossible, when discussing 'truth', not to mention 'trust'. The two words are inextricably linked. The reader trusts the writer of an autobiographical work to tell the truth. There is an inherent desire to believe what is written. And if the reader suspects that the writer is untruthful that trust is broken.

The BBC2 biopic *Marvelous*, written by Peter Bowker, about Stoke City mascot, Neil Baldwin, was inspired by a Guardian newspaper article and was billed as an 'incredible true story'. Broadcast in 2014 it was a modern day fairy tale about a man with learning difficulties who refused to be labeled. But how accurate was it? This was a question that the film continually asked itself; perhaps as a way of answering its critics. Throughout the drama the real Neil Baldwin appeared on screen to confirm the details as presented by the actor

¹⁸ Blake Morrison, *Too True* (London: Granta Books, 1998), p. 17.

¹⁹ Jill Ker Conway, 'Points of Departure', in *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of memoir*, ed. by William Zinsser (New York: Mariner, 1998), pp. 43-59. p. 51.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

Toby Jones, in his role as Baldwin. These cameo appearances added to the veracity of the drama. By implication, the audience was led to believe that everything in between those moments was also true. Only once did the real Neil Baldwin deny that a particular event had taken place. Having been invited to play in a testimonial football match for Stoke City, for whom he worked as kit man, the fictional Baldwin scored an amazing header. The audience was rooting for him from the off – hoping he'd score – and so when he did our expectations were fulfilled. The fact that the real Baldwin then denied the episode had ever taken place didn't matter, it still had the desired effect and illustrates perfectly that our desire to be told a good story far outweighs our need for accuracy – although there was an element of truth to this; just as the television audience hoped Baldwin would succeed, so too did those sat in the football stadium.

Peter Morgan is a scriptwriter who has made his name in recent years writing fact-based fiction, or 'faction'. He first came to prominence with *The Deal* (2003) about the power-sharing pact struck between Tony Blair and Gordon Brown prior to the 1994 Labour leadership election. Morgan has since gone on to write a number historical re-imaginings for the stage and screen, including *Frost/Nixon* (2006), *The Queen* (2006) and most recently *The Crown* (2016).

Defending his own versions of these historical stories, Morgan points out that when he met the people involved in the Nixon interviews, including David Frost and his then producer John Birt, "they all had wildly differing

perceptions of what had gone on in that room.”²¹

It was the same when I researched *The Queen*: each palace had a completely different, politicised, spun version of events – St James's representing Charles, Kensington Palace representing Diana, Buckingham Palace representing the Queen, Downing Street ...²²

Following the broadcast of *The Lost Honour of Christopher Jeffries* (2014), the Bristol landlord wrongly linked to the murder of Joanna Yeates in 2010, Morgan described the dilemma facing writers working in the genre.

The difficulty arises when a writer invents a fictional scene within a piece that is presented as fact – the audience automatically begins to question the veracity of the whole.²³

An article in *The Guardian*, published ahead of the broadcast, states:

While [The Lost Honour...] is “based on true events”, this is no documentary. Some object to this. *Private Eye* has already had a few digs, pointing out that Jefferies and Steven Coogan did not meet at the Leveson inquiry, as is amusingly portrayed. Nor did the poignant final scene – in which Jefferies and Yeates’s boyfriend meet as the latter is planting a small garden in her memory – really happen. It neatly

²¹ Guy Lodge, ‘The Man Who Rewrites History’, *Evening Standard*, 27 October 2006.

<https://www.standard.co.uk/goingout/film/the-man-who-rewrites-history-7187030.html>

[accessed 12 July 2016]

²² *Ibid*

²³ Stephen Moss, ‘Peter Morgan: when I saw Christopher Jeffries I thought they’d got their man’, *The Guardian*, 7 December 2014, G2 section, p. 24.

pulls the threads together, but it is not the literal truth. Does that matter?

Every so often, you have to do something that isn't exactly as it was," says Morgan. "As a dramatist, you have 200 choices at every fork in the road. But the audience will reject it if you make the wrong choice, if they feel you are trying to shape the character in a way that suits you. It rings false immediately. People can sense when you're being cynical or schematic."²⁴

Although the 'docu-drama' is a relatively recent genre, this is an issue that has long concerned writers. In *The Life of Thomas Hardy*, originally published as Hardy's biography written by his widow, now generally acknowledged as the work of Hardy himself, the novelist and poet makes his feelings on the subject clear.

What would certainly be protested against, in cases where there is no authorisation, is the mixing of fact and fiction in unknown proportions. Infinite mischief would lie in that.²⁵

And he went further still:

If any statements in the dress of fiction are covertly hinted to be fact, all must be fact, for obvious reasons. The power of getting lies believe about people through that channel after they are

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Thomas & Florence Hardy, *The Life of Thomas Hardy* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2007), p. 369.

dead, by stirring in a few truths, is horror to contemplate.²⁶

Hardy would, no doubt, have disapproved of *The Village*, as well as several more recent offerings from BBC Radio 4. *Home Front*, set during the First World War, mixes both fact and fiction to create 15-minute episodes, each told from a different character's perspective. Researchers and academics supply the facts; it is then the writer's job to weave them into the story arcs of the fictional characters. Whilst historically accurate, in terms of the events that took place (internationally, nationally and locally), there is no pretense made about the characters themselves. Yet it could be said that there is a certain truth to the series, in that it's possible to imagine that the lives of people living in Folkestone during the Great War might not have been so different.

'It's easier to myth-bust in an unusual way through drama,'²⁷ says Series Editor, Jessica Dromgoole.

Our relationship to the truth is different. We can be very light with factual information... The game will be guessing what is true in each episode, and what comes from the imagination. The male beauty pageant won by a soldier? Or the landlady who took whisky with her breakfast milk?²⁸

²⁶ Ibid., p. 369.

²⁷ Kate Chisholm, 'Home Front: Radio 4's first world war drama will fight out the full four years', *The Spectator*, 2 August 2014.

<https://www.spectator.co.uk/2014/08/a-new-series-follows-the-first-world-war-in-real-time-day-by-day-for-four-years-following-a-cast-of-imaginary-families/>

[accessed 13 May 2016]

²⁸ Ibid.

BBC Radio 4's recent *From Fact to Fiction* series, which ran for nineteen series, invited a different writer each week to create a 15-minute fictional piece in response to recent news events. Whilst the audience is in no doubt what they are listening to, there are moments when the boundaries between what is real and what is imagined become blurred. In Series 5 the journalist Will Self takes on the role of a 7-year-old girl - Angela - who receives a visit from a social worker in a piece written, by Self, in response to proposed government changes to its child protection policies. Whilst there is no danger of mistaking Self for a girl, there is a recognizable truth to his performance that makes his/her words all the more real and allows the listener to suspend disbelief.

In his book *Too True*, Blake Morrison discusses the relationship between literature and journalism - fiction verses non-fiction - and argues that both disciplines commonly borrow from each other, despite, as he puts it, there being a degree of 'mutual antagonism' between the two camps.

Many novelists, dramatists and poets (from Defoe, Whitman and Dickens to Tom Stoppard, Michael Frayn and Brian Moore) have worked in journalism...a few have confessed to learning useful tricks there. Equally, journalists commonly refer to the articles they write as 'stories', and the best journalism borrows many devices from traditional fiction.²⁹

Morrison himself drew upon such literary devices to great effect when writing his critically acclaimed memoir, *And When Did You Last See Your Father*, and in the sequel, *Things My Mother Never Told Me*, he acknowledges as much.

²⁹ Blake Morrison, *Too True* (London: Granta, 1998), p. 3.

I confess to a little embroidery...her [mother's] letters from Elsie say little and I've filled in some of the gaps. It's not my usual method, to fictionalize. And even here what I've set down scarcely qualifies as fiction. With fiction you can let go, constrained only by the logic of your inventions – with my mother there is a demand of honest reporting...³⁰

And he's not alone in drawing on his own past, or indeed embellishing it for the sake of art. In 1973, following a bitter divorce from his second wife, Elizabeth Hardwick, the American poet Robert Lowell published three volumes of poetry; *History, For Lizzie and Harriet* and *The Dolphin*. In *Robert Lowell: Life and Art*, Steven Gould Axelrod writes:

Throughout his career [Lowell] has struggled to close the gap between life and artwork, and in *History* the two have finally joined. This volume," says Axelrod, "seeks to reveal not the truth of the past but the truth of Lowell's mind as it meditates upon the past in terms of its inmost concerns."³¹

The third volume, *The Dolphin*, contained a series of sonnets with language taken directly from the personal letters of Lowell's ex-wife, Elizabeth Hardwick. Described by Axelrod as "half memoir" and "half fiction". At the time, many took exception to the fact that Lowell had simply lifted lines from the correspondence and felt that in doing so he had somehow betrayed a trust. One of

³⁰ Blake Morrison, *Things My Mother Never Told Me* (London: Vintage 2003), p.76.

³¹ Steven Gould Axelrod, *In Robert Lowell: Life and Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 9.

Lowell's fiercest critics was his close friend and fellow poet, Elizabeth Bishop. Whilst Bishop admired the poetry itself she felt it raised important ethical issues and appealed to Lowell to look to his own conscience prior to *The Dolphin's* publication.

Please believe that I think it is wonderful poetry...[but] I'm sure my point is only too plain ... Lizzie [Hardwick] is not dead, etc.--but there is a 'mixture of fact & fiction' [in the book], and you have *changed* [Hardwick's] letters. That is 'infinite mischief,' I think ... One can use one's life as material--one does anyway--but these letters--aren't you violating a trust? IF you were given permission--IF you hadn't changed them ... etc. But *art just isn't worth that much.*³²

As well as reflecting on 'the turbulence of his life'³³ Lowell's poetry explores concerns shared by many writers and poets about autobiographical writing, as this extract, taken from his poem 'Dolphin', reveals.

I have sat and listened to too many
words of the collaborating muse,
and plotted perhaps too freely with my life,
not avoiding injury to others,
not avoiding injury to myself--³⁴

Another writer famous for blurring the distinction between reality and fiction is Philip Roth. In his book, *The Facts - A novelists autobiography*, Roth, like Lowell,

³² Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell, *Words in Air: the Complete Correspondence between Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell*, ed. Thomas Travisano and Saskia Hamilton (New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 2010), p. 707.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Robert Lowell, *The Dolphin* (New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1974)

self-consciously examines the writing process in an opening letter to his alter ego Nathan Zucherman:

In the past, as you know, the facts have always been note-book jottings, my way of springing into fiction. For me, as for most novelists, every genuine imaginative event begins down there, with the facts, with the specific, and not with the philosophical, the ideological, or the abstract. Yet to my surprise, I now appear to have gone about writing a book absolutely backward, taking what I have already imagined and, as it were desiccating it, so as to restore my experience to the original prefictionalised factuality.³⁵

Roth continues:

I recognize that I'm using the word "facts" here...in its idealized form...Obviously the facts are never just coming at you but are incorporated by an imagination that is formed by your previous experience. Memories of the past are not memories of the facts but memories of your imaginings of the facts. There is something naïve about a novelist like myself talking about presenting himself "undisguised" and depicting a life without fiction.³⁶

Like Barthes, Roth acknowledges that there is a 'significant gap' between the autobiographical writer that he is thought to be and the autobiographical writer that he is. The former being a fictionalized character, or persona, who is perhaps better placed to write

³⁵ Philip Roth, *The Facts - A Novelists Autobiography* (London: Vintage, 2007), p. 3.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8

objectively about events that have taken place than the writer himself. Or, as Zucherman puts it:

I am your permission, your indiscretion, the key to disclosure...Your gift is not to personalize your experience but to personify it, to embody it in the representation of a person who is *not* yourself. You are not an autobiographer you are a personficator.³⁷

INT. SITTING ROOM DAY

A mini-disc recorder lies on the mantelpiece reflected in the large gilt mirror. It's red recording light flashes intermittently. The WRITER refers to his notes. ALAN BENNETT sits patiently sipping his tea.

WRITER

I've always thought of your work as falling into two distinct categories: the autobiographical or semi-autobiographical (northern plays) and the historical work (*George III, Englishman Abroad*). More recently, I've realised it's not quite as simple as that – in *The Lady in the Van* and *Cocktail Sticks*, you make the point that 'you don't put yourself in what you write – you find yourself there.' I just wondered whether you've found yourself in everything that you've written. You wrote a collection of plays called the *Writer in Disguise* and I wondered to what extent you found yourself in those plays – even the historical plays, in one form or another?

³⁷ Ibid., p.161-162.

AB

With *The Lady in the Van*, I'd never thought much about the problems of writing, and even with the first stage play of *The Lady and the Van* I didn't really think about that but with the film, with splitting the character into two parts as a writer and the person who interacts with Miss Shepherd, I did have to face up to the situation of a person observing myself, which I had never really done. Or if I did it was implicit, I didn't do it explicitly.

WRITER

And what about your earlier work; *Marks*, *Rolling Home* and *Intensive Care*... how much of yourself is in those?

AB

I didn't really think of it as writing about myself, but I certainly wrote about my Mum and Dad and my aunties, my aunties particularly, 'cos they were so 'caricature-able' in a way. The big watershed would be after my father died in 1974, and I hadn't written anything about being gay, or admitted in public to being gay until after that time. I think that was quite a definite decision, he [my father] would have been very upset. My mother less so. Anyway all the plays which have a gay context like *Marks*, like *Englishman Abroad*, all that sort of aspect of it came in after my father died, after 1974. So they were more autobiographical after that date, whereas before that, they were autobiographical in a different way in the sense that they were...the language and character, some of them were based on people I knew. *A Day Out*, that the thing about the cyclist going to Fountain's Abbey, that was

(MORE)

(CONT.)

based on the way Leeds people talked, and on characters from that time. And I remember my father really liking that. They were always really supportive, but a play like *Forty Years On*, mystified them slightly 'cos it was about a world they didn't know anything about. But *A Day Out*, he thought that was really, really good. Plays which had no connection with my life, like *Habeas Corpus*...that was the last thing my father saw - and I think I've written about this - but when they came to see it, I came down and looked through the porthole of the door to the stalls where I could see them sitting and my father had broad smile on his face, not at what was happening on the stage, which was quite funny, but just at the audience laughing, he was proud of me. But that was what he called cheeky and so he wouldn't really approve, and a lot of other stuff he wouldn't approve of at all.

WRITER

Did he ever tell you he was proud of you?

AB

Not really, he didn't need to - it was implicit really, you know. It was partly with them, they had always, including university, not simply the theatre, they just let me go my own way. So what I did at university was a mystery to them and when I went into theatre, that was a mystery to them as well. If there was anything in the paper, they would save it, but it wasn't...the notion of exposing oneself in any way would have upset him, I think. So, I think Philip Roth says you can't really start writing until your father

(MORE)

(CONT.)

has died. Or your parents. With my mother, it was less so, she was more tolerant really, but she also went into the twilight later on. But they didn't see themselves in anything I'd written. When *Sunset Across the Bay* came out, where the couple really are based on them, although the woman is much more plaintive than my Mum was, my father had just died and I said to my Mum, 'did she seem like you?' and she said, 'well, not really. They came from Leeds and we came from Leeds and they went to Morecambe and we've gone to Clapham,' you know - but that was all - it was something entirely different. But as I say, it got much easier in a way, I could write what I wanted once they'd died. If I had to deal with anything, it wasn't to do with embarrassment with my parents, it was to do with myself and I got used to that, it didn't matter.

CUT TO:

In *Patrimony - A True Story*, Philip Roth writes about his dying father in an unsentimental account that describes their complex relationship. By the end of the book Roth comes to realize that the man whom he had railed against for much of his life, had, in fact, been central to his work - he was, as Adam Phillips states in his LRB review, 'his muse, his double, his child.'³⁸ In the final paragraphs Roth confesses that 'in keeping with the unseemliness of my profession, I had been writing all the while he was ill and dying.'³⁹ And whilst for Herman Roth the retelling of family history was a way of uniting his

³⁸ Adam Phillips, 'How to be Your Father's mother', *London Review of Books*, 12 September 1991, pp. 17 - 18.

³⁹ Philip Roth, *Patrimony - A True Story* (London: Vintage 1992), p.237.

family, for Roth, the writer, it served primarily as source material - that would inevitably lead to betrayal.

The Dead Room began with my own research into my family history. For some years my father had been keen to discover more about his grandfather, Jack, and a great uncle, Hezekiah, who, according to family stories, had been killed at the battle of Spion Kop, in the Eastern Natal district during the second Anglo-Boer war. Over the years my father had heard various tales about both men and had even travelled to South Africa in the hope of finding Hezekiah's grave in the regimental cemetery close to the battlefield. In the event he found nothing and returned home disappointed.

Pursuing various lines of enquiry, on numerous internet forums, I eventually discovered that Hezekiah wasn't, in fact, killed at Spion Kop but fell several days later at Wynne's Hill, during a minor skirmish further east. After the British defeat at Spion Kop the South Lancashire Regiment crossed the Tugelar river before meeting further resistance. A South African contributor to one of the forums saw my thread and offered to take a picture of the memorial at Wynne's Hill, which stands beside the main Colenso to Ladysmith Road. A month later a picture arrived in my 'In-box' of a memorial surrounded by a white picket fence.

Engraved in gold letters on the black marble slab was Hezekiah's name: Lance Sgt. Monks H. along with Corporal. Worrall T. and Privates, Brown, Fahren and Haywood - his men. It was this memorial that five years earlier my parents had tried (and failed) to find in the heat of the South African veldt. Now, with internet access, I'd tracked it down in less than 24 hours.

However, when I presented the facts to my father, expecting him to be pleased, it became clear that he preferred the story he'd grown up with - his own narrative. Spion Kop was a battle that has gone down in history and the name lives on in football grounds, golf clubs, villages and towns across the country. My father had always believed that his great uncle was a part of that legacy. Who's ever heard of Wynne's Hill?

A week or so later, whilst scanning the pages of eBay for a vacuum cleaner, I spotted an opportunity to make amends.

**Superb WWI Belgian Croix de Guerre
Rare – Original – Genuine.**

My father has always been very proud of the fact that his grandfather, Jack, won the Belgian Croix de Guerre for bravery during the First World War, whilst also serving with the South Lancashire Regiment. Sadly the medal itself was stolen some years ago and all that now remains is an empty plastic wallet in which the original medal was kept, along with Jack's other effects. Within minutes I'd tracked down half a dozen possible contenders and had placed a bid on what looked like the best of the bunch - location: Thessaloniki, Greece. Two days later I found that I was the winning bidder at \$40, plus package and posting - or to be more accurate I found that I was the only bidder. I began to worry. Why was no one else interested? Could it be that the medal described as 'Full size, perfect condition for 96 years! Original ribbon!!' might, in fact, be a fake. I started to look

more closely at the photograph – zooming in on the ‘fantastic patina’. Was that touch-up paint that had been used? I emailed the seller with a series of questions worried that I’d made a terrible mistake. He reassured me that the medal was original – a beautiful example purchased from a reputable dealer in France. I had no option but to go ahead with the purchase and duly transferred the money. A week later the medal arrived in a jiffy bag wrapped in Greek toilet paper. It looked just as it’d been described but I’d still no idea whether or not it was genuine. I then rewrapped it and sent it to my father as a Father’s Day present. He was delighted and wondered how I’d managed to track it down. Had I applied to the War Office for a replacement? I couldn’t tell him I’d purchased it on ebay – or that it’d come from Greece. And so, I lied and told him I’d bought it from a dealer in Yorkshire (Yorkshire being a good honest county and only a stone’s throw from Warrington where Jack was born.) Somehow, though, its providence suddenly seemed unimportant. In my father’s mind he now had a genuine Belgian Croix de Guerre to replace the one that had been stolen (and it may well be genuine for all I know.) The end result is a credible narrative – that whilst not entirely true – helps complete his story.

Having re-found Jack’s lost war medal (or one very like it) I began to research the man himself, which proved somewhat easier. A couple of clicks of the mouse and after checking various census I discovered something that neither my father, or I, had expected.

My father had always believed that Jack was an only child. Thanks to Ancestry.com I found that he was, in fact, one of thirteen. Far from answering my father’s questions it simply threw up new ones. Why had he been

lied to? Was my grandfather aware of the truth and if so why had he kept it from my father? As with Hezekiah's story it quickly became apparent that my father didn't want to know. Perhaps he was afraid of what he might turn up. Perhaps he'd always had an idea that there was something buried - something that he now couldn't face. Perhaps it was all too late anyway.

The process of delving into my family's past and the subsequent conversations with my father prompted me to explore the idea further. Not only did it appeal as rich territory for drama but it also had the potential to combine questions around truth and memory. In the early drafts of the screenplay I experimented with the idea that father, having witnessed his son drowning, had buried this episode in the depths of his memory as a way of coping - a method of survival.

As the idea developed I decided that rather than have father be the one who recovers a lost memory it might be more interesting to reveal that John is in fact mistaken all along, and has constructed his own false memory - so that rather than the cutting room being a place where father pieced together a true account of the past, it is, instead, somewhere where John constructs his own version of events from fragments of memory - snatches of conversations overheard - pictures he's seen of his brother, which he later uses as evidence to back up his own misremembered theory of family history.

In his Introduction to *Cocktail Sticks*, Alan Bennett writes:

[...] it can be no fun having a writer in the family, always on the make, never happy to let things lie undescribed or leave them unremembered, and ready, too, to tweak experience if the drama or the narrative demands it.⁴⁰

And, as if to prove a point, at one stage in the play, following an exchange with his mother, Alan Bennett comments:

[...]actually that last bit I didn't say and nor did she, but that was what you did with dialogue when you were a writer, edited, augmented it for public consumption. It wasn't lying; it was part of the job.⁴¹

Bennett has often been asked whether he has any regrets about writing about his parents – the implication being that he has somehow violated their privacy – furthermore that autobiography is some kind of betrayal. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, this is not a theory that Bennett subscribes to. However, it is interesting to note that it wasn't until a number of years after their deaths that Bennett finally wrote about his parents, not only in his diaries *Writing Home* and *Untold Stories*, but also in *Hymn* and *Cocktail Sticks*, staged at the National Theatre in 2012.

Blake Morrison faced a similar dilemma when writing about his father. Again, his memoir, *And When Did You Last See Your Father*, wasn't published until after Arthur

⁴⁰ Alan Bennett, *Hymn and Cocktail Sticks, Two Recollections* (London: Faber, 2012), p.66.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

Morrison's death. In *Too True* Morrison discusses the problems of dramatizing his own childhood and describes what he saw as a sliding scale of truth where white lies, or fibs, were 'told in the service of a higher good'⁴². The phrase 'too true', used by his father, 'whenever something required rueful acknowledgment or cheerful assent,'⁴³ also suggested that truth itself wasn't at the top of this scale, instead 'it was a state of compromise: some things were untrue, and others too true; the truth lay sensibly in between.'⁴⁴

INT. SITTING ROOM DAY

The WRITER turns the page in his notebook for his next question.

WRITER

The *Lady in the Van* started life as a series of diary entries but in the film you made it clear at the beginning anyway that Miss Shepherd was never a project of yours, did that make a difference initially to how you wrote about her? If you know that something you're writing is going to be published, or seen by others, to what extent do you edit your work? Do you find yourself omitting certain things you deem as classified, or out of bounds?

AB

I didn't imagine I was going to write about her. When I did note things down when she was actually there, it was simply because it was interesting.

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⁴² Blake Morrison, *Too True* (London: Granta Books 1998), p. 1.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

(CONT.)

I may have thought that ultimately, I might have thought I'd write something about her in my diary. But I didn't write anything in the diary or have anything published. The peculiar thing, and it just goes to show how things were different then, but nobody who came to interview me ever mentioned her being there - the ramparts of privacy were much higher than they are now. I mean it's unthinkable now that she would go unmentioned as it were. Anyway, I used to note down odd things that she did, if she was wearing some peculiar thing or if anything dramatic happened when she was roughed up, or whatever. But I think if I thought I was going to write about her, I would have tried to find out more about her. It was impossible to talk to her, you couldn't find out by a direct question what she was like. All I found out about her I found out after she died from her brother, I didn't know anything about her during life. I always think I'm not a proper writer, I'm not curious enough, I don't follow stuff up. If I'm a proper writer I'd have somehow investigated her, but I don't know how you would have done it. She was just un-talkable to, you know.

WRITER

There's a diary entry here - January 1971, where you mention the neighbours knocking on the door of the van with a plate of 'Roman remains' (left-over food from a Roman themed dinner party). When that happened did you write it in this form, as published in the London Review of Books, or in note form and then wrote it up later?

AB

I think I probably wrote it in note form, or in rough diary format, but I probably tidied it all up for the LRB, 'cos the LRB for their 10 anniversary wanted a piece and I remember thinking I hadn't got anything I could write, but then it occurred to me I could work it up into something. But I knew the Roman remains was funny! Cos it reflected both on Miss Shepherd and also on the people - on Anna Haycraft who was taking out whatever it was and also Miss Shepherd's mystification when she was presented with this.

WRITER

You talk in the preface to the play of *The Lady in the Van* about truth, how, as an historian, you find it difficult to alter the facts. Did you feel at all constrained by the facts in Miss Shepherd's case? And why do you think it matters if you do change things when, ultimately, if that person is dead, no one is going to know except you?

AB

I don't know why, but I do feel it. I felt it with her. I still have to explain it to people, I mean I had to do the film in the village two weeks ago and they showed it in the Church, and I found myself explaining that it was all true, except for (technically speaking) the Jim Broadbent part, but in the sense she was (technically speaking) on the run all her life, ever since the accident, cos she'd left the scene of a death, and that was a felony, that was true.

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And making Jim the character that embodied that was a device. People could have said, well, "that's not true," but I do feel that...that somehow when I think about people like Bruce Chatwin for example, or W.G. Sebald (the German writer, who lived outside Norwich), who allow themselves a great deal of latitude with the truth, I can't do that. I don't know whether it's being a historian or being brought up properly, I don't know. I feel that work of fiction is all right, that makes no difference, but I wouldn't want to over dramatise my Mam and Dad. All the things in *Cocktail Sticks* are virtually true. And what they say is what they would have said. I don't think it's a virtue to be moral and so wedded to the facts, I think it is a weakness because it limits you and you don't get any credit for it. People aren't that bothered really.

WRITER

Some make the distinction between 'truth' and 'truthfulness', the truth being something subjective and truthfulness being something that the writer strives for in the search of truth. What's your definition of truth in the context of autobiographical writing?

AB

I think it would be..., well, I think the best you can do as a writer, is when someone is reading something you have written, for that person to think here is somebody who knows what it is like to be me. Forster talks about 'only connect', he didn't mean that, but that's what I mean by 'only connect'. That seems to me to be the highest form of truth.

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(CONT.)

And if you can do that it's the most you can expect, I think. I hope that's right.

WRITER

I remember you once quoted Emily Dickinson, in relation to your work, who said, 'tell all the truth but tell it slant'. At the beginning of *The Lady In the Van* the caption says it is a 'mostly true story', and you've acknowledged that you've made some things up; creating the policemen, Underwood, and creating composite characters for the neighbours and compressing time. At what point does non-fiction become fiction? How 'slant' can you go before it becomes, as the boys would say in the film, a lie?

AB

I don't know... Well, in Miss Shepherd's case, if I did, which I don't think I did, if I'd tried to make out I was kinder than I was, that would have been untruthful and not right. In fact, I go the other way - truthfully saying how exasperated I was with her half the time, which is absolutely true. That she irritated me, she drove me up the wall and that my motives were almost out of sheer laziness really and sloth, that I couldn't be bothered to lay down the law a bit and say you've got to behave better or if you don't you've got to move on with the van. But I just didn't have the will to do it. It came to me after she had died what a strong will she had, and how weak willed I am. If I'd told it in a different way, that wouldn't have been right.

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(CONT.)

It's ridiculous, but the thing that is untruthful about the film version of *The Lady in the Van* is her going up to heaven. But then in a way that's not untruthful cos that's how she saw her life and the way she peopled her life with the Virgin Mary and all the other characters. I suppose you could have made it a much more redemptive ending; somehow her either showing me something about life, which she didn't really (she had her own redemption), or finding some kind of arc to her life, but I couldn't see that. And I think that would have been wrong, or would've been wrong for me, I couldn't do it like that.

WRITER

I can imagine some producers trying to impose exactly that structure on the play.

AB

Well I didn't have anything like that and I don't think Nick [Hytner] ever tried to tidy it up or make it seem more acceptable. And the good thing, a lot of performers wouldn't do it like this, but the good thing about Maggie [Smith] was that she was quite prepared to be thoroughly unpleasant throughout. At no point did she somehow try to present herself as being loveable. The scenes playing the piano at the end was very moving, but it is not that she is somehow making a bid for sympathy at all.

WRITER

No, but what it does do, and there's another scene too where she confesses, or reveals some of her past, is that it allows the audience to catch a glimpse of her - to see how she's become this tough/bloody character. It allows us in.

AB

Yes, that's right. And also, it means they have more time for her, not just irritated by her.

WRITER

Yes. You sympathise with her.

AB

The other question which the film does deal with is, why on earth did I let her in the garden in the first place? and what a fool I was, and so on. I think he does explain that in the play.

WRITER

I don't know if it was in the play, or in an interview subsequently, but you said things happen little by little, they creep up on you, so you agree to a little at the start and then...

AB

Yes, if people had said she was going to be here for 15 years, there would be no question about it. I don't think I've said this, it seems so offensive, but a lot of marriages are like that. If you knew the pattern it was going to take, you might not enter into it in the first place, and it was a kind of marriage in a way.

WRITER

Do you think *The Lady in the Van* would have had the same impact had it been a work of fiction?

AB

No. I think you would have had to explain a lot more, my psychology, you would've had to have had a much more lengthy knowledge of me and my past to set that character up in order to make it seem even plausible, I think. Some people don't believe that it's true anyway; in the village, their questions indicated they thought I had made it all up. There's nothing you can do about that.

WRITER

Is that because you have put 'a mostly true story', so they think which parts...?

AB

Yes, I would have put a true story, but you have to put that because of the lawyers. They are such sticklers now, particularly in America.

WRITER

But who would have been offended? Miss Shepherd is dead.

AB

Don't know. Anyone who appears on the screen they think is a possible claimant in some fugitive court case.

WRITER

The woman who gave Miss Shepherd the van, Lady Wigan, is she still alive?

AB

No. But her sons are.

WRITER

I remember you saying that you thought your portrayal of her was fairly unsympathetic.

AB

Yes, but it was absolutely true,
she lived in Regents Park Terrace,
just around the corner, [she]
could quite easily have had the
van there - there were no parking
restrictions - but there was
absolutely no question.

CUT TO:

John Barbour, in *The Conscience of the Autobiographer*, attempts to define the notion of 'truth' and in so doing refers to truthfulness, making the distinction between the two:

Truthfulness must be distinguished from truth. Truth is usually thought of as a kind of correspondence between human thought and reality, or as a matter of coherence among different ideas and propositions. Truthfulness, in contrast, is a process or quality of a person, a virtue we ascribe to certain individuals and not others...the autobiographer may err; he is fallible as any human being in interpreting reality. The autobiographer may, however, demonstrate truthfulness, which is an active search for the most exact and insightful understanding of past experience.⁴⁵

Here Barbour highlights the writer's 'fallibility', which is as much to do with memory as anything else. Neuroscientists, too, over recent decades, have explored the mutability of memory and its manifold capacities for suppression, distortion and invention with researchers proposing different structural models to explain the

⁴⁵ John D. Barbour, *The Conscience of the Autobiographer: Ethical and Religious Dimensions of Autobiography* (London: Macmillan, 1992), p. 26.

workings of Short Term and Long Term memory: the Multi-Store Model (Atkinson and Shiffrin, 1968) and the Working Memory Model (Baddeley and Hitch, 1974). However, this is a huge and separate field of study and one that I do not intend to discuss in any depth in this thesis. That said, research carried out into Proactive interference and Retroactive interference - where recall is prevented either by old learning, or new learning - as well as retrieval-failure theory - is of some relevance here, as is the work of the eminent American cognitive psychologist, Elizabeth Loftus, whose investigations into eye-witness testimony accounts, are certainly worth mentioning within the context of autobiographical 'truth'.

When someone tells you something, just because they're confident, just because they're detailed, just because they're emotional when they tell you something they tell you is a memory, doesn't mean it really happened.⁴⁶

To prove the point, a recent study, carried out by psychologists at the University of Bedfordshire, convinced a group of adults in just a matter of hours that they'd perpetrated a violent act as a teenager - when in fact they'd done nothing of the kind. Over the course of several short interviews researchers were able to plant false memories in the minds of participants by mixing fact with fiction. True details, gained from the participant's parents, were added to the false account, giving it credence. The fabricated stories were then 'internalized'. Of the thirty students that took part in the experiment, 70% believed that they had committed a crime. A second similarly sized group was then told about

⁴⁶ 'Elizabeth Loftus and Eye Witness Testimony', *Mind Changers*, BBC Radio 4, 17 April 2011.

an emotional event that had taken place in the lives, using the same techniques and resulted in 77% of the students forming false memories.

According to Dr Julia Shaw, who led the experiment:

This research speaks to the distinct possibility that most of us are likely able to generate rich false memories of emotional and criminal events. The findings have clear implications for criminal interrogation and other aspects of legal procedure, affecting suspects, witnesses, and law-enforcers, as well as for interviews that take place as part of therapy.⁴⁷

It is completely plausible, therefore, given the fundamental malleability of memory, and our willingness to fill in the gaps, that John's character is able to construct his own particular narrative based on the flimsiest of details. And indeed this particular psychological study is referred to in the script. In both *The Dead Room* and *The Lady in the Van* this unreliability in interpreting reality is further explored by means of splitting the protagonist in two, to create the 'writer' and his 'other-self', in order to establish a dialogue between them.

The writer is double. There is the self who does the writing and there is the self who does the living. And they talk. They argue. Writing is talking to

⁴⁷ Sophie Freeman, 'How False Memories could land you in Jail', *Mail Online*, 16 January 2015.
<www.dailymail.co.uk/.../How-false-memories-land-jail-tricked-believing-committed-c...>
[accessed 26 March 2016]

one's self, and I've been doing it all my life...⁴⁸

Just as Alan Bennett chose to divide himself in two in *The Lady in the Van*, with one half invariably seen sat working at his desk, whilst the other attempts to live his life with Miss Shepherd parked in his driveway, it seemed obvious to me, when coming up with the idea for *The Dead Room*, that I should draw on my own experience in radio drama to create a scenario, set within a recursive framework, where an actor, playing a scriptwriter, is able to interrogate the original author about the writing process.

For example, the encounter between John and John 2, as they stand together in the BBC toilets, highlights the point Barbour makes about interpretation. During the course of their conversation about John's relationship with his sister Lucy, it's decided that John 2 should play the part with a neutral RP accent, (due to his inability to master John's Lancashire accent). It's a seemingly tiny detail but nevertheless it is an alteration to the facts - as are numerous other changes that are made at the behest of the director in the studio.

At several points during *The Lady in the Van*, Alan Bennett (or A.B. in the script - 'the one who lives the life') is taken to task by the writer for invention.

MISS BRISCOE

What is she like?

A.B.

Mary, as you call her, is a
bigoted, blinkered, cantankerous,
devious, unforgiving, self-
serving, rank, rude, car-mad cow.

(MORE)

⁴⁸ Alan Bennett, *The Lady in the Van Screenplay* (USA: Picador, 2015), p. 3.

(CONT.)

Which is to say nothing of her flying faeces and her ability to extrude from her withered buttocks turds of such force that they land a yard from the back of the van and their presumed point of exit.

Beat. ALAN BENNETT is at the desk.

ALAN BENNETT

Though, of course, you didn't say any of that.

MISS BRISCOE leaves the study.⁴⁹

In his Introduction to the stage play of *The Lady in the Van*, Alan Bennett writes:

Telling the truth crops up quite a bit in the play, what Miss Shepherd did or didn't do a subject of some disagreement between "the boys", as I tended to think of the two Alan Bennetts. They call not telling the truth "lying", but "the imagination" would be a kinder way of putting it, with Alan Bennett the writer finally winning through to make Miss Shepherd talk of her past (as she never actually did) and even to bring her back from the dead in order to take her bodily up to heaven (also imaginary).

Blake Morrison maintains that truth is the first casualty a good story and indeed it seems that there is a trade-off between fact and fiction during the construction process. The creation by the writer of a persona, in the case of the autobiographical memoir, allows the writer to distance himself, or herself, from the work and with that distance comes certain freedoms. American journalist and memoirist, Vivian Gornick, writer of *The Situation and*

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 65.

the Story, agrees with Philip Roth when she describes the narrative voice within autobiographical writing as 'a structure, or device... which permits deviations from fact in the service of better storytelling.' And goes on to describe it as 'the instrument of illumination.'⁵⁰ This idea is illustrated in *The Dead Room* where John is seen to be taking certain liberties with the facts, which Lucy strongly objects to.

Micaela Maftei argues that it is impossible for a writer not to distance himself from the work during the writing process to some extent. The very nature of reflecting on past events means that there is already a space between the event and the writer - in temporal terms at least - and that's before the event is translated by the writer into language and laid down on the page. All of which allows plenty of room for artistic license - the pruning, shaping and selection of material in order to create a good story. 'To write about the self's hot flushes,' Blake reflects, 'you have to be cold and detached...The process of being 'truthful' as a writer is not unlike that of constructing a narrative voice in fiction.'⁵¹

Maftei adds:

Autobiography necessitates the removal of its writer to a place outside the experience, in order to write about it. Yet simultaneously illustrates his, or her role in the experience, situating them within the described event. The writer must wear a multitude of masks in order to create the illusion of being both protagonist and recorder of the story, the character to whom we (hopefully) relate and have an interest in

⁵⁰ Micaela Maftei, *The Fiction of Autobiography - Reading and Writing Identity* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 44.

⁵¹ Blake Morrison, *Too True* (London: Granta 1998), p. 11.

following, as well as a controller of the strings, the one who draws us along through the story even while knowing the outcome and writing from a time and space beyond it.⁵²

INT. SITTING ROOM DAY

Alan Bennett takes another sip of tea. He repositions himself in his chair and stretches his legs.

WRITER

At what point did you hit upon the idea of having two Alan Bennetts, of splitting yourself in two? And did you feel that by inventing the two characters it gave you a license to invent?

AB

It happened in the play, of course, before the film. I remember I was trying to write the play for quite a while, and it was perfectly easy to tell Miss Shepherd's story, because it had a beginning, middle and end. But what was the problem, was talking about myself in that period. I think it came out of that, that somehow having two people, two characters on the stage playing me slightly deflected one's thoughts about what was happening to me, or you didn't need to be told in detail so much about it, I think that's what it was. There are all sorts of references about being in plays or going down to the theatre in the film and in the play. They are all sorts of stuff happening to me outside that. There is more in the film about occasional gay boys turning up.

(MORE)

⁵² Micaela Maftai, *The Fiction of Autobiography - Reading and Writing Identity* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 59.

(CONT.)

Some people miss that completely, I don't think they got that in the village really. But that didn't happen in the stage play. But that is because I feel so much less concerned about it in the last 10-15 years than I was before.

WRITER

Did you see 'the boys', the two Alan Bennetts, as characters in the same way as you saw Miss Shepherd, and were you able to distance yourself from them?

AB

I was able to distance myself. I remember doing them in the stage play and finding a lot of fun in the relations between the two actors, played by Kevin McNally and Nick Farrell. The way they sparked off each other, they had a life of their own which was not untrue, you could comprehend it, if you thought that it was my inner-life and this was a dialogue going off in my own head. But they had a theatrical truth and theatrical energy, which I liked, which made it work.

WRITER

What do you mean by 'theatrical truth'?

AB

The things they were saying worked on the stage and they weren't false to me, they are what I would have said. And that's true in the film as well. The irritations I felt you may not be able to pin down to the specific situations as it were, certainly the continuing irritations and self-reproach was there for most of the time.

WRITER

Film-making is obviously a collaborative process and you've talked about your working relationship with Nicholas Hytner. Is there a sense when you hand a script to a director and it gets handed on, in the case of a film, to the director of photography, the wardrobe department, all the different people involved - that the truth, or *your* truth, your version of the events somehow becomes diluted?

AB

I think it does, it depends on what your relationship is with the director. With Nick, I know him so well and he knows me so well, without us being in a way particularly friendly, it's a very professional relationship. I don't think he would ask me to do anything which he knew I would resist or find false. And the same goes for the cameraman too, Andrew Dunn. He is so faithful to what you want to do - he did the *Madness of George III* and the *History Boys* as well - he is so respectful of one's work and so modest himself that there would be no question of him trying to jushe it up at all.

WRITER

Nicholas Hytner has said that 23, Gloucester Crescent (your old house) was so integral to the story of *The Lady in the Van* that if you hadn't been able to use it as a location in the film then he didn't think it would've been made.

AB

There were various other things, slightly less worthy! They thought that by filming in my own house it would come cheap and indeed it did come very cheap because we were scarcely paid anything at all for it. But I don't think it would've worked really any other way. The geography of the street, the slope of the house that brought her opposite, you would need that, also the composition of the neighbours at that time, there was a slightly raffish element of the street, there were lawyers, there were some quite posh people and some quite bohemian people, and while she stood out, she was nevertheless tolerated and tolerated out of a sense of guilt really in a way that someone ought to look after her, they were quite glad it wasn't them really.

WRITER

That came across quite strongly in the film with the neighbours, with Deborah Finlay and Roger Allam 'we are very tolerant people', and then there's the scene where they drive off to Glyndebourne and are suddenly horror-struck when they realise Miss Shepherd is parking outside their house.

AB

That was fictitious that episode, but on the other hand it is entirely true in the sense that Colin Haycraft, next door, referred to her as that 'fucking woman' and he would say outrageous things well within earshot and he was the person when the coffin was put into the hearse said 'a cut above her previous vehicle'. So all of that, although it was farmed out of different characters, it was true.

CUT TO:

It's also the case, ironically, that facts can sometimes undermine the authenticity of a piece. At the beginning of *The Dead Room*, John is sat on a train to London when a man jumps on the line. As he sits waiting for the train to move, the guard makes an announcement over the tannoy.

TUTOR 1

Yes and on that note there is a very obvious protocol that they follow and it seemed to me that [in the script] they gave out a lot of information. Too much, possibly.

WRITER

It was quite incredible - I sat on that train and I wrote it all down - word for word as he was saying it. Because I was amazed at the language he was using. The breaks went on and we sat there for a while - nothing happening - and then the guard's voice was heard and he said all of that - in a most casual way...it struck me as very strange, which was why I wrote it down - verbatim.

TUTOR 1

Because there are clichés: 'There has been an incident on the line...'

WRITER

No. It wasn't anything like that. He said, 'The train has just hit somebody...' and implied that 'this is a real nuisance. We apologise for any inconvenience caused.'

Following the above exchange in the Upgrade, I altered the lines in the script to appear more 'real', less surprising - just as the tutor has described; concerned that the truth of what I heard that day might not be

believed - or, rather, that it might strike the reader as false.

Likewise, in an article in *The Guardian* newspaper, the film director and writer Terence Davies claims that he felt unable to portray his father as he really was, in *Distant Voices, Still Lives*, for fear that the audience wouldn't believe him.

Everything really happened. I had to tone down my father's violence because if I'd put the real levels in, nobody would have believed it.⁵³

So the character that we encounter in Davies' script is perhaps a milder, modulated version of the truth - still a violent bully, but a *version* of his father nevertheless. Although *The Dead Room* is not my story - John, the protagonist, is not me and his family is not my family, there are undoubtedly autobiographical elements within the script, as is the case with everything I write. I share Davies' concerns and wonder whether they may also have something to do with feeling a sense of responsibility towards the living - a need to protect - albeit subconscious. Davies' 1988 film has proved itself to be particularly influential and instructive in the making of this project, and I will be discussing it in greater depth later in the thesis.

Whilst creating the main characters for *The Dead Room*, I drew heavily on my experience writing *Inquest* (2014), a five-part series for BBC Radio 4, about the death of a young female soldier, which looks at a single event from multiple viewpoints (see Appendix). I felt it was

⁵³ Kate Abbott, 'How we made: Terence Davies and Freda Dowie on *Distant Voices, Still Lives*', *The Guardian*, 16 April 2012, G2 section, p. 24.

important that the protagonist, John, and his sister, Lucy, should see things differently - consequently two perspectives are given on the same family history as they try to work out how best to deal with their father after his stroke. Differences of opinion emerge between them as the script goes into production, illustrating the impossibility of establishing a single definitive 'truth' in autobiographical writing, as well as highlighting the gap that exists between the writer and his persona.

Alan Bennett, the writer, has made a hugely successful career out of Alan Bennett the persona. He has even been dubbed a 'National Treasure' (along with Julie Walters and Thora Hird, before her death) based on the public's perception of his character on stage and television. Bennett himself dislikes the title, yet maintains that by not quite fitting the public's perception of him it gives him more freedom. It also gives him the opportunity to surprise, as he continues to do in his work.

In an article in the US online magazine *Salon*, written in defense of her book, *Fierce Attachments*, Vivian Gornick tells a story about an encounter with a woman after a book signing when the woman asked if she could visit her mother and 'take a walk with her' the next time she was in New York. Gornick replied that she wouldn't want to walk with her mother - it was the person in the book she wanted to walk with - the two are not the same. 'I am not I. Thou are not thou', as John says to his wife, Val, when she discovers his radio script for the first time and is horrified by what she reads.

The framing of an autobiographical radio play within a screenplay is quite deliberate and offers the potential to further explore the question of autobiographical truth

by examining the aural and visual aspects of the script. That said, I had not fully appreciated the potential that this device might offer until I began to write *The Dead Room*; namely that I was able say one thing and show another, as a way of highlighting degrees of 'truth' - the sliding scale to which Morrison refers. We see changes being made to the script throughout the production process; 'tweaks' as lines are altered, or entire scenes cut by the director, with or without the writer's consent.

The inclusion of the additional layer of narrative - that of the PhD itself - offered further opportunities to investigate the writing process whilst simultaneously creating a more three-dimensional experience for the reader. This was a relatively late decision in the overall process, but one that was intended to help integrate the creative project with the reflective thesis.

As a viewer, observing the story unfold through the studio glass, we are able to see what the radio audience cannot. Watching the studio technicians manipulate objects to create sound effects we realise that this process requires a degree of creativity. The actual objects themselves rarely sound as one would expect; a quill on paper might not sound 'right', whereas a broken wooden coffee stirrer gives the listener a more 'realistic' sound picture, consequently foley artists working in the recording studio have all manner of assorted props to help them achieve the desired effect. Discrepancies between autobiographical facts and how these are then depicted in a radio drama are highlighted in this way throughout *The Dead Room* by juxtaposing the aural and the visual.

For example: in one particular scene, within the radio play, characters leave the hospital in the pouring rain; sound effects of 'rain on leaves' are played in by the Studio Manager to achieve the effect of a downpour as the actors read their lines from their scripts. The action in the screenplay then cuts to a glorious sunny day outside the hospital and we see the same scene unfold in flashback.

Likewise, in the same scene the Studio Manager says, 'I can't find a decent hospital atmos, but we can cheat it' before playing in a recording of a supermarket background. This illustrates the point that the production process itself offers numerous opportunities for subtle changes to occur.

But whilst some alterations are deliberate others take place sub-consciously during the writing process. In his acknowledgements at the beginning of *This Boy's Life*, Tobias Wolff thanks various people for their help with the book before adding:

I have been corrected on some points, mostly of chronology. Also my mother thinks that a dog I describe as ugly was actually quite handsome. I've allowed some of these points to stand, because this is a book of memory, and memory has its own story to tell. But I have done my best to make it tell a truthful story.⁵⁴

And so it is with John's character, who, writing from his own perspective, is convinced that his version of events is entirely accurate.

⁵⁴ Tobias Wolff, *This Boy's Life* (New York: Grove Press, 1989), p. 1.

In a coroner's court witnesses take to the stand and swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. But as they recall events from the past the very act of remembering can colour their recollections. Indeed recent research carried out by neuroscientist Daniella Shiller, of Mt. Sinai School of Medicine, together with colleagues at New York University, shows that each time a memory is recalled from our long-term memory (in a process known as reconsolidation) it is partially modified. Shiller is particularly interested in how this might enable victims of trauma to overcome past fears. Writing in *Nature Journal* she describes the process of Memory reconsolidation and her attempts to alter previously consolidated memories during this period of recall.

During reconsolidation, stored information is rendered labile after being retrieved. Pharmacological manipulations at this stage result in an inability to retrieve the memories at later times, suggesting that they are erased or persistently inhibited. Unfortunately, the use of these pharmacological manipulations in humans can be problematic. Here we introduce a non-invasive technique to target the reconsolidation of fear memories in humans. We provide evidence that old fear memories can be updated with non-fearful information provided during the reconsolidation window. As a consequence, fear responses are no longer expressed, an effect that lasted at least a year and was selective only to reactivated memories without affecting others. These findings demonstrate the

adaptive role of reconsolidation as a window of opportunity to rewrite emotional memories...⁵⁵

In his book *The Making of Memory: From Molecules to Mind*, Steven Rose describes the same phenomena.

[...]memory is an intricate and ever shifting net of firing neurons...the twistings and turnings of which rearrange themselves completely each time something is recalled.⁵⁶

During my research for *Inquest* I was able to observe witnesses attempting to recall events under cross-examination. When asked whether, or not, something took place, if they could not remember clearly they were told not to speculate but instead were given three choices: On the balance of probabilities, is it likely, possible, or are you confident that this did not happen?' Thus providing yet another scale of accuracy or, in other words, a means of evaluating 'truth'.

In summary, Micaela Maftei, referring to her own autobiographical writing, concludes:

This instability [of 'truth'] was eventually freeing. I became more confident in thinking of truth as something that could be expressed in different and not always co-existing ways. I could be true to my memories; I could be true to research that provided me with corroboration of what I was writing; I could

⁵⁵Daniella Shiller, Preventing the return of fear in humans using reconsolidation update mechanisms, *Nature*, 463, (2009), 49-53 (p. 49).

<<http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v463/n7277/abs/nature08637.html>>

[accessed November 2016]

⁵⁶ Steven Rose, *The Making Of Memory: From Molecules to Mind* (New York: Random House, 2012), p. 15.

be true to the wishes of others; I could be true to the feel of a piece of writing (a kind of assessment that itself is not always stable). Each possibility was valid, even while some could be mutually exclusive. Thus, writing truthfully would take a different shape depending on my intentions and beliefs, and the writing would be received differently depending on each reader's beliefs. This understanding shifted the pressure away from the writing as finished product, and onto the process. Truth slowly became a (flexible, changeable) state of mind rather than a measurable outcome⁵⁷.

The caption 'Based on a True Story', that appears on screen at the beginning of a film or television programme, is a widely recognized convention to signal the origins of the idea. In addition to offering the writer a degree of indemnity it also offers a caveat - a warning to the audience that what they are about to watch is, in part at least, fiction. *The Lady in the Van* began in the same way, with the variation, 'a mostly true story', giving Alan Bennett artistic license to embellish his own tale as he saw fit. Indeed, the self-interrogatory techniques employed in *Marvelous* also help to manage audience expectations in much the same way. Nevertheless, whether true or not - fact or fiction - it appears that what matters most to an audience is story. And whilst it's obvious that Miss Shepherd's ascension never took place - at least not while Alan Bennett was watching - it doesn't stop audiences from leaving the cinema believing what they've seen (for the most part anyway). So perhaps 'truth' is better thought of as an end point, or destination - something that is arrived at,

⁵⁷ Micaela Maftai, *The Fiction of Autobiography - Reading and Writing Identity* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 2.

or reached, after the writer has taken a variety of different paths, rather than a starting point - or waymark - from which the writer must not stray. What matters more, perhaps, is authorial intention. Integrity. According to Alan Bennett, as far as the truth is concerned, 'people aren't that bothered really'⁵⁸ as a review of *The Lady in the Van* that appeared in the Hollywood Reporter seems to prove: 'Figuring out what is true and what isn't is one of the pleasures of watching *The Lady in the Van*'.⁵⁹

INT. SITTING ROOM DAY

The WRITER refers to his notes. ALAN BENNETT sits patiently.

WRITER

In the play *Cocktails Sticks* there are conversations that take place between your parents about you, which you obviously weren't privy to. Did you have to justify those conversations, those moments, to yourself? Was it something you consciously thought about?

AB

No. I think there's a scene with them bothering about me going to turn out to be a vicar. And also about the gay side. And I'd have thought those probably did take place, it would be entirely like them too.

WRITER

There's also a scene with them in bed together, laughing.

⁵⁸ Alan Bennett interview, 4 May 2016.

⁵⁹ Frank Scheck, *The Lady in the Van*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, 9 December 2015, p. 28.

AB

That's right, yes. Well they used to have endless conversations in bed, both when I was living at home, or staying at home, they would go to bed at about nine o'clock and they would then drop off and I'd sometimes take them a cup of tea about ten o'clock, and they would then have lively conversations until about midnight and peals of laughter. That was the awful thing when my dad died, my mother was just left, nothing like that to keep her going.

WRITER

I found both *Cocktail Sticks* and *The Lady in the Van* incredibly moving. For me one of the most touching moments was when your mum talks about a conversation she'd had with your brother, Gordon, where she asked him if he'd ever seen behind the clouds - because you know why she was asking. What was it like, having written *Cocktail Sticks* and *The Lady in the Van*, to see the actors on stage, or on the screen, playing your parents, speaking their lines? As your mum said, 'I've given you some script in my time.'

AB

It depends on the actor. It's difficult to say. For instance, Jeff Rawle, no problems at all, he was so exactly like my Dad, not so much in the voice, just everything about him. No-body who has played my mother on the stage has got the same..., they tend to play her too...'cos she ended up so depressive and pathetic in a way, they tend to emphasis that too much. Whereas, in fact, she was much more feisty (not a word I like) and shouting with laughter, and funny.

(MORE)

(CONT.)

But I understand how that happens, 'cos in a way I forget that side of her and think of her as she was in the last 20 years of her life as she was gradually going into asylums. So nobody really catches her, although Gwen Taylor was very good in the film. My mother is such an odd mixture of being outrageous and funny, and at the same time shy, and both of them in the presence of others, being polite and careful what they said and so on. But as soon as anyone had gone out of the room, becoming themselves again.

WRITER

I remember reading that you had an aunty who had the tremors and your father commented once how if you gave her a whisk she could beat an egg!

AB

That's right...she had Bell's Palsy. It's difficult to tell that story now, it seems so politically incorrect. But my father was like that - if he saw a joke he'd make it. The thing which really is relevant to what you're doing is the fact that (partly due to me, but really because it's what he wants) my brother is censored totally.

WRITER

I was going to ask about him.

AB

I said to him when we were doing *Cocktail Sticks*, I've written this thing, do you want me to put you into it, or even to refer to you, and he absolutely didn't want me to, so that's why he's not in it. He doesn't feel badly about it.

(MORE)

(CONT.)

In a sense he's been really so selfless about it. And his version of our parents would be totally different to mine, but that's cos I was at home much later than he was. He left home at eighteen to go into the RAF and never came back, as it were. Whereas I didn't leave home properly until I was thirty. So my view of them is very different to his. He's never wanted to be acknowledged even. He comes to the first nights and all that.

WRITER

I wondered if you didn't include him because that was 'classified', or 'out of bounds'?

AB

No, I would have found it difficult to include him, but at the same time, I felt conscious that...and nobody's ever questioned me closely about him, but he's never wanted to be mentioned and that's fine.

CUT TO:

CAPTION:

*What demands do we make on form in
attempting to give shape to the mutable
nature of memory?*

After completing *Inquest* I began to consider an idea that was more complex in its configuration in an effort to more closely represent memory itself. Although each episode of *Inquest* begins with a flashback to the past, and the discovery of a woman's body in the river, each episode is relatively simple in that it takes place in real-time, a single linear narrative in a single time frame, with witnesses called one after the other and asked to give their version of events that lead to the young soldier's death. These accounts varied, depending on the particular witness and their motives.

Influenced by filmmakers such as Terence Davies, I decided to employ a more challenging, non-linear structure in *The Dead Room* as a way to explore and reflect the very act of remembering and, in particular, one character's attempts to construct a meaningful narrative from suppressed, or lost, memories. As previously mentioned, this was a deliberate decision and one that allowed for further experimentation as the creative project evolved.

Within *The Dead Room*, time frames are compressed and extended as the action shifts from present to past in a series of flashbacks; days are elided into seconds of screen time whilst other moments are expanded into whole sequences. The element of time is further stretched as the story begins to 'fold back on itself' in a cyclical fashion as the protagonist, John, confronts the Writer in the stairwell and finally discovers the truth about how his brother died.

Eva Hoffman, in her book, *Time* writes:

The conviction of time's seamless flow may to some extent be an illusion; but a sense of temporal continuity – the ability to make connections between the past and present, and the on-going stream of experience – is one of the prerequisites of a genuinely human identity.⁶⁰

The notion of time itself appears key to our understanding of memory and in turn the representation of memory both on the page, radio and screen.

[...]the brain selects, categorises and assigns different "values" to memories continuously, in the light of it's own neurological history. But it is also continuously changed by the new input, or experiences, entering its domain.⁶¹

Put simply, the brain is continually editing information, 'reviewing past experiences as well as viewing them from new perspectives...' therefore the metaphor of the cutting room, as used in *The Dead Room*, seemed particularly apt, as material is restructured within John's mind.

INT. UNIVERSITY SEMINAR ROOM DAY

The red light on the mini-disc recorder continues to flash.

TUTOR 1

It's interesting how different disciplines have come to the same conclusion about how we feel as human beings. Iser talks about a literary text as being made up of present moment, retrospection and anticipation and relates that to the structure of consciousness –
(MORE)

⁶⁰ Eva Hoffman, *Time* (London: Profile Books, 2009), p. 84.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

(CONT.)

it's exactly what you're saying here. It's the same process by which we respond to events and in fact how events that may have no particular meaning are put into this flow of experience - we sequence them. When we're subjected to the simultaneity of experience what do we pull out of it? For instance, you're sat here in this seminar room listening to me talking, yet you might be listening to this...

The WRITER looks around the room. He hears nothing.

(CONT.)

...the heating system running in the background - or the sound of someone having a piss in the toilets next door - so there's the thing about what we notice and what we sequence as what happened, prioritising particular aspects of it.

CUT TO:

Julian Barnes, in his novel *The Sense of an Ending*, begins with a series of images: 'I remember, in no particular order: a shiny inner wrist' - 'steam rising from a wet sink as a hot frying pan is laughingly tossed into it' - 'gouts of sperm circling a plug hole' and 'bathwater long gone cold behind a locked door'. He then acknowledges that 'this isn't something I actually saw,' but concedes that 'what you end up remembering isn't always the same as what you witnessed.'⁶²

He goes on to write. 'I need to return briefly to a few incidents that have grown into anecdotes, to some approximate memories which time has deformed into

⁶² Julian Barnes, *The Sense of An Ending* (London: Vintage Books, 2012), p. 3.

certainty. If I can't be sure of the actual events any more, I can at least be true to the impressions those facts left. That's the best I can manage.'⁶³

Barnes' view of memory is something that is forever shifting over time – where time plays a key role in shaping, or reshaping, distorting even. And because, over time our memories become familiar to us we accept them as the truth, even though it is perfectly possible that what we remember has little bearing on reality – rather like Chinese whispers – little by little, almost imperceptibly, details change – the sun becomes brighter, the days hotter..

This gap between truth and memory is central to the ideas behind *The Dead Room*, although it was only in the later stages of writing the script that it became critical to John's own story. Initially the unfolding narrative was much simpler, with John encouraging his father to remember a tragic accident that he had tried for years to forget. Following discussions with tutors about John's motives I decided that the flashbacks of the family holiday, which I'd previously assigned to the Father, would become John's false memory – a series of events remembered but not seen; an event constructed purely within his own imagination and added to over time – layer upon layer until the particles of silt become compacted into solid rock.

We live in time it holds us and molds us – but I've never felt I understood it very well. And I'm not referring to theories about how it bends and doubles back, or may exist somewhere in parallel versions. No, I mean ordinary everyday time, which clocks and

⁶³ Ibid., p. 4.

watches assure us passes regularly: tick-tock. Click clock. Is there anything more plausible than a second hand? And yet it takes only the smallest pleasure or pain to teach us time's malleability. Some emotions speed it up, others slow it down; occasionally it seems to go missing - until the eventual point when it really does go missing, never to return.⁶⁴

The Dead Room begins with a blank screen and the sound of voices; an academic meeting is in progress during which the PhD is discussed. We then cut to the protagonist, John, stood on the station platform waiting for a train. He is at the beginning of a journey, both physical and mental, during which he remembers both the immediate and distant past. The story is told from John's perspective and over time he creates a narrative from which he constructs his own identity - a narrative that he uses to justify his actions; from the way he treats his family, to the way he portrays himself in his autobiographical radio play. Yet as Micaela Maftei points out, memory can be deceptive.

We often misremember, or assign certain memories to incorrect places and times. Memory is altered or influenced by our current state. When we remember an event we often do so as a different self than the one who experienced the event.⁶⁵

Barnes describes the process by which we consciously reinvent our own narrative (as opposed to the

⁶⁴ Julian Barnes, *The Sense of an Ending* (London: Vintage Books), p. 3.

⁶⁵ Micaela Maftei, *The Fiction of Autobiography - Reading and Writing Identity* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 96.

subconscious process that takes place during reconsolidation, as outlined in the previous chapter).

How often do we tell our own life story? How often do we adjust, embellish, make sly cuts? And the longer life goes on, the fewer are those around to challenge our account, to remind us that our life is not our life, merely the story we have told about our life. Told to others, but—mainly—to ourselves.⁶⁶

It became obvious early on in the writing process that to tell John's story, with all its complexities, a non-linear structure would allow greater freedom, and, I felt, would also be a more interesting multi-layered approach. Just as a memory changes with each recollection, influenced by the present, so John finds himself in the middle of an ever-shifting set of narratives over which he has no control. In a desperate attempt to make sense of the past he turns to a series of rediscovered home-movies in the hope of finding some answers.

In his book *Searching for Memory*, Daniel Schacter writes:

We now know enough about how memories are stored and retrieved to demolish another long-standing myth: that memories are passive or literal recordings of reality. Many of us still see our memories as a series of family pictures stored in a photo album of our minds. Yet it is now clear that we do not store judgment-free snapshots of our past experiences but

⁶⁶ Julian Barnes, *The Sense of an Ending* (London: Vintage Books, 2012), p. 24.

rather hold on to the meaning, sense and emotion these experiences provided us.⁶⁷

This is a theory supported and explored by numerous neuroscientists, including the neurologist and writer Israel Rosenfield, who says: 'Memory is not a set of stored images that can be remembered by an independent 'I'; memory is a set of ever-evolving procedures.'⁶⁸ The contingencies of information encoding, storage and retrieval, and differing, contested psychological models of memory, have meant the conceptual centre of gravity has moved a long way from a simplistic metaphor of mind as an inert repository.

And so the idea of a film cutting room (as appears in *The Dead Room*) as a way of representing memory, chimes perfectly with current scientific research where the brain has been found to continually re-construct events; the editor, in this case, continually reordering, re-splicing frames of celluloid.

Although triggered by the senses, by smell, taste and touch, memories are essentially visual - we 'see' past events in the 'mind's eye'. In a letter written in 1922, Proust described memory as 'a telescope pointed at time... A telescope [which] renders visible for us stars invisible to the naked eye.'⁶⁹

And just as neuroscience has progressed over the centuries so the metaphors associated with memory have

⁶⁷ Daniel L. Schacter, *Searching for Memory* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), p. 5.

⁶⁸ Israel Rosenfield, 'Memory and Identity', *New Literary History*, 26 (1995), 197-203 (p. 202).

⁶⁹ Roger Shattuck, *Proust's Binoculars: A Study of Memory, Time and Recognition in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* (Princeton; Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 46.

become richer, ultimately underlining our powerful sense of visual memory.

In *The Aetiology of Hysteria*, Freud likens the act of remembering to archeology, 'the procedure of clearing away the pathogenic psychical material layer by layer...with the technique of excavating a buried city'⁷⁰. He also acknowledges the importance of language in the interpretation of memory:

the numerous inscriptions, which, by good luck, may be bilingual, reveal an alphabet and a language, and, when they have been deciphered and translated, yield undreamed of information about the events of the remote past⁷¹

Developing Freud's archeological metaphor further, the German-Jewish philosopher, Walter Benjamin, stated:

Language is the medium of past experience, as the ground is the medium in which dead cities lie interred. He who seeks to approach his own buried past must conduct himself like a man digging...He must not be afraid to return again and again to the same matter; to scatter it as one scatters earth, to turn it over as one turns over soil. For the matter itself is only a deposit, a stratum, which yields only to the most meticulous examination what constitutes the real treasure hidden within the earth: the images...that stand - like precious fragments or torsos

⁷⁰ Freud and Breuer, *The Aetiology Hysteria* (1893-5), p. 206, cited Nicola King in *Memory, Narrative, Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), p. 12.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

in a collector's gallery- in the prosaic rooms of our later understanding.⁷²

Indeed it is the common language used in both film and neuroscience that gives the metaphor its significance. Describing the work of the director D.W. Griffith, one of the pioneers of early cinema, Ernst Lindgren writes:

[He] instinctively saw the coherence he could achieve on the screen [through editing] even though his material was fragmentary, filmed at different times in different places with a variety of shots but all coming together to make one scene; [Griffith] succeeded in building up in the minds of his audience an association of ideas welded with such logic and charged with such emotional momentum that its truth was not questioned.⁷³

Just as Griffith constructed a scene from fragmented material shot at different times in different places so John attempts to order what memories he has in search of a coherent narrative - his own 'truth'.

Some years before the advent of cinematography, early photographers recognized the analogy between photography and the brain, with the Camera Obscura offered as a metaphor for memory.

⁷² Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter, 'A Berlin Chronicle', in *One Way Street and Other Writings* (London: New Left Books, 1979), p. 314, cited in Nicola King's *Memory, Narrative, Identity - Remembering the Self* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), pp. 13-14.

⁷³ Ernest Lindgren, *The Art of the Film - An Introduction to Film Appreciation* (G. Allen & Unwin, 1948), cited Roger Crittenden, *The Thames and Hudson Manual of Film Editing* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1981), p. 11.

The shadows and phantom of Reflection, Memory and Imagination fall into the soul as into the Camera Obscura...⁷⁴

The images produced, unfixed and unstable, where a subject's features appear like ghostly shadows on their faces, reinforced the similarities. The US photographer and prominent physiologist John William Draper drew further parallels between the photographic process and the human nervous system where, in both cases, an image is retained, either on glass or lodged in the mind, preserved as 'relics or traces of impressions...' Draper wrote: 'I believe that a shadow never falls upon a wall without leaving thereupon its permanent trace.'⁷⁵

The idea that a photograph is taken in one place and then developed, perhaps months later, in another (just as memories are recalled), fascinated scientists and artists alike. But there the analogy ends. Draper described the resultant photographs as 'having forgotten nothing'⁷⁶. But, as has already been discussed, the notion that we store memories like pictures in a 'silent gallery'⁷⁷ has long been dispelled. Just as memories alter with every recollection so our interpretation of what is remembered alters too.

It is true that a memory evoked too often, and expressed in the form of a story, tends to become fixed as a stereotype, in a form tested by experience, crystallised, perfect, adorned, which

⁷⁴ Douwe Draaisma, *Metaphors of Memory, A history of ideas about the mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 119.

⁷⁵ J.W Draper, *Human Physiology*, London 1856 7th edition, p. 288 cited Douwe Draaisma, *Metaphors of Memory: A History of Ideas About the Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 120.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 121

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 121

installs itself in the place of raw memory and grows at its expense.⁷⁸

In an article that appeared in *The Guardian* magazine, the American writer, Kathleen Hale recounts details of a serious sexual assault that took place on her first day at college. Describing her horrific ordeal and its aftermath she writes:

I gave the account of what happened next so many times in preparation for what would become my sworn testimony that during the actual trial I could tell my story with no emotion whatsoever. I once admitted to the prosecutor that while I never actually questioned my version of events, I'd relayed them so many times that on good days the incident felt more like something memorized than a genuine memory.⁷⁹

Whilst there was no denying that the assault took place - something that was subsequently proved in court - the passing of time and the continual remembering of the event seems to have had a distancing effect on Hale - perhaps a mechanism for survival, or self preservation.

In *The Dead Room*, as John writes each new draft of his script, so it is that he becomes more emotionally detached from past events, which may go some way to explaining why he behaves in the way that he does towards his father. Having convinced himself about the

⁷⁸ Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans Raymond Rosenthal (London: Sphere Books, 1988), pp. 11-12 cited Nicola King's *Memory, Narrative, Identity - Remembering the Self* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), p. 25.

⁷⁹ Kathleen Hale, 'From Prey to Predator: how I got justice after sexual assault', *The Guardian* 19 July 2014, G2 section, p. 4.

<<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jul/19/sexual-assault-trial-justice-kathleen-hale>>

[accessed 20 April 2016]

circumstances surrounding his brother's death, each retelling only adds credence to his own particular narrative - something that is backed up by Schacter who states that some memories are subject to a process of long-term consolidation that allows them to become more resistant to interference over time. 'This occurs, in part, because people talk about and think about their past experiences; the older the memory the greater the opportunity for such "post event rehearsal".'⁸⁰

Schacter goes on to outline current research that suggests that when we experience an event, long-lasting changes occur to our brains, as connections between those neurons responsible for encoding the different sights, sounds, words and actions are strengthened. The resultant memory traces are called 'engrams' and form an 'index' in the brain that, when activated, "point to" the different locations of the stored information. Consequently, when we remember an event, rather than calling on a specific 'ready-made' image, as was once believed, a set of engrams help to identify and bring together the numerous separate elements from the medial temporal region of the brain - in order to trigger a single memory - rather like piecing together a huge jigsaw; an image used in *The Dead Room* as John attempts to encourage his father to remember the past.

In *And When Did You Last See Your Father?* Blake Morrison cuts between the present and the past with much the same effect, gradually building up an impressionistic picture of his relationship with his father. Told from his point of view, in the historical present tense, the novel is as much about the process of remembering as it is about his

⁸⁰ Daniel L. Schacter, *Searching for Memory - the brain the mind, and the past* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), p. 87.

years growing up in North Yorkshire. 'Telescoped, edited, misremembered, any family's past seems a catalogue of grief and dispersal.' As memories are triggered and Morrison recalls his childhood so connections are made across the decades. The result is an autobiographical collage, a series of patterns, like 'engrams', reaching back to Morrison himself.

Eva Hoffman refers to the workings of the brain in relation to memory in her book 'Time':

It seems that each person's specific (and unique) narrative is created in the tracery of neurons and synapses, and the specific connections between them, and that the kinds of modifications of that narrative which we might call interpretation and revision are also built into the material dynamics of the mind...it is tempting to see in the registration of memories, and their selection, a kind of neurological inventiveness, which through a combination of stability and plasticity, composes the ongoing narrative or poem of our lives.⁸¹

The narrative composed by our subjectivity rarely either follows a chronological sequence or is divided into regular chronometric units. Rather, emotional memory, like its neurological correlaters, entails acts of continuous autopoiesis, or creative self-making, and the compositions it creates over time, and with the materials of time are plastic, personal, our own.⁸²

⁸¹ Eva Hoffman, *Time* (London: Profile Books, 2009), p. 77.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 108.

As I have already stated, a key influence to the development of *The Dead Room*, and in particular to its resultant structure, was the autobiographical film *Distant Voices, Still Lives*, written and directed by Terence Davies. Described by Beryl Bainbridge, in her accompanying introduction to the DVD, as 'a mosaic of memory', the film employs a similar non-linear structure to Morrison's memoir. In the preface to his screenplay, Davies writes:

Memory does not move in a linear or chronological way – its pattern is of a circular nature, placing events (not in their 'natural' or 'real' order) but recalled for their emotional importance. Memory is its own validity. Thus any 'story' involving memory is not a narrative in the conventional sense but of necessity more diffuse, more elliptical.⁸³

As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, Davies goes on to add, by way of a warning to the reader:

Therefore conventional narrative expectation will not be satisfied in any conventional way, and I would ask you to bear this in mind when you are reading this piece. I was trying to create "a pattern of timeless moments."⁸⁴

Although Blake Morrison's memoir and Davies' autobiography share a similar non-linear structure, Davies pushes the form further, with memories triggering deeper memories to create a multi-layered series of flashbacks often set to a musical soundtrack. By his own admission, the entire film-making process is, for Davies,

⁸³Terence Davies, *A Modest Pageant* (London: Faber & Faber, 1992), p. 74.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, p. 74.

a way of coming to terms with his family's history and suffering, just as it is for John in *The Dead Room*.

Distant Voices, Still Lives begins with radio. We hear the shipping forecast as the camera tracks slowly along a series of back-to-back houses. A middle-aged woman, Mother, opens the front door and collects the milk off the step. She looks down the street, then closes the door.

CUT TO:

INT. MORNING MID-1950s

Hallway and stairs as seen from the front door.

MOTHER walks down the hallway (away from camera) and stops at the foot of the stairs.

MOTHER: (Calling softly) It's seven o'clock you three!

(Walks away to kitchen)

VOICE OVER: (1950s BBC Radio announcer) 'Dogger, German Bight, Rockall, Mallin Hebrides, Fastnet...'

(MOTHER walks back up the hall to the foot of the stairs.)

MOTHER: Eileen! Tony! Maisie!

You'd better get your skates on!

(She exits down hall.

Hold on empty hall and stairs.

Soundtrack of MOTHER'S voice over, singing 'I Get The Blues When It's Raining'.

BBC Radio 'Lift up your Hearts'.

Footsteps on the empty stairs.)

TONY: (Voice over) Morning Mam.

MOTHER: (Voice over) Are those two sisters of yours up yet, Tony?

TONY: (Voice over) Yer - they're just coming down.

MAISIE:(Voice over) Hiyer Mam.

MOTHER: (Voice over) Morning Maisie.

EILEEN: (Voice over) Morning Mam.

MOTHER: (Voice over) Morning Eileen. Nervous love?

EILLEN: (Voice over) A bit.

MOTHER: (Voice over) Have a cuppa and a ciggie.

(Track round 180 degrees and crane up from this camera position until the front door (which is closed) is framed. Hallway and door as seen from the stairs. Voice over of MOTHER singing 'I Get the Blues When It's Raining' continues.

From the same camera position the front door opens in a dissolve.

Sunshine. Through the door a hearse is seen drawing up (right to left), early 1950s.

Soundtrack of Jessye Norman singing, voice over 'There's a Man Goin' Round Takin' Names'.

Dissolve to:)

From the outset, as we're led inside Davies' childhood home, we (the viewer) witness the peeling back of layers of memory as familiar sights and sounds are recalled: the morning ritual as Davies' mother calls to wake her children - their voices then heard in reply as their footsteps descend the stairs like ghosts. The camera then pans back to the front door, through which we entered Davies' world, and the picture dissolves from a rain drenched street to sunshine, as a hearse pulls up outside the house, heralding a new and brighter future for the family. From here, the picture dissolves again to the front parlour where the family gather for a group photograph. Conversations are heard in voice-over as they pose for the camera. Central to the frame is a picture of Father hanging on the wall - a bully of a man who brought terror to the family - the person whom they are about to bury. A photograph within a photograph - the same

recursive imagery as used in *The Dead Room* as John finds himself, on several occasions, reflected in a mirror. From one tableau we dissolve through to another - this time a wedding portrait - with the soundtrack of Jessye Norman, singing 'There's a Man Goin' Round Takin' Names, continuing all the while. And with the words of Davies' sister, Maisie, 'He was a bastard and I bleedin hated him'⁸⁵ we cut to Father lying in a hospital bed looking frail and ill with his family standing over him.

MAISIE: (Voice over) Can I have the money to go to the dance, Dad?

FATHER: (Voice over) You get that cellar done - never mind bleedin' dances.

MAISIE: (Voice over) But Dad, there's rats down there - I'm terrified of rats.

FATHER: (Voice over, furious) No cellar - no dance!

The scene then cuts hard to Maisie scrubbing the cellar floor, before her father attacks her with a yard brush. From one scene to the next Davies' script moves back and forth through time with a multitude of memories sparking off each other, often with music used to bridge each vignette. And in so doing he challenges those viewers perhaps more used to conventional narrative techniques.

The difficulty of assembling scenes in a logical temporal order means that the audience is forced to participate in the process of remembering, and to experience it as an attempt to impose order on a confused totality of memory which is ever present in the characters' minds.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Terence Davies, *A Modest Pageant* (London: Faber & Faber, 1992), p. 77

⁸⁶ Adam Barker, 'Distant Voices, Still Lives', *Monthly Film Bulletin*, 55/657 (1988) p. 294.

Although there are similarities between *And When Did You Last See Your Father* and *Distant Voices...* there is one fundamental difference. In *Distant Voices...* the events that Davies describes so intensely occurred before he was born. The film, therefore, is entirely imagined from stories that have entered Davies' consciousness over many years. In effect, it is an autobiography told from multiple shifting perspectives rather than one single viewpoint.

Distant Voices, Still Lives was much more complicated because it dealt with things I'd learned second hand from my mother and my two eldest sisters and my brother. They talked about my father and the way he treated them, and their telling of it was so vivid to me that their memories became mine. The difficulty was what to leave out, as their suffering had been so prodigious. But the form of the piece solved my problem. Content dictates form, never the other way round...The film constantly turns back on itself, like the ripples in a pool when a stone is thrown into it. The ripples are the memory.⁸⁷

Memory is treated in much the same way in Davies' follow-up film *The Long Day Closes*, where 'childhood recollections are consecrated as moments out of time and assembled in a symphonic collage, guided more by emotional logic than by plot or chronology.'⁸⁸

Set when Davies is eleven-years-old, one standout sequence begins with him swinging on a horizontal iron bar outside his house.

⁸⁷ Terence Davies, *A Modest Pageant* (London: Faber & Faber, 1992), p. xi.

⁸⁸ Lim Dennis, 'Remembrance of Liverpool Past', *New York Times*, 9 January 2009, Arts review, p. 17.

Dissolve to shot directly overhead of the cellar steps.
BUD swings on the bar. Hold.

Soundtrack: the passing ball is heard.

Then still directly overhead crane and track away right
to left from swinging BUD.

Dissolve to:

INT. MR NICHOLLS' CLASSROOM AFTERNOON

Continue craning and tracking right to left still
directly overhead.

MR NICHOLLS: Get in line.

(The boys do so.)

Turn.

(The boys do so.)

Good night, boys.

BOYS: Good night, Sir.

MR NICHOLLS: Off you go.

(Soundtrack: Terry Thomas's voice over from 'Private's
Progress'. ['You're a shower - an absolute shower...'])

The boys snake out. Continue craning and tracking
directly overhead - right to left.

Dissolve to:)

INT. CINEMA NIGHT

Continue craning and tracking right to left directly
overhead.

The projection light flickers over the heads of a full
cinema audience.

MOTHER and BUD walk down the aisle and take seats at the
end of the row. The aisle runs down the centre of the
frame. Continue craning and tracking.

Soundtrack: Debbie Reynolds singing the title song 'Tammy' from the film Tammy and the Bachelor.

Dissolve to:

INT. CHURCH DAY

Continue craning and tracking right to left directly overhead. The church is full. The congregation is standing. The altar bell is rung three times. The congregation sinks to its knees.

CONGREGATION:

Holy! Holy! Holy!

Lord God of Hosts!

Heaven and Earth are full of thy Glory!

(Continue craning and tracking.)

Priest comes into shot. He elevates the host. The altar bell rings three times.

Dissolve to:)

EXT. STREET DAY

Continue craning and tracking right to left down street directly overhead. Crane and track comes to rest when the pavement and cellar outside Bud's house is reached.

ALBIE and another boy enter shot.

Cut to close-up of Bud head-on leaning out of front bedroom window watching ALBIE and another boy walk up the street.

Cut to:⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Terence Davies, *A modest Pageant - The Long Day Closes* (London: Faber & Faber, 1992), pp. 180-182.

Exquisitely framed, and beautifully choreographed, the series of formally composed shots contain the key elements that have shaped Davies' life: education, cinema, music and religion, accompanied (in the final edit) by Debbie Reynolds singing 'Tammy', and an additional line (not in the original script) from *Kind Hearts and Coronets* referring to the clergy. And as one memory slowly dissolves into the next we eventually come full circle, ending up back where we began. In the film the iron bar that Bud had been swinging on is now rusted and bent - the paving slabs cracked and worn. Time has moved on.

According to Wendy Everett in her book *Terence Davies*:

The use of long motionless takes, and slow, fluid lyrical tracking shots, often choreographed to music, draws the spectator's attention to the materiality of film, to the nature of the shot and its duration. In other words, by stretching time visibly, they involve the spectator directly in their exploration of time and space, and in so doing demand a creative reading not only of the images that are shown but of the hidden invisible spaces behind and beyond them.⁹⁰

Just as Iser refers to omissions in a story that invite the reader to 'establish connections' and 'fill the gaps' with their own experience, so Davies does the same, supplying fragments of memory, 'snapshots' of the past that offer the viewer a framework on which to hang the larger narrative.

⁹⁰ Wendy Everett, *Terence Davies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 4.

'Above all,' Everett writes, 'Davies' films are about film; they self-consciously explore and celebrate the form and the potential of the medium...'⁹¹

Distant Voices, Still Lives is, in fact, two interrelated films that were originally commissioned separately by the British Film Institute (BFI), with Davies producing part one, *Distant Voices*, two years before shooting began on the companion piece, *Still Lives*. At the end of *Distant Voices* the picture fades to white with the brightness on the screen reflecting the family's optimism of things yet to come.

Davies' elliptical approach to the representation of memory was a major influencing factor on *The Dead Room* whose recursive structure operates on four different time scales. I decided to set the script largely within a BBC recording studio as this is a world I've known professionally for many years. It is a space that John, the protagonist, is also familiar with, unlike his family who are invited to attend the recording. This, in itself, offers huge dramatic potential. John feels relatively comfortable in Broadcasting House – his sister, Lucy, less so, and Father is so unused to the bright new surroundings that he becomes trapped in the revolving doors, emphasising the gulf between their two worlds.

Furthermore, it is also a space where there is an ever-present awareness of time, operating on various levels. Over the course of a recording the present is marked by the large studio clock, whose second hand sweeps silently above the mixing desk. The radio script itself is also timed, with each take carefully logged by the production assistant to make sure that the finished play doesn't run

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 5.

over the all-important 44'15". Flashbacks to the past, on which the script is based, take place in their own separate time-scale, which covers the course of a year as we chart Father's recovery following a minor stroke. Finally, there is the distant past as played out in Father's mind as he lies unconscious after a brain aneurism. Events of over 50 years ago are reconstructed in the 'cutting room' where film and sound footage are spliced together on the Compeditor. The overall effect is that of a collage, as illustrated, in places, by the dubbing charts – a visual representation of the relationship between sound and picture as we cut back and forth.

Metaphor is used throughout *The Dead Room* to represent memory and the workings of the brain – from the train tracks, with their overhead wires (like axons carrying electrical impulses between neurons) to the cutting room itself – reassembling footage that runs backwards and forwards on a tiny screen. The continual challenge for the scriptwriter is not only to create a suitable structure on which to hang the narrative, but also to find the appropriate language with which to convey both images and sounds on the page in order that they may be effectively realised by directors, actors and technicians.

A script, therefore, is not intended as a finished piece of work, in the same way that a novel is. Instead, it is a set of instructions – a blueprint – that must be interpreted by others, resulting in further adjustment. Iser refers to the action of bringing a text to light as 'Konkretisation' and suggests that a text has two poles: the artistic, created by the writer, and the aesthetic, realised by the reader. Because a literary work must

incorporate both, it lies somewhere between these two poles.

The work is more than the text, for the text only takes on a life when it is realised, and furthermore the realisation is by no means independent of the individual disposition of the reader...The convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence, and this convergence can never be precisely pinpointed, but must always remain virtual[...]⁹²

CUT TO:

INT. UNIVERSITY SEMINAR ROOM DAY

The mini-disc recorder lies on the table between the WRITER and the two TUTORS - it's red light flashing.

TUTOR 1

I think there's an interesting dimension to this - you're not asking us here to make a film - you're asking us to imagine that this film could be made. You're asking us to screen it in our heads.

WRITER

That's right. In the same way that a producer might, if they were given the script to read.

TUTOR 2

Curiously I think this could work as a graphic novel.

WRITER

Because it combines the visual and the written?

⁹² Wolfgang Iser, 'The Reading Process: a phenomenological approach' in *Modern Criticism & Theory A Reader*, ed. by David Lodge and Nigel Wood (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 1988), pp. 294-310 (p. 295).

TUTOR 2

Exactly.

TUTOR 1

Film, after all, is made up of a series of still images that run through the projector at 25 frames per second. Our minds, as we've discussed, fill in the gaps.

WRITER

Just as they do with an edit.

TUTOR 2

So for example we see the hand go back - next we see the chap lying on the floor clutching his face - we know - our memory tells us that he's been hit - it bridges the gap. What in graphic novels is called 'closure' - the jump cut.

TUTOR 1

Because, of course, movement isn't what we see it's what the brain puts together somehow. In fact there's a woman in Germany who has brain damage and sees four-second stills - she pours a cup of tea - next thing she knows it's overflowing - so from this neurologists realized that there must be a centre in the brain that orchestrates movement.

Now we're talking here about something that is going to be orchestrated through vision and through sound and yet it's written down on the paper but it's not a form of literature. As you say it's a set of instructions - it's something you've got to unfold through another process and I wonder whether the recursive nature of it is a way of perhaps trying to overcome the flatness of it - I wonder if by creating these perspectives you're giving the work further depth -

(MORE)

(CONT.)

or, to put it another way, you're using the structure to make it more multi-dimensional.

WRITER

Like extending a telescope?

CUT TO:

Both *The Lady in the Van* and Peter Bowker's biopic, *Marvelous*, employ similar recursive techniques. Peter Bowker describes the difficulty he had deciding how to best approach the material on the BBC Writersroom website. Although he had endless anecdotes, told to him by Baldwin's friends and colleagues, what he lacked was any idea of a clear narrative structure. After all, as Bowker explains, 'anecdotes aren't story'.⁹³

I liked Neil a lot but wasn't sure how the drama was going to work. Then he got out one of his many scrapbooks and I saw that his fluid and open ended attitude to living - making his life read like a fantasy and making his fantasies become his life - invited an unconventional structure that reflected that. It was Julian Farino, our wonderful Director, who suggested a scrapbook rather than a linear narrative was the right form for this film. So the form dips in and out of conventional narrative realism.⁹⁴

Bowker further blurs the boundaries between fact and

⁹³ Peter Bowker, 'Writing the "Marvelous" Lifestory of Neil Baldwin', *BBC Writersroom*, 22 September 2014.

<<http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/writersroom/entries/e78e3a93-1148-3e86-8830-a5e89b29a862>>

[accessed 18 October 2016]

⁹⁴ Ibid.

fiction by introducing the real Neil Baldwin to his 'screen-self', as played by Toby Jones, in order to confirm, or deny, events that take place within the film.

It seemed to me to emphasise the disconcerting truth about Neil's life, that the more unlikely the story he was telling you, the more likely it was to be true. So occasionally I have Neil appear to tell the audience that something that was just in the film didn't happen that way. To act as a chorus, if you like, on my work, pointing out my lack of reliability as a chronicler of his life.⁹⁵

Alan Bennett, too, makes an appearance at the end of *The Lady in the Van*, freewheeling down Gloucester Crescent on his bike, before stopping to watch the production unit film the unveiling of a blue plaque on the side of his house. The plaque reads: Miss Shepherd, 'The Lady In the Van' Lived here 1974 - 1989. Although Miss Shepherd's van is no longer parked in his drive, it seems that her legacy lives on, laying claim to Bennett's property from beyond the grave.

INT. SITTING ROOM DAY

ALAN BENNETT stretches out his legs as the WRITER consults his notebook again.

WRITER

You wrote *The Lady in the Van*
about ten years after Miss
Shepherd's death, and I think I'm
right in saying you were
(MORE)

⁹⁵ Ibid.

(CONT.)

undergoing treatment for cancer at the time. How important was it to take a step back and reflect on events that had taken place, and do you think that what you were going through at the time of writing the play had any bearing on how you remembered Miss Shepherd, or indeed your mother whose health was deteriorating?

AB

No, I don't think so, it was in a different box somehow. My operation was in 1997, I was just trying to get it finished. I did that, and half-finished at that time was the second series of *Talking Heads*, so I had to really pull my socks up and get them finished because I wasn't sure I would see them on. But I don't think the actual feeling of being ill - and so on - related to the characters. I mean, although it was touch and go, I had a relatively easy time, I was never in any pain or discomfort even. The anguish, such as it was, was mental thinking you were finished, and gradually beginning to realise that you weren't. I don't think that fed into what I was doing.

WRITER

After Miss Shepherd's death you found out various things about her past from her brother. Had you known those things when she was alive, do you think it would have affected the way you wrote about her?

AB

I don't know, I can't see how I could have known, or brought it up with her, because she would have absolutely clamped down on it, or denied it, or tell me it wasn't any of my business.

(MORE)

(CONT.)

She wouldn't have opened up in a way you are supposed to do when presented with the truth as it were, in the way that she did in the film. The thing that did surprise me absolutely was going to see her brother and finding that he was as saintly as she would have aspired to be. That he wouldn't touch any of her savings, and blamed himself, and knew he had done the wrong thing, and saying she had been a very, very difficult woman. All that was absolutely true.

WRITER

Why did he have her sectioned - presumably he didn't have a choice?

AB

She was persecuting their mother, the mother was quite devout, but Miss Shepherd was even more devout, or more obsessively so, and was telling their mother that she was wicked. So in that sense it was in defense of his mother as much as anything else.

WRITER

How did you set about finding a structure for the stage play of *The Lady in the Van*? You had your diary entries but how did you go about finding a shape, and did you ever consider a more elliptical approach, like in *Cocktail Sticks*?

AB

I don't know, I can't really answer that. I remember Nick [Hytner] talking about the stage play and saying it works fine before she comes into the drive (she comes into the drive at the end of the first act in the stage play) but where it ceases to be dramatic slightly is when she's is

(MORE)

(CONT.)

in the drive and time has to pass before she then sickens and dies, which is in itself dramatic, and that was the problem.

WRITER

How did you get over that?

AB

I don't know if we did or not. I suppose there were enough relatively minor incidents. And that part happens quite quickly in the film.

WRITER

In the film there's a line when they all gather as Miss Shepherd is put into the ambulance and Mrs Vaughn-Williams asks how long it's been and Fiona, the neighbour, replies, 'Ten years', before Giles corrects her saying, 'more like fifteen.' So you mention it there. And the neighbours talk about their children having grown up. So at that point you realise that time has passed.

AB

Yes. I think it worked better in the film. It was easier because we could take her away to Broadstairs and that lengthened it out and gave it more of a structure. I've forgotten what the stage play is like.

WRITER

When you began writing the film script, did you work from the stage play at all?

AB

Gordon House had done it on radio, and I used the radio version more than the stage version, it seemed easier to work with. It was already one removed - I don't know why that should be.

WRITER

I listened to the radio version while following the stage play and it seemed to follow it quite closely with music where there were scene changes on stage.

AB

It was easier in the radio version because I did a voice over, and Adrian Scarborough played me, and that gave it a lot more latitude as I could fill in things quite easily with voice-over, I think that's how it worked.

WRITER

Why did you write it as a stage play originally, rather than as a radio play? Because, in a way, it's easier to do on radio using voice-over.

AB

Yes - you're right. But then I've never done anything else. I've never written directly for radio, I've always done it afterwards, after I've done it on the stage.

WRITER

Why do you think that is, just because your background is in the theatre?

AB

That's the way I've always done it and being an actor, being on the stage...although the radio version of *A Question of Attribution*, with Edward Petherbridge, he was much better than I was on stage.

WRITER

To what extent do you think your writing about Miss Shepherd, and the various productions of *The Lady in the Van*, have affected your memories of her at the time?

AB

I find it difficult to think of her now as she was, I see Maggie's face, but that's a tribute to Maggie really. But then it's not a large difference between the real Miss Shepherd and Maggie's portrayal of her, as she came so close, they were both equally as cantankerous - Maggie playing cantankerous - so there is a difference, in a way the real Miss Shepherd was on the move a bit more than she was in the film. She got about more, and she had a life apart from me. Whereas in the film, inevitably, you only see her, as it were, through my eyes when she was there. She went off shopping, she went off for two or three days in Cornwall where her confessor was, and stuff like that. And she went, horrendously, I can't imagine what it was like, she once went on what she called a frizzby (she meant freebie) when OAPs were allowed to go on the train for free at the weekend, she went to Dawlish and it was a very, very hot weekend and I kept thinking of the people in the carriage with her. Terrible. So she did things like that - so she was quite enterprising in a way.

WRITER

You've talked a bit about writing about your Mum and Dad, I just wonder...for a long time you resisted writing specifically about your parents. Instead, their character traits and their lines of dialogue, which appeared in plays like *Say Something Happened* and *Sunset Across the Bay*, were dealt out to other characters, until *Cocktail Sticks*, that is. What was it that finally allowed you to write about them?

AB

I think it was having written *Untold Stories*, having written a prose account of them really. I think if I'd known Jeff Rawle was so good on the stage - that if I had thought about him playing my Dad, I would have written more. He was so exact, so like my Dad. It was that and also, finding a way in *Cocktail Sticks* not to be as naturalistic as... I normally feel imprisoned by naturalism, but like them just talking about, me or him, talking to the audience and saying that was my Dad who died five years ago, and just not bothering about time. Coming in and out of it.

WRITER

Cocktail Sticks is far less linear and much more to do with the fragmented nature of memory than *The Lady in the Van*, how did that develop and how did you settle on the structure?

AB

Hymm, the thing that George Fenton asked me to do, I did that and that's the central section about my Dad trying to teach my brother and me to play the violin. And so that put me in that sort of mode. And then Nick heard that, just at a private reading somewhere (nothing to do with me), and he said we could use that on a platform lasting three quarters of an hour. Then I started to think I could do a little play in that form, very, very simply, because you have to do it on the set of something else. So that's really how that came about, I knew there was a slot for it and I knew all the dialogue, 'cos I'd written it in prose form in the book.

CUT TO:

In his introduction to *A Modest Pageant*, Terence Davies describes his need to make films 'as a way of coming to terms with [his] family's history and suffering.' Alan Bennett, on the other hand, used to bemoan the fact that his childhood was 'nothing to write home about' and for a long time felt deprived as a writer - short of material from which to draw inspiration.

Larkin says they fuck you up your mum and dad. And if you end up writing, then that's fine because if they have then you've got something to write about. But if they haven't fucked you up, you don't have anything to write about, so then they've fucked you up good and proper.⁹⁶

In *The Dead Room*, Lucy accuses John of mining his own family past for material and of exploiting their parents, the father in particular, an accusation he vehemently denies, as does Bennett.

From time to time at literary festivals and suchlike I do readings of extracts from my published diaries, which are generally followed by a question-and-answer session. One of the questions that regularly comes up is whether I have any misgivings or regrets about having written so much about my parents. 'No' is the short answer, and I certainly don't feel, as the questioner sometimes implies, that there is any need for apology... 'Why do you write about your parents when they're no longer around?' Distance is one answer. Perspective.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Alan Bennett, *Hymn and Cocktail Sticks: Two recollections* (London: Faber & Faber, 2012), p. 67.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

Cocktails Sticks begins with Alan Bennett clearing out his parents' kitchen cupboards - his father is dead and his mother, he tells a neighbour, is in a care home in Weston-Super-Mare. A voice calls from another room. It is Mother - calling from the past. Alan sits typing at his desk. She enters the room and sits down. Alan then proceeds to question her about his childhood as we (the audience) are taken back in time. Mother turns to consult Father, long since dead, about AB's perceived lack of childhood. AB introduces his father who is standing outside the toilets in Schofield's holding Mother's handbag.

AB Why have I got no memories?

Dad Because you were happy.

At which point Mam appears and passes her handbag to Alan as we move forward in time. The handbag is now his responsibility, as is his mother.

Mam I do miss you Dad.

Characters appear and disappear without stage directions by way of explanation. Mam and Dad step in and out of different time frames as events from the past are discussed in the present amongst those who are dead.

AB My father now comes home from work.

Mam Our Alan's been assaulted.

Dad Where?

Mam The Picturedome.

Dad Are you sure he's not making it up? He's always coming home telling the tale.

AB I'm not. He put his hand on my leg.

Mam On it or up it?

Dad (embarrassed)

AB Dad was embarrassed.

You didn't believe me, Dad. I was sexually interfered with at the age of ten and you didn't want to know.

Dad I was embarrassed. I'm embarrassed now.

AB You can't be embarrassed, Dad. You're dead. (And you didn't die of embarrassment.)

Dad Your memory of me's embarrassed, that's what it is.

By his own admission, Bennett felt liberated by this elliptical approach, where events are guided more by emotional logic than by plot, or chronology. In *Cocktail Sticks*, as in Terence Davies' *Distant Voices, Still Lives*, episodes flow into each other as memories connect. Having started life as a series of recollections, written in prose with no concern for narrative, the play stays true to its origins; Alan Bennett, as narrator, informing the audience of a jump in time, 'cut to twenty years later' or, 'this would have been in the fifties...'. And, as in *Distant Voices...* events are recalled in order of emotional importance, not in their 'natural' or 'real' order. Indeed time, or its passing, also seems to have given Bennett a degree of perspective. Whereas once he wished that his upbringing hadn't been so ordinary, in later life he has come to reevaluate things somewhat.

Eventually I would come to see that the meagerness of my childhood and my sparse memories of it could be subject in itself.⁹⁸

Bennett also concedes that *Cocktail Sticks* could easily have been written for the radio. And had he been approached by a radio producer, rather than a theatre

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 85.

producer, he would have given it serious consideration; revealing that what are often seen as creative decisions often come down to simple practicalities. To Bennett, *Cocktails Sticks* could have worked in either medium.

INT. SITTING ROOM DAY

ALAN BENNETT shifts in his chair. He glances up at the mantelpiece where the mini-disc recorder still flashes.

WRITER

I've always been very envious of the way you manage to recycle your work...so that a book becomes a play, becomes a film.

AB

Nick [Hytner] says 'God, you do use the same stuff again and again...!'

WRITER

Not so much in the dialogue - although there are certain phrases that crop up - I just mean that all your projects have numerous lives: in print, on stage or radio plays. *Talking Heads*, *A Question of Attribution*, *An Englishman Abroad* and of course *The Lady in the Van*, have all been seen, or read in different forms. What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of each medium and how do to overcome the challenges each presents?

AB

I don't really think of it like that - I just see it as a job.

The phone rings on the other side of the room.

AB

Sorry. Just let me get that.

CUT TO:

CAPTION:

How porous are the boundaries between writing for the screen, radio and the page?

It was always my intention to test the boundaries between the disciplines during the writing of *The Dead Room* and in developing the creative project I have attempted to make it as multidisciplinary as possible; a screenplay about the recording of a radio play, which also combines elements of lyric poetry; with concrete imagery and rhythmic patterns within the stage directions and dialogue.

INT. UNIVERSITY SEMINAR ROOM DAY

The WRITER takes a sip of water. The faint sound of an electric hand-dryer is heard through the wall.

TUTOR 1

I think there's something very interesting in the way this has been constructed. You're constantly cutting back and forth - not just in temporal terms, but from the aural to the visual - and as we do so we're moving through a structure that has a dimensional quality to it - it's not just that it's not linear, it's self-referential in many ways. I was reading Robert Macfarlane's *The Old Ways*, in which he talks about walking *into* a mountain - rather than *upon* a mountain - and it's a bit like that reading this, as if you're moving into something with a curious interiority that ensnares you. The effect of reading it is really fascinating, I think. And ironically, perhaps, not what we should be doing with it because it exists to be surrendered - to somebody who is going to make it into something that they have constructed from it...

WRITER

Although as I've been writing this I have been very aware that it is going to be read by people who might not necessarily have a film background, so, as a result, I've gone further with it than I might normally - trying to paint the picture. If I were simply writing a radio play, working with a producer with whom I've worked before, I wouldn't include nearly as much detail in the stage directions, for instance. I would've developed a shorthand that we'd both understand. It simply wouldn't necessitate this kind of detail. It'll be quite sparse.

TUTOR 1

So it's a kind of hybridized form in a way. Far more narrative detail than you'd normally see in a script.

WRITER

It depends on the writer. If you read Terence Davies' *Distant Voices, Still Lives* he'll talk in great detail about the camera movements; the size of the shot etc...but personally I find that degree of precision quite dry to read so I've tried to imply in *The Dead Room* what we, as an audience, might see, without including all the technical factors.

TUTOR 1

I think that's interesting - and would be interesting to say why you have written this in this way.

TUTOR 2

Yes. And further to that one reads a script knowing that it's a series of instructions for making a movie - but that's not how we read this script (this is a PhD script, a strange beast) and you make the point - is it possible to read a script like a poem? A would-be director would not read your script like a poem - they would read it with 'I'm going to make a film head on' and what you're doing here is taking something that is very overtly a script and making the reader look at it in a different way so that it can be read as a script.

SUPERVISOR

There's something to add here - in that after the last review you were probably let off the leash a bit in terms of this being simply viable - or something that could be made - so that's taken you in this direction; to create the hybridized format.

WRITER

Absolutely. I think that made a tremendous difference to how I approached subsequent drafts. I mean, for example, the idea of including the dubbing chart - a visual representation, not only of what was written, in terms of the stage directions, but also of what we might ultimately hear; the gulls fading up - the sound of the marine flare cutting in hard...These charts, of course, are given to the dubbing mixer to work from in the dubbing studio - in a sense they act like a map, logging each sound, on each track, so that he knows what's coming up as he mixes the effects - so that he knows when to bring up a particular fader.

TUTOR 1

And it's interesting that you're not asking us to make a film - you're asking us to imagine that this film could be made. Maybe that's how things do get moved on anyway - in those initial stages.

WRITER

Yes. It's true - I certainly did feel freer to experiment after the review - but I do still think it could be made - either as a film, or even, possibly, as a radio play, by stripping it back, or re-imagining it. It's not moved so far off the scale that it couldn't be produced. Or that it wouldn't be of interest to a producer.

CUT TO:

CAPTION:

RADIO ADAPTATION

Just as memory constantly shifts and changes with each recollection, so it seems entirely appropriate that the creative project should behave in much the same way - constantly reinventing itself. What began as a conventional script, within a notional academic enterprise, has morphed into a far more experimental piece than I had ever imagined. I was intrigued to know whether it would still be deemed as a viable broadcast entity, capable of reaching a larger audience, or if, in fact, I had somehow pushed the boundaries too far with its highly recursive structure. In order to test the project's limits, I decided to send it to an Editor at BBC Radio 4, proposing a radio adaptation of *The Dead Room*.

From: **Richard Monks**
Subject: The Dead Room
Date: 25 August 2016 11:42:04 GMT +01:00
To: James Cook

Hi James,

Really good to see you yesterday and thanks for giving up your time to chat. You mentioned that there might still be a 5x15 Minute Drama available for this round of offers and I wondered whether *The Dead Room* might be of interest:

'The Dead Room'

A shocking family secret comes to light when a scriptwriter invites his parents to the recording of an autobiographical radio play. But as the actors grapple with the script its author discovers that truth is never black and white. Fact and fiction play out on either side of the studio glass as two parallel stories unfold across alternate episodes in a play that explores the mutable nature of memory.

In terms of its structure I had wondered whether we might alternate between 'fact' and 'fiction' so that episode one takes place in the cubicle with the writer, director and the family (recorded in a documentary style) before switching to the studio in episode two. We then switch back to the other side of the glass for episode three...and so on. As the piece develops, and the writer's version of events is disputed by his family, so we discover the truth surrounding the tragic death of his older brother; for which the writer has always wrongly blamed his father.

Let me know what you think. Happy to talk more.

All the best

Richard

From: **James Cook**
Subject: The Dead Room
Date: 9 September 2016 10:31:04 GMT +01:00
To: Richard Monks

Hi Richard,

Sorry to be slow in replying.

I like the set up here - it's a clever use of the slot and could be excellent.

Some thoughts and questions. Setting each episode on different sides of the glass would help with clarity but it might reduce the possibilities for drama - eg how would the first episode get by without the drama of the family responding to and rewriting the version of events? So you might want to switch between them more often.

Or, possibly...were you thinking that the first two episodes could take place over the same time frame. IE you hear the 'drama' (possibly with the actors noticing the family members in some way). And then you'd loop back in episode two to get the family's response to the same bit of drama. 3 and 4 could work in the same way before it all breaks down in episode five? Not sure it answers the first question but it might help...

Actually, thinking about it. You might be able to have it constantly looping back over the same bit of drama that is being rewritten and rewritten as more secrets come to light. That would make it pretty clear to the audience which bits were drama because they'd know it already (even though it was constantly evolving...)

Also, do you have a sense of how it would unfold - what the secret is etc. I'm not expecting it fully fleshed out just a sense of what the big turning point / reveal might be.

J

From: **Richard Monks**
Subject: The Dead Room
Date: 9 September 2016 12:41:06 GMT +01:00
To: James Cook

Hi James,

Thanks for the email - I'm glad you like it.

I like your idea that the piece constantly loops back on itself across the series and think you're right that if we stick rigidly to being on only one side of the glass in each episode it might be too restrictive.

I imagined that the writer has grown up in a household, along with his sister, where their elder brother's death was never spoken about. There were no photos of him on display - no mention at all. It's as if he never existed. And the writer wonders why this is. Over the years the writer convinces himself that his brother drowned (based on a photograph he found as a child, of his father burying his brother in sand on the beach). This sepia-coloured image lodges itself in his memory and becomes the basis on which he constructs an entire narrative - a false memory. When his father then suffers a stroke some years later, it's suggested by a neurologist that the writer talks to his father about the past in order to stimulate his memory. Clearing out the parents' garage, the writer comes across a number of old home-movies which he replays to his father - amongst them is one of a holiday in Wales, taken before the writer was born. In it he sees images of his brother. The father claims not to remember anything about it - but the writer persists, convinced he's hiding something. As the father's memory begins return, the truth finally emerges - a truth that causes the father to have a second stroke (this time fatal) as matters come to a head in the recording studio. The reality is that both the writer and his brother had been in a car that stalled on a railway crossing. With a train heading straight for them the father had to make a choice and grabbed the baby - saving the writer and not his older brother. So, having held his father responsible for his brother's death it transpires that he was completely wrong. I imagined us hearing abstract snippets of the approaching train as the father slowly regains his memory - an incident that he has long tried to forget.

I hope that all makes sense!

Let me know what you think.

Richard

INT. UNIVERSITY SEMINAR ROOM DAY

The SUPERVISOR sits in the corner of the room. He leans forward on his chair.

SUPERVISOR

And there's one other way that this whole endeavor is less unusual than it might strike any reader. I was talking to my wife about this and she said, 'so what is this,' and I said, 'it's a radio play that's being filmed - so we're watching the making of a radio play' and she went, 'Ah ok.' And she went out the room and then she shouted for me about five minutes later and I went into our office and she had Radio 5 Live on the webcam - and so people sit and watch radio being made - we're familiar with that - it's not that bonkers. It is viable - it has viabilities is what I'm trying to say.

TUTOR 1

It's the same with the news these days - we see people in the background - we see the cameras in the studio with the presenter - they've opened it up - to reveal the sense of process and in so doing perhaps have given it a sense of authenticity - this is real - it's happening right now - we're hiding nothing - it is transparent - 'transparency' being the buzz word of the moment, of course.

CUT TO:

Roger Bolton, speaking on BBC Radio 4's *Feedback*, recently invited listeners to express their views on the growing trend of 'visualising' radio, something he refers to as 'a contradiction in terms.'⁹⁹ One contributor objected to the use of 'doodles, scribbles and cartoons' that are beginning to accompany many programmes. Whilst another took to the BBC website to air his views. 'If it needs visuals then obviously radio is the wrong medium.'¹⁰⁰

Joe Harland, the BBC's Head of Visual Radio, disagrees. With one in three young people owning a tablet, as opposed to one in seven who own a radio, Harland maintains that by visualizing radio content the network is able to reach a wider audience and dismisses concerns that radio itself will be diminished as a result. He concedes, however, that 'a lot of radio doesn't necessarily benefit from being filmed'.¹⁰¹ But with music channels, especially, benefitting from increased audience figures with filmed content posted on Youtube, it is clearly something the BBC is committed to in order to safeguard its market share. However, Harland has yet to convince some listeners of Radio 4, one of whom objected to the visualization of 'How to Speak Like Shakespeare' on *Word Of Mouth*.¹⁰²

What on earth was it supposed to add seeing images of actors in costume reading Shakespeare's words? It was all about Shakespeare's words and how it sounded. Why did it need video?¹⁰³

⁹⁹ *Feedback*, BBC Radio 4, 8 July 2016, 8.00pm.

¹⁰⁰ Max Johnson@maxjthinks, Twitter, June 26 2016.

¹⁰¹ *Feedback*, BBC Radio 4, 8 July 2016, 8.00pm.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

Having listened to the debate on *Feedback* I began to reflect on my own creative project and what it might lose were I to adapt it for radio. Until fifteen years ago I had only ever written for the screen; the thought of writing a script without visuals was completely alien to me then, and, if I'm honest, more than a little terrifying. But as Roger Bolton quoted in the introduction to his programme, 'the pictures are better on the radio because they are supplied by our own imagination.'

Sean Street, Emeritus Professor of Radio at Bournemouth University, has written extensively about sound in *The Memory of Sound* and *The Poetry of Radio - The Colour of Sound*. In his book he quotes Alan Hall, a feature-maker, who says:

Sound offers a kind of portal through which a deeper, often inarticulate consciousness can be glimpsed. It is with incidental and ambiguous sound that we can drill bore-holes into the deeper recesses of the consciousness.¹⁰⁴

Radio has long been used as a means of delivering poetry to a larger audience. According to Street:

[...] most poets would agree that when they are in the process of making a poem, they read it aloud; it is fundamentally about a spoken medium, much closer to music than it is to prose.¹⁰⁵

Michael Ladd, the Australian poet, maintains:

¹⁰⁴ Sean Street, *The Poetry of Radio Sean Street* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), p. 4.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

Sound offers a dimension for poetry beyond the printed page, a material (though invisible) presence that I find exciting and full of potential for a writer. You are making something happen in the air and the body as well as the mind.¹⁰⁶

It seems strange then, that although we learn to hear in the womb, months before we are able to see, it is our visual sense that tends to dominate thereafter. Ironically, when creating a radio play I find that its initial construction is in images, a fragmented series of pictures seen in the mind's eye. They are never complete, in the way one might see a photograph, or a painting, but put together, assembled over time they build a sense of the overall world – as well as the characters that inhabit that world. There then follows a process of interpreting these partial images, using dialogue as well as sound effects, to create an aural landscape. In a television interview the poet Tony Harrison observed, 'If the word is powerful enough it can make the ear go into close-up.'¹⁰⁷

In the case of a radio play, as Iser suggests, what the audience then 'sees' will of course differ from one person to the next, as individuals re-imagine the characters that first took shape in the writer's mind.

As mentioned earlier the process of recording sound effects is an art in itself and the work of the foley artist, and the visual nature of sound, is something that writer/director Peter Strickland explores in his work. In his most recent film, *The Duke of Burgundy* (2015), much of the action takes place 'off-stage' and it is sound

¹⁰⁶ Sean Street, *The Poetry of Radio* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), p. 115.

¹⁰⁷ *Film Night*, Channel 4, 3 June 1997.

that provides the pictures in the mind's eye - as is the case with radio. Sound also plays a crucial role in *Berberian Sound Studio* (2013). Set in a dubbing studio, during the making of an Italian schlock horror film, *Equestrian Vortex*, the protagonist finds himself the subject of the film, as the narrative loops back on itself in much the same way as Davies' work operates.

Like *The Dead Room*, *Berberian Sound Studio* examines the production process itself. In an interview for *Quietus* magazine, Strickland reveals his motivation:

I wanted to make a film where everything that is usually hidden in cinema, the mechanics of film itself, is made visible. *Berberian...* turns this on its head. Here, the film is out of view, and you only see the mechanics behind it. Like dissecting - not in a theoretical way, but in a physical way.¹⁰⁸

Fascinated by the mystery of analogue sound, Strickland met with technicians from the BBC's Radiophonic workshop to better understand the production process.

[We] talked a lot about the physical nature of working with analogue. The clumsiness of it, the talisman quality, the alchemy of it. Tape delay, distortion - it changes the sound world so poignantly. It creates a darker, much more disturbing world...All this visual peculiarity, and the darker and more ambiguous side to sound-making, links to the

¹⁰⁸ Basia Lewandowska Cummings, 'Foley Cow!' *Berberian Sound Studio* Director Peter Strickland Interviewed, *The Quietus*, 31 August 2012. <<http://thequietus.com/articles/09874-peter-strickland-interview-berberian-sound-studio>> [accessed 2 May 2016]

English eccentric in his garden shed that I was keen to depict.¹⁰⁹

For a film that deals primarily with sound it is amazingly visual - not only in the imagery seen on the screen, as but in terms of what is not seen, as the protagonist, Gilderoy, descends into madness, unable to escape from the nightmare of his studio.

I really love that element of it - that the sounds and his mental state can be in one sense completely serious, terrifying and dangerous, and in another, completely farcical. That's what is so incredible about working with sound - the resonances that it can take on when it's played with.¹¹⁰

Just as *Berberian Sound Studio* explores our ability to evoke horrifying imagery through sound, so *The Dead Room** uses both diegetic and non-diegetic effects to trigger long-buried memories; the single piercing note from a violin bow, played on the edge of a brass Chladni plate, creates patterns in the sand as the particles respond to the vibrating sound waves - a recurring 'image' that foreshadows the death of John's father and his own suicide.

A common mistake made by many writers new to radio, is the temptation to fill the script with too much detail - both in terms of description and irrelevant sound effects, thus leaving nothing to the imagination. Radio is not about sound. It is about significant sound. And

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

* Title taken from an area in the recording studio where special acoustic tiles eliminate echo.

more often than not, it doesn't matter what a room looks like - the colours of the walls - unless, of course they're covered in blood.

In its effort to attract a wider audience, the BBC are putting increasing resources into exploring possible interactive content that crosses the boundaries between radio and screen. Although there have been experiments with radio drama in the past, where abstract images have appeared simultaneously on-line, the visuals, in general, have added little to the aural experience. Current experiments by the BBC's Research and Development department, however, appear more ambitious in their approach to presenting radio. In *The Kraken Wakes* by John Wyndham, adapted for Radio 4 by Val McDermid as part of the *Dangerous Visions Season*, extra content was developed, where, by using 360° cameras and a virtual reality headset, the listener was placed at the centre of the drama, cast as the prime minister. Rather than visualise scenes from the play itself, the R&D team took dialogue from the play and created a new scene, where a group of scientists and advisors confront the PM with warnings of the impending global disaster. Maps, graphics and images, seen through the headset, showed rising sea levels before the world was plunged into darkness. Although the experience was designed to compliment the aural experience it is clear in which direction the research is heading and it's perhaps inevitable that the boundaries between what until now have been perceived as two separate disciplines will become increasingly blurred as market forces continue to put pressure on radio producers to come up with ever new ways of presenting content. It is significant that until recently radio and television drama departments were separate (BBC Radio Drama and BBC Television). Now they have merged, in name

at least, grouped together by region (e.g. BBC Drama North) incorporating both disciplines under one banner. The Afternoon Play has also been re-branded The Afternoon *Drama*, an epithet borrowed from television.

Writers such as Danny Brocklehurst (*Ordinary Lies*, *The Driver*, *Exile*) move from one medium to the other, and indeed are positively courted by the controllers of radio, keen to be associated with television. 'Stone', a police series set in Manchester, created by Brocklehurst, plays out on Radio 4 with four episodes broadcast yearly. It could easily be adapted for television with the same cast, same stories, same dialogue - the same scripts even.

EXTRACT FROM *DISCLOSURE* (STONE SEASON 6, EPISODE 1)

SC. 13 EXT. HOUSE DAY

RAY SMASHES UP AN OLD PIANO WITH A SLEDGEHAMMER AND FEEDS BITS OF WOOD INTO AN INCINERATOR. D.I. TANNER APPROACHES.

TANNER What are you doing?!

RAY It's worthless. A month on Freecycle and not a peep.

TANNER I'm looking for Stephen.

RAY Who are you?

TANNER D.I. Tanner.

RAY What's he done now?

TANNER It's probably best I speak to him.

RAY About school?

TANNER Why do you say that?

RAY This is Bryant, isn't it?

TANNER It's probably best I speak to Stephen. Is he in?

RAY (CALLS OUT) Stephen!

STEPHEN What?

THERE IS A COMMOTION FROM INSIDE THE HOUSE.
STEPHEN DARTS OUT THE BACK DOOR.

TANNER Hey!

RAY Stephen!

SC.14 EXT. ALLEYWAY DAY

STEPHEN GIVES CHASE. STEPHEN KNOCKS OVER BINS AS HE GOES.

TANNER Hey! Come here!

STEPHEN TAKES NO NOTICE

TANNER Stop! Police!

STEPHEN RUNS INTO THE ROAD. A HORN SOUNDS.
TYRES SCREECH. THERE IS A LOUD BANG AS STEPHEN
SOMERSAULTS OVER THE BONNET OF A CAR.

TANNER Shit!

CUT TO: ¹¹¹

¹¹¹ 'Stone: Disclosure', *Afternoon Drama*, BBC Radio 4, 21 November 2016.

INT. SITTING ROOM DAY

ALAN BENNETT returns to his chair by the window.

AB

Sorry about that. They're doing *George III* in San Francisco and wanted a word. What were we saying?

WRITER

Are you sure you're alright for time?

AB

Yes. Fine. Go on.

WRITER

We were talking about 'recycling' - how much of your work is adapted, or presented, in different forms. *Cocktail Sticks*, for example, blurs the boundaries between radio and theatre.

AB

I think we did it on radio.

WRITER

Yes, you did - after the stage play. But that play in particular is pure radio - a play for voices, if you like, with seamless scene changes.

AB

Yes it was.

WRITER

So is it purely that your background is the theatre, that you always think of writing for the stage first?

AB

I think it would depend, I worked with Gordon House two or three times, if I'd had a more continuous relationship with a radio producer, I might have written more and been encouraged to do it. The impulse has always come from me rather than the other way round.

WRITER

What challenges did you face when adapting the stage play of *The Lady In the Van* for the screen. What could you do in the screenplay that you couldn't do on stage, or on the page?

AB

Most obvious thing is that technically you can use the same actor playing both me(s). Nicholas could never really explain to me how you did this, but I knew he could do it and it was funny, watching the rough cuts and all that, the technical adjustments that had to be made weren't done until quite late on. I had seen several runs through with it not working, so I had to make allowances, but that was the main thing.

WRITER

And did you think that was better? You mentioned the radio version using just one actor and your voice-over.

AB

I think it was less confusing than the radio version. I think. We were bothered that people wouldn't pick up on what it was - having the two Alan Bennetts played by the same actor, but I think the script makes it fairly plain and people don't seem to mind about

(MORE)

(CONT.)

that. I see so few films so I never know quite how sophisticated people are really.

WRITER

Right at the beginning, I'm not sure which one says it, but one of the Alan Bennetts says 'this is how writers are, split into two'.

AB

That's right. One's at the desk all the time, which is virtually true, that is where I was.

WRITER

And I remember you talking about the clothes; whether they should both wear the same things.

AB

They did have slightly different clothes in the stage version, one was more raffish than the other.

WRITER

There are some obvious differences between the play and film version of *The Lady in the Van*: there's the motorbike accident, that's foregrounded in the film, as is Miss Shepherd's fear of the police and your 'other' life (referred to in the play) is actually seen in the film with the dinner parties, and the men coming and going late at night. So there are some things that you have added, however, much of Miss Shepherd's political ambition, and references to her Fidelis party is missing from the film, as is her writing to cardinals etc.... What was it that prompted those changes?

AB

Just time really, I think it was. And sometimes somehow not wanting to make her seem too much of a joke - the notion of her writing

(MORE)

(CONT.)

to the Pope on regular basis. Exactly the same problem with *The Madness of George III*. When the king was sane and becoming mad he was still of interest to the audience; when he was crazy, the audience thought he was crazy and we don't need to take any notice of what he says. In the same way with Miss Shepherd, if she became too extremely eccentric, then the audience would think 'oh well this is a mad woman.' So you had to...it's a fine line. And we hadn't realised that, it probably came out as the various versions of the film script was slimmed down.

WRITER

Do you think that in any way (I asked an earlier question about the truth) your version of the truth, how that maybe alters as you pass it onto different directors and technicians, do you think the editing out of the Fidelis party affects the overall picture that you had of her, the truth, your version of her?

AB

I don't think so, and also I tend to think, well I've got it down once, and I've got it down in print, it's there, so these other things are projections on it, as it were. If anything is lost in one version it is there somewhere else.

WRITER

Do you think there is a definitive version?

AB

No. No, I don't think so.

WRITER

Is there a version that you think worked better, that you prefer?

AB

Not really, don't think so. The first version, which is the closest to her death, is the most immediate, but taken together - there is something in all of them that is different and adds stuff.

WRITER

To me the London Review of Books version - the original text, is about an eccentric old woman living in your driveway, then the play, and subsequently the film, become more about the writer; his dilemma and their relationship.

AB

Yes, that's true. That's true.

CUT TO:

CAPTION:

RADIO ADAPTATION

Following a lengthy telephone conversation with the Editor, during which we discussed how *The Dead Room* might work as a radio play, the following emails were exchanged outlining changes to the treatment in advance of a meeting with the Commissioning Editor for Drama:

From: **James Cook**
Subject: The Dead Room - Here is the summary
Date 7 October 2016 11:34:07 GMT+01:00
To: Richard Monks

It's got slightly longer - please do edit / amend / add etc

A man has a stroke and loses much of his memory. His son moves in and helps him recover his memory by having long conversations with him about his life.

In the process of doing this, the son realises there is something hidden in his parents past. There are clues in his parent's house and in his father's utterings about his half remembered life. The son is a writer. He records these conversations and makes a drama out of them recounting the process of recovery often using the verbatim transcripts. When the drama is due to be recorded the family come to watch it.

Hearing his own words coming back to him causes the Father to remember more things, to correct other things. We realise the drama is unstable, the process has not ended and the father, like a detective, is still piecing together his own life.

The mother is silent, the sister anxious at the process and the agitation in her father's responses. The son is keen to get to the truth of things.

And so the play is written and then rewritten, things emerge, stories change, there is a sense of some revelation being at hand. The father remembers that he had another child, a first child that died. The memory emerges from deep within him, perhaps overwhelming him. We realise that the father and mother have deliberately kept this from their subsequent children so that they may live without the shadow of the tragedy upon them. We realise that the mother has watched this whole process knowing (both fearing and hoping that the revelation may emerge).

We find the brother and sister challenged and altered by the revelation. The family unchanged and yet utterly changed.

And I've slightly glossed it in the writing with character responses etc. rather than just the basic plot so please do rip those out etc. if they don't suit.

J

From: **Richard Monks**

Subject: Re: The Dead Room - Here is the summary...

Date: 9 October 2016 23:05:54 GMT+01:00

To: James Cook

Hi James,

Have a read of the following and let me know what you think.

The Dead Room by Richard Monks - a 5x15 series about Truth and Memory

An elderly man has a stroke and loses much of his memory. His son, a writer, moves back to the family home to care for him. Neurologists advise that he talks to his father about the past in an attempt to retrieve what is lost. In the process, the writer realises there is something hidden - something buried deep in the past that the father cannot, or will not, confront. Over time the writer begins to construct his own narrative, based on his father's utterings, as well as clues found about the house. As he questions his father he sees the potential for an autobiographical radio drama. The idea is commissioned and the subsequent script, using verbatim transcripts from their conversations, charts the father's struggle to remember, as well as the family's efforts to adjust to their situation. When the drama is ready to be recorded the writer invites everyone (father, mother & sister) to the studio to watch.

Hearing actors speaking his words, from the other side of the glass, causes the father to remember more and more, and as he does so he begins to dispute the writer's version of events. We realise that the drama is unstable, the process is unfinished and the father, like a detective, is still piecing together his own story. The mother is protective of her husband. The sister is anxious as her father becomes increasingly agitated. The writer, ignoring their concerns, is determined to uncover the truth. His sister accuses him of using their parents as 'material' to further his own career. It's clear there's no love lost between the siblings; having always cared for their parents, the sister resents the fact that her brother, the 'prodigal son', has returned to the fold.

As the father slowly begins to regain his memory so the writer is forced to make changes to his script. Re-written scenes are re-recorded and reheard from one episode to the next as a different story emerges. And as the family spends time together - in the cubicle, in the canteen and in the hotel - so tensions mount as we get closer to the truth.

In the final episode painful memories come to light as the father remembers another child, a first born who died tragically. The memory emerges from deep within. Having blocked it out for almost fifty years - we realise that the mother has watched this whole process knowing that her husband's recovery will bring with it unbearable pain - something she too must now relive. By the end we see the family leave the studio utterly changed.

In terms of structure, we begin with them arriving for the recording of the radio drama. Over the course of five episodes past events play out on the other side of the studio glass, as we witness the mechanics of the production process. In parallel to this we witness the family dynamics as the script is constantly being rewritten from within the cubicle - a metaphor for the mutable nature of memory itself. And at the centre of it all is father, who, ironically, is unwittingly complicit in it all, desperate to remember something he's long tried to forget.

Fingers crossed.

R

It quickly becomes apparent that the original script is simply too complex for radio. It was suggested that the flashbacks of the beach scenes (John's false memory) take place in the recording studio instead, as part of John's autobiographical script. Father's flashes of memory, showing the advancing train, have gone completely, as have the references to John's home life, with the focus now solely on the key members of the family. With layers of narrative removed for clarity the drama's recursive structure is simplified. Locations too are cut so that the main action takes place in the recording studio, giving the play a more claustrophobic feel. Although it's often said that on radio you're freer to imagine - you can send your characters to the moon, or summon up vast armies for a fraction of the budget of a television drama - but if there are too many characters, too many voices, the listener becomes easily confused, something that doesn't apply to the screen, where the visual element helps us retain information.

CAPTION:

**Can a script be read as a poem, or a
poem read as a script?**

INT. UNIVERSITY SEMINAR ROOM DAY

The WRITER glances down at the mini-disc player. 65:32 mins on its digital display - still recording.

SUPERVISOR

I think this is the most pregnant of the questions and the biggest of the questions. Cinema has undeniably altered the way we experience things, our surroundings, our environments, our lives. And it's affected, too, the way we talk - I'm thinking in terms of the language we use in general - we talk about the flashback, the long shot - phrases like 'cut to the chase...'

TUTOR 1

And, certainly, one of the connections between cinema and poetry is structural, isn't it? Everything is rhythmical in a very particular way and although this script is rhythmical perhaps in different ways from a poem - it's more like a long poem, an extended poem where you might get recurring motifs - but the whole idea of rhythm of movement is absolutely essential to it. And the use of imagery too.

TUTOR 1 pauses, re-reading the Upgrade documents.

TUTOR 1

I'm just wondering...

WRITER

What?

TUTOR 1

Well whether there's a slightly different way of looking at this.

WRITER

How?

TUTOR 1

Perhaps it should be something more like, 'What can poetry show us...or, 'What can scriptwriters learn from poetry?' It might be good to break it up a bit - to maybe look at different aspects; poets who write for the screen (the development of the film/poem, for instance), filmmakers who use poetry, or who are influenced by poetry, and perhaps poems that use similar techniques. What do you think?

CUT TO:

CAPTION:

What can scriptwriters learn from poetry?

Perhaps the most well-known example of the 'Film/Poem' is W.H.Auden's *Night Mail*. In 1936 Auden was commissioned by the GPO Film Unit to write verse for a documentary, directed by celebrated filmmaker, John Grierson, promoting the postal service of the time. Auden's contribution the final third of the film, as the overnight LMS train travels from London to Glasgow, provided an energy - a sense of momentum to the piece as it moved into its final 'act' with the rhythm of the poem echoing the rhythm of the train speeding along the tracks. Accompanied by music composed by Benjamin Britten, the film's highly engineered soundtrack was recorded entirely in the studio by foley artists and technicians, with all manner of props from sandpaper to compressors used to create the sounds of the train. From a recently discovered file found in the British Film Institute archive it's evident that Auden was only too aware of the relationship between sound and image. A shot list for a documentary directed by Dziga Vertov, entitled *Three Songs of Lenin*, for which Auden translated a series of Russian folk songs, shows a real understanding of the editing process. However, despite his involvement with what was, by this time, already a recognized genre, certainly in the USSR and Europe, Auden's own approach to film/poetry was somewhat literal.

The spoken word must bear some relation whether of similarity, indirect reference, or contrast to what is seen, for without a quickly grasped connection the poetry and its place in the film is meaningless.¹¹²

Verse commentary, written by Auden in 1962 for a documentary called *Runner*, also illustrates Auden's

¹¹² 'Crossing the Border: Poetry and Film', *Sunday Feature*, BBC Radio 3, 24 January 2016.

skepticism towards film as a medium, and it's potential to explore character.

The Camera's eye
Does not lie,
But cannot show
The life within.

However, Russian filmmakers such as Vertov, who was inspired by contemporaries such as the poet and writer Mayakovsky, clearly disagreed. Vertov's first film *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) explores the lives of workers in the city and is made up of a series of rapidly edited images of post-revolution Russia - steeplejacks, factory workers, trams...all spliced together in quick succession to create a city symphony. A funeral procession is intercut with a wedding, which, in turn, is juxtaposed with a graphic sequence of a woman giving birth. Sometimes spit-screen techniques are used to produce multiple images of buildings, superimposed one on top of the other. The shot of a blinking eye is repeated as the busy streets spin. The filmmaker himself is seen operating his camera beneath a towering office block. On another occasion, he's glimpsed from inside an elevator, stood behind his tripod cranking the clockwork camera, before black wipes the frame and he disappears. And all this at a time when the Russian Modernist painters, such as Kasimir Malevich, were producing their bold abstract canvases with intersecting geometric shapes.

Interestingly when John Grierson, head of the GPO Film Unit, saw Vertov's work he claimed that, 'a film that is moving this fast, that works through

associate logic cannot be classed as a real documentary.¹¹³

What Vertov achieved on the screen was a series of impressions, of feelings that created emotions within the viewer - no different to lyric poetry.

In 1943 the American experimental film-maker, Maya Deren, made a film called *Meshes of the Afternoon*, a non-narrative 'trance film' where dreams spill over into reality as the camera takes on the subjective view of the protagonist's subconscious. Sequences are replayed over and again as multiple selves appear defying a conventional linear structure. Deren is quoted as saying that:

a narrative film is horizontal - not only events, but chains of images, moved linearly and a poetic film is vertical - it creates stackings of images and associations through spirals and recursions that move backwards through time.¹¹⁴

Both Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* and Deren's *Meshes of the Afternoon* fall into the category of 'Film Poem', as described by the American writer and academic William C. Wees. Devoid of verbal language they rely solely on the visual language of cinema to create a screen equivalent to the poem by using many of the same techniques as poetry; repetition, symbolism, metaphor... While working on *The Dead Room*, I became interested in how imagery and structure might also be organized to create spatial or lyrical effects.

¹¹³ 'Crossing the Border: Poetry and Film', *Sunday Feature*, BBC Radio 3, 24 January 2016

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

According to Wees, *Night Mail*, on the other hand, belongs to a different category, that of 'Poetry Film', where there exists an interaction between the spoken word and the visual. Whether it is possible to define work in quite such simplistic terms is open to debate, as the boundaries between the two are often blurred, as we shall see later on. What is certain is that since the early Russian pioneers the film/poem has continued to develop with today's proponents including Leeds born poet, Tony Harrison.

Harrison grew up in the post war years an avid theatre and cinemagoer. In the introduction to his 'Collected Film Poetry' he describes his early memories of watching music hall and variety shows with the likes of Norman Evans, Robb Wilton and even Laurel and Hardy. What struck him most was how the acts addressed the audience directly, breaking down the fourth wall, a technique he later employed in his own work. He also recalls an early visit to the News Theatre, a small cinema next to the City Station to watch the Pathé newsreels of the time.

It was there just after the Second World War ended that I saw footage of the Nazi concentration camps...there was something overwhelming in seeing such terrible images on a large screen, much bigger than life size. I think my reaction was almost on a scale of those early viewers of the Lumiere Brothers' film of the train arriving in the station in 1895. It almost blighted my life it had such a powerful effect on me and made me draw a line between what I knew in my heart was 'pretend', the films that entertained me

and made me laugh, and what was news: real dead bodies bulldozed into pits at Bergen Belsen.¹¹⁵

Whether consciously, or subconsciously Harrison began to explore the boundaries between fact and fiction in his own work, beginning with a translated version of the *Lysistrata* of Aristophanes.

Aikin Mata began with a montage of newsreels and documentaries projected onto the back wall of the theatre...That was my first glimpse into the practicalities of the editing process and how you could make a shot mean different things by changing what it was juxtaposed with, and how something seemingly quite innocent could be made sinister by editing a terrifying reaction.¹¹⁶

Following the publication of Harrison's first book of poems, *The Loiners*, he was invited to read excerpts on a TV arts programme whilst pre-recorded images were screened alongside his reading. Harrison was horrified by the result.

It was as if the director had only read the nouns in the poems and decided that we wouldn't understand them without a show-and-tell picture...It is everything a film/poem shouldn't be.¹¹⁷

Having grown up watching the work of Eisenstein and the GPO Film Unit, as well as directors such as Bergman, Antonioni and Visconti, Harrison was determined to find a more successful way of combining film and poetry and in

¹¹⁵ Tony Harrison, *Collected Film Poetry* (London: Faber & Faber, 2007), pp. ix-x

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. xi

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

subsequent years, with projects such as 'V', *The Blasphemers' Banquet* and *Black Daisies for the Bride*, he made the genre of 'Film Poetry' his own.

The scansions of the screen and the prosodies of poetry co-exist to create a third kind of mutually illuminating momentum that is the film/poem whose potential range and depth has not been fully explored.¹¹⁸

Peter Symes, Harrison's long time collaborator, writes:

It was not until Tony Harrison turned his attention to the form that we see the beginnings of a real development and the creation of a body of work that actually moved the process onto a different plane. Here at last was work that was beginning to create its own agenda, and in which one can discern a development both in form and in content. It was work that took great risks and which challenged orthodoxy. It brought poetry into the homes of millions of people, and made it immediate.¹¹⁹

Black Daisies for the Bride, directed by Symes, is a piece about those suffering from Alzheimer's, which, when it was first broadcast in 1993, certainly made a deep impression on me. It was shown as a BBC ScreenPlay, part of a season of films on BBC2, and at the time I had also been commissioned to write and direct a drama for the same slot. Although my idea was very different I took a particular interest the other films being produced. *Black Daisies for the Bride* was a revelation, beginning as it does with the sound of Maria Tobin, one of the residents

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. xxx

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. xxxv

of High Royds Psychiatric Hospital, singing 'Vogliatemi bene' from *Madame Butterfly* (recorded c. 1950), before the music fades and we hear her as an old woman - the words have gone, long since consumed by the disease, and all that remains is a single high pitched note that rings out above the noise of the Whernside Ward.

This screenplay musical docu-drama is the crowning masterpiece of the recent movement, led by Tony Harrison and Peter Symes [director] to reinvent the combination of verse and film.¹²⁰

It is only now, during the course of writing this reflective thesis that I begin to make connections between those writers and directors I've mentioned so far; Bennett, Davies and now Harrison, all of whom feel to me like old acquaintances that I'd somehow lost contact with over the years - only to be reunited a quarter of a century later whilst excavating the origins of my own writing.

Reading Harrison's book of *Collected Film Poetry*, I came across another familiar name, that of the Russian film director Andrei Tarkovsky, whose films I first discovered, and much admired, whilst at Art College and whom Tony Harrison cites as a major influence. Tarkovsky's 1975 film, *Mirror*, a meditation on war, memory and time, struck a particular chord.

I thought it was brilliant...According to the Russian critic Maya Turovskaya, "*Mirror* is the most documentary and the most poetic" of Tarkovsky's

¹²⁰ Black Daisies, *Sunday Telegraph*, TV Review, 30 June 1993.
<<http://www.highroydshospital.com/galleries/black-daisies-for-the-bride/>>
[accessed 1 September 2016]

films. The stark documentary and the poetic were interdependent. The film moved from colour to black and white, from lyrical fields to newsreels of the Spanish civil war and more extended footage of the Red Army crossing Lake Sivaash during the soviet advance of 1943...it was not simply the power of the images captured by an army cameraman who was killed that day...over the sequence was the voice of the director's father, the poet Arseny Tarkovsky.¹²¹

Later in the film another poem is heard over an extended shot of Margarita Terekhova, walking down a long factory corridor, a sequence that resonated with Harrison.

It made you both watch and listen to the poem. It also stayed deep in my memory and was still there when Peter Symes and I were filming *Black Daisies* for the *Bride in High Royds* hospital in Menston, Yorkshire.¹²²

Black Daisies for the Bride had the same impact on me as Terence Davies' *Distant Voices, Still Lives*, and perhaps for the same reason - poetry. Both films employ similar techniques: long camera shots, voice-over and most obvious of all, music. In fact both films use the same Christmas carol, 'In the Bleak Midwinter', to great effect.

Having recorded *Black Daisies for the Bride* on VHS, I recently rediscovered the tape in the attic, buried in a box along with a bundle of white cotton editing gloves and a packet of chinagraph pencils, left over from my days as a film editor. On the same tape was one of Alan

¹²¹ Tony Harrison, *Collected Film Poetry* (London: Faber & Faber, 2007), p. xv.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

Bennett's monologues, *A Cream Cracker Under the Settee* about an elderly woman (played by Thora Hird) who resigns herself to her fate after a fall, and as she lies on the floor in the dark remembers the past.

I wish I was ready for bed. All washed and in a clean nightie and the bottle in, all sweet and crisp and clean like when I was little on Baking Night, sat in front of the fire with my long hair still.¹²³

Somehow this seemed more than coincidence. Both from Leeds, and indeed contemporaries, Bennett has long been an admirer of Harrison's work and even mentioned him in my interview. When asked whether Bennett considered himself an 'outsider' he replied:

I never feel that I fit into any of the categories, I'm not a sort of..., while being left wing, I'm not like David Hare, for instance. I find people whose lives have been closer to mine, like Tony Harrison, I can identify with him, and he's not from any school any category. He's very much an outsider.¹²⁴

Re-watching *Black Daisies For the Bride* I was struck by how incredibly moving I still found it. Harrison interweaves documentary footage with dramatised sequences, to tell the stories of patients suffering from Alzheimer's. Using verse, put to music, he focuses on three residents in particular. Muriel, Maria and Kathleen - 'museum names'¹²⁵ as Thora Hird's character, Doris, refers to them. In common with poetry the piece uses recurring imagery; young brides, played by actors, walk

¹²³ Alan Bennett, *Talking Heads* (London: BBC Books, 1998), p. 90.

¹²⁴ Alan Bennett interview, 4 May 2016.

¹²⁵ Alan Bennett, *Talking Heads* (London: BBC Books, 1998), p. 90.

down the same long stark hospital corridor singing of their past lives, a blizzard of confetti periodically obscures the screen as residents struggle to remember, and staff repeatedly punch a key pad on the door as they come and go from the ward - something the residents are unable to do, having forgotten the code, no longer able to access their own memories. Instead they live only in the moment; Muriel constantly repeating the words 'I love you. I love you. I love you.' When shown a piece of paper with her husband's name written on it, she pauses - a spark of recognition - before saying the word 'Jim.' It is heartbreaking to watch. (It is also, I realize now, the central premise of *The Dead Room* as John tries to encourage his father to remember.)

At a Christmas party on the ward a local school choir sings 'In the Bleak Midwinter' for the residents. Many seem oblivious to the festivities but Irene Clements, who looks far younger than the others, sings along, quietly at first, before finding her voice. The rhythm is there - the melody - but the words, as written by the poet Christina Rossetti, have been replaced with Irene's own lyrics - a language that only she understands.

In a later scene, a musician enters the ward playing a banjo and singing 'oh you beautiful doll'. Kathleen begins to dance in front of him clapping in time to the music - although the words have long gone, again, the rhythm remains.

Much of the detail in *Black Daises...* I had forgotten in the intervening years, but unlike the residents of Whynward ward, who will never remember, it soon came back to me as I re-read Harrison's script. The piece begins with a number of residents in close up addressing the

camera 'like newsreaders, or story tellers'¹²⁶, influenced, perhaps, by Harrison's visits to the music hall, when performers spoke directly to the audience - a device that engaged him as a child.

In the script, the words themselves are laid out on the page, as one might expect to see poem.

MARIA TOBIN

O murals, the babble of ewes

Beautiful jews.

I said 'Oo...Mm...I'll come and buy another two.'

Laughs.

He said, 'Everything is right!'

I said, Oo, that's good!'

Yes, it would be better.

It's nicer when they come in

And they're not worrying all the day.

Whilst some of the residents shriek, others get on with their own thing; tapping out a rhythm with their slippared feet, or cleaning obsessively, wiping every surface - repeatedly. This documentary footage was then intercut with the 'drama' element of the singing brides.

As already mentioned, Harrison's fascination with the mechanics of editing - the process by which a film is constructed - assembling shots (in those days physically splicing them together with tape) and pairing the visual image with sound (which was recorded onto magnetic tape and run on a parallel track on the Compeditor) is something that Harrison talks about in his introduction

¹²⁶ Tony Harrison, *Collected Film Poetry* (London: Faber & Faber, 2007), p. 181.

to his collection of film poetry - it is a fascination that I share and that is the central conceit of *The Dead Room*. The parallels between the disciplines are striking. In film, shots are trimmed in the cutting room - frame by frame - just as a poet edits the text, cutting a line, or replacing one word with another - a word that perhaps sits better or works harder - so images are ordered and reordered - one against another - changing emphasis depending on their place within a particular sequence. Both are concerned with economy of language; whether it be a line of dialogue in a script, or the line of a poem - every word counts.

By the time Harrison came to make *Black Daisies for the Bride* he had developed a unique way of working with his collaborators. From the outset he insisted on being involved in the entire filmmaking process. Rather than spend time meticulously planning before a film began, Harrison and his team would arrive on location and respond to whatever they found - this 'creative chaos' relied on a high degree of flexibility on Harrison's part. It was, as Symes explains, 'a process of collecting imagery, often without any clear idea of where that imagery might appear in the finished product.'¹²⁷

During the production process the structure of the piece would develop organically - the juxtaposition of sound and image - often throwing up new ideas in the cutting room, with the choice of metre dictating the rhythm of the edited sequences.

The back and forth between writer and editor became a rhythm in itself..We rapidly found out how complex verbal rhythms could cancel out visual ones, and vice

¹²⁷ Tony Harrison, *Collected Film Poetry* (London: Faber & Faber, 2007), p. xxxviii.

versa, but also how close the editing process was to the poetic work...both poet and editor struggle with the rhythmical juxtaposition of images. We reveled in repetition, something verse and image excel in. We were excited by the possibility offered by the verse of intense and very visual imagery on the sound track that we could juxtapose with gentler or less insistent pictures on the screen.¹²⁸

It seems fitting therefore that when the LMS Royal Mail rail service was due to close it was Harrison who was asked to write a film/poem to mark the event as part of a *South Bank Show* documentary that also looked back at W.H.Auden's *Night Mail*. Harrison's piece, *Crossings*, took on an altogether bleaker tone than Auden's nostalgic promotional piece. In *Crossings* we meet a range of different characters, from a homeless boy sleeping rough to a woman waiting to hear the results of an HIV AIDS test. The film/poem begins in the sorting office with postal workers speaking lines in addition to Harrison's own voice-over.

In come the letters load after load
Panic...pain...pleasure for every postcode:

A letter for someone homeless, alone
Sent back to his mother 'addressee unknown'.
Final demands that prove the last straw
For desperate men who can't take any more,
Great news for a pupil with good exam grades,
The result of a blood test for HIV AIDS.

As well as drinkers playing pool in a northern pub, Harrison gives us a suicidal farmer who, far from being

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. xli-xlii.

sound asleep as the train passes (as in the original poem), is seen stopped at a railway crossing contemplating suicide. Drowning in debt after his flock was culled during Foot and Mouth, one suspects that as the barriers rise, having reached the end of the line, he is ready to throw himself in front of the next passing train - like John in *The Dead Room*. It's interesting to note that the following lines, confirming this, were omitted from the broadcast version of the film/poem, perhaps deemed too bleak for the television audience.

If there's one more demand in t'postman's next sack
I'll be putting mi head right here on this track.
It's t'only way left to me, laying my head
Under the wheels of the Lady in Red.¹²⁹

Crossings was the last of Harrison's film/poems, after which he appears to have handed on the mantle to Simon Armitage whose work includes *The Not Dead*, a powerful and moving film/poem about sufferers of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) whose accounts of war are intercut with documentary footage and poetry based on their testimonies, written by Armitage and recited by the ex-soldiers themselves. Likewise, *Feltham Sings* features the young offenders of HMP Feltham singing verse inspired by their own stories in a nod, perhaps, to Harrison's *Black Daises for the Bride*.

It's an area that still excites poets and filmmakers alike but is also a genre that is notoriously difficult to master.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 408.

There's a sinusoidal relationship between the two [visual and oral] where at some moments the wavelength of the image and the wavelength of the poetry are pulling apart and then at other moments they seem to intersect and cross over and that elasticity, that coming and going between meaning and vision are very exciting when they work in a film. Sometimes the poetry can become facile because it's simply a subtitle of what you're seeing, but at other moments there's this strange stretching, a peculiar frisson you get between the two where they're not exactly in tandem but they are doing something spiritually in alignment.¹³⁰

Armitage insists that there must be a justification for using verse in this way - 'to go in and start rhyming' - and sees his work as giving a missing voice, whether that be to the sufferers of PTSD, or the residents of the Ashfield Valley estate, Rochdale, as in his 1992 film/poem, *Xanadu*, for the BBC. It's certainly true of *Black Daisies for the Bride* where Harrison was able to bring the past to life for Alzheimer's sufferers with no memory.

Although William C. Wees referred to two distinct groups of 'Film Poetry' ('Film Poems' and 'Poetry Films'), the genre is perhaps more elastic than this implies. In an interview on Radio 3's *Sunday Feature*, Peter Symes, Harrison's long-time collaborator, elaborates on Armitage's observation about the relationship between the two rhymes, the visual and the oral.

¹³⁰ 'Crossing the Border: Poetry and Film', *Sunday Feature*, BBC Radio 3, 24 January 2016.

We had to be careful that one wouldn't cancel out the other, so at times one gives way to the other. The visual could be quite bland but actually there was a powerful verbal image going on and vice versa. Or sometimes there was so much going on on the screen that Tony [Harrison] didn't say anything.¹³¹

Harrison refers to his own work as 'film poetry', rather than 'poetry film', whichever term is used it's clear that Harrison has embraced the media of film as a means of further developing his ideas, of creating something 'other'.

There is poetics of the screen and there is poetics of language - but there is a third thing - the poetics of the film poem.¹³²

In conclusion, Harrison states: 'It's all poetry to me, whether it is for the printed page, or reading aloud, or for the theatre, or the opera house, or concert hall or even for television.'¹³³

In her book about Terence Davies, Wendy Everett describes Terence Davies' camera work on *Distant Voices, Still Lives* as 'slipping freely through time weaving in and out of memories and viewpoints in a composition which is far closer to music than to conventional narrative,'¹³⁴ suggesting a definite sense of 'cross pollination' between Davies' films and other disciplines, as is the case in Harrison's work. But whilst Harrison is first and foremost a poet drawn to the language of cinema, Davies is a filmmaker inspired by poetry.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Tony Harrison, *Collected Film Poetry* (London: Faber & Faber, 2007), p. xxxiii.

¹³⁴ Wendy Everett, *Terence Davies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 55.

Davies acknowledges the influence of T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* in particular, with its themes of time and memory that run deep through *Distant Voices, Still Lives*. Davies came to the poem by chance, when he heard it read by Alec Guinness in 1960 on his first television set, and was drawn to its cyclical structure.

I knew what the story was [for *Distant Voices, Still Lives*], and I knew it wasn't linear. I knew it to be about memory; and the great influence for that was Eliot and *Four Quartets*...and I thought it's got to be cyclical, it mustn't be linear, it's not a linear story, because I'd heard these stories by memory, but told out of order.¹³⁵

Distant Voices, Still Lives could be described as 'poetic', in much the same way as one might describe *A Man with a Movie Camera*. And just as Vertov's film is a portrait of a city, a series of documentary images set to music, (similar, in many ways, to Davies' own portrait of Liverpool in his 2009 film, *Of Time and the City*) *Distant Voices*...is a portrait of family life; a series of snapshots passed down to Davies by his mother and sisters - reimagined and reordered according to emotional weight.

Time past and time future
Allow but little consciousness.
To be conscious is not to be in
time
But only in time can the moment in
the rose-garden,

¹³⁵ Paul Farley, *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (London: BFI, 2006), p. 65.

The moment in the arbour when the
rain beat,
The moment in the draughty church
at smokefall
Be remembered; involved with past
and future.
Only through time time is
conquered¹³⁶

As mentioned earlier, the structure of *Distant Voices, Still Lives* is determined by its content. It was impossible for Davies to make a film about memory any other way. '...any 'story' involving memory is not a narrative in the conventional sense but of necessity more diffuse, more elliptical.'¹³⁷ In poetry, too, form and content are bound together - one dictates the other. And in the case of *Distant Voices, Still Lives* the recursive structure of the film is its meaning.

Interestingly *Distant Voices, Still Lives* begins with a kind of found poem, in the form of the shipping forecast, read by a male announcer over a black screen, adding an additional spatial dimension to the narrative - that of radio. Consequently the audience is forced to create the opening scene in their collective mind's eye: 'Faroes, Cromarty, Forth, Tyne...' a list of far off places - a mantra - conjuring images of storms and rough seas as we hear the sound of thunder.

Davies explains that 'as a boy the shipping forecast was like magic because I didn't understand what it meant - I

¹³⁶ T.S. Eliot, 'Burnt Norton' *Four Quartets* (London: Faber, 1943)

¹³⁷ Terence Davies, *A Modest Pageant* (London: Faber & Faber, 1992), p. 74.

still don't - so it was a kind of ritual, an incantation.'¹³⁸

As the shipping forecast continues a woman appears from one of the houses and collects three pints of milk from the doorstep. It is, as Wendy Everett suggests, a gesture that is 'both overwhelmingly banal (every day starts in this household with is action), and richly symbolic (Mother as source of nurture; the three bottles echoing the three children).'¹³⁹ It also illustrates, again, strong parallels between poetry and film, in this example both disciplines employing symbolism, pattern and symmetry. Recurring images, such as the hallway and stairs, as well as the static family group tableaux, are seen throughout the film, often to a soundtrack of unseen voices. These serve to emphasise the passing of time and act as a metaphor for memory. With each viewing they take on added meaning - just as a repeated word, or phrase, might be used to reiterate the premise of a poem.

Davies' use of music in his work is significant also, not only the songs the characters sing themselves (as diegetic sound), but also the songs of the day that fill the soundtrack and provide their own narrative layer to Davies' 'mosaic of memory'. In *Distant Voices...* we watch as Mother sits on the window ledge, with her legs dangling into the room, cleaning the glass. As the camera tracks slowly towards her we hear Ella Fitzgerald singing 'Take a chance on Love' before cutting to a scene in the parlour where Mother is being beaten relentlessly by Father. The song continues as Mother screams. Father finally walks out of the room, leaving Mother crumpled on

¹³⁸ Nigel Floyd, 'A pebble in the pool & ships like magic', *Monthly Film Bulletin* 55/657, October 1988, p. 295.

¹³⁹ Wendy Everett, *Terence Davies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 66.

the floor as the song ends. The power of this scene lies not only in the content, the brutality with which Father metes out his punishment, but in the juxtaposition of sound and image, in its 'strident discord'¹⁴⁰. Mother took a chance. 'He was nice', she tells her daughter, Maisie. 'He was a good dancer'. A decision she undoubtedly came to regret. And it is music again that is central to a flashback sequence where Eileen remembers her father on her wedding day. 'I WANT MY DAD!' She cries, before we hear a choir singing 'In the Bleak Midwinter'. 'I know me Dad was bad - I know that - but I always try and think of the good times - like Christmas.' A series of fluid tracking shots, dissolving slowly from one to the next, takes us from a home-made crib, besides which the children are seen lighting candles, past exteriors of houses through whose windows 'parlours have been dressed for Christmas', to Father creeping into the children's room and hanging out three stockings. 'Father looks down at the sleeping children with love. His eyes fill with tears.' 'God bless', he whispers. And so, as the choir sings, we are lulled into thinking that beneath it all there is a heart - we may even pity him, until we cut to the following scene.

INT. KITCHEN NIGHT EARLY 1940s

Shot of table.

FATHER at the head of the table. MAISIE as a child to his right - TONY and EILEEN, as children, to his left.

Soundtrack carol climaxes:

Choir: (Voice over, singing) 'If I were a Wise Man
I would do my part;
Yet what can I give him-
Give my heart.'

(FATHER rises in a fury.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 69.

The table is laden with Christmas food.

Suddenly he grabs the tablecloth and drags everything off the table.)

FATHER: (In a fury) NELLIE! CLEAN IT UP!

(Cut to:)

As we see Father tremble, unable to contain his rage, it is the music and lyrics that add extra depth and meaning to the sequence. Throughout the film Davies uses music, and the absence of music, to create movement and rhythm.

Silences and spaces are essential to the film's mobility...the suggestion that the structure of 'Distant Voices, Still Lives' can be likened to music in its fluidity and its essential self-reflexivity goes at least some way to explaining the film's emotional power and its ability to generate complex meanings at a variety of levels.¹⁴¹

The American author and academic S.K. Valenzuela, in an interview for *On the Page*, discusses the similarities between the two disciplines, cinema and poetry. In both, she maintains, structure and meaning are inseparable, both being concerned with form and function. Poets and screenwriters alike work within recognized parameters, be it the conventions of certain genres, such as horror, or comedy, or the constraints of poetic form, such as the haiku or sonnet.

In poetry structure enforces meaning - so is true of screenwriting...it's really critically important - you need to know the structure in order to tell the story you want to tell. Even down to the layout on the

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

page. The white space becomes important - that's where the magic happens...¹⁴²

There are, of course, many examples of films where structure and meaning are entwined. *Birdman* (2014), directed Alejandro Gonzalez, was conceived as a way of telling a story that felt more like real life, in one continuous shot rather than a series of cuts. And although, in reality, the film was constructed with numerous hidden edits it appears to move seamlessly from one scene to the next. The same concept lies behind the recent German feature-film, *Victoria* (2015), directed by Sebastian Schipper and shot in one take over a single night in Berlin. The effect of which is intended to take the viewer to the heart of the central character's experience. With no production frills it feels as close as it's perhaps possible to get to the action as the drama unfolds in real time.

Whereas *Victoria* is set over a few short action packed hours, *Stuart: a Life Backwards*, by Alexander Masters, charts the entire life of a homeless man, Stuart Shorter, whom we meet at the point of his death, having been hit by a train. The film adaptation follows the structure of the novel, rewinding to the moment he was born. In a lecture given by Masters, the author reveals how he came to shape the piece. Having shown the first draft of the biography to Stuart himself, his response to the linear narrative had been far from complimentary. According to Masters, Stuart had told him that it was 'bollocks boring'¹⁴³ and suggested he re-write it backwards, in the

¹⁴² S.K. Valenzuela, On the Page Screenwriting Podcast.

<<http://player.fm/series/on-the-page-screenwriting/456-the-poetry-of-the-page>> [accessed 3 June 2016]

¹⁴³ Alexander Masters, A Life Backwards, 5x15 Talk, 13 February 2014.

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SXbXiEmOU-c>> [accessed 7 August 2016]

style of a Tom Clancy thriller - 'what murdered the boy I was' ¹⁴⁴. And so, by returning to Stuart's childhood, Masters gives us an insight into his life before his illness, the life of a boy whose tragic trajectory we already know.

In his book *Sculpting in Time*, Andrey Tarkovsky discusses both time and memory.

Just as a sculptor takes a lump of marble, and, inwardly conscious of the features in his finished piece removes everything that is not part of it - so the film-maker, from a 'lump of time' made up of an enormous, solid cluster of living facts, cuts off and discards whatever he does not need, leaving only what is to be an element of the finished film, what will prove to be integral to the cinematic image.¹⁴⁵

The same, of course, could be said of the formal strategies of the poet. In his poem 'Black Ice and Rain', the Irish-American poet, Michael Donaghy, employs many techniques common to cinema. Indeed, the similarity between 'Black Ice...' and *Distant Voices, Still Lives* is striking, not least in its recourse to the recursive. 'Black Ice and Rain' begins at a party, in the present. A man follows a woman into a room. She reminds him of a girl he once knew - someone from the past. As Donaghy sets out the premise of his narrative, that of time and the nature of memory, we flashback to another party and the girl in question, in much the same way as Davies leads us from his sister's wedding back in time to the family gathered around his father's deathbed.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ Andrey Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time - Reflections on the Cinema* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), pp. 63-64.

Just as Davies plays with time, using voice-over and music to take us from one memory to the next, across days, months and years, so Donaghy does the same - a night stretches out across one stanza - a year spans just one line.

Exactly a year on she let me kiss her - once -
her mouth wine chilled, my tongue a clumsy guest,
and after that the invitations dwindled.
By Christmas we were strangers. It was chance
I heard about the crash. He died at once.
Black ice and rain, they said. No news of her.¹⁴⁶

And just as imagery plays an important part in *Distant Voices, Still Lives*, so in Donaghy's poem the recurring image of ice is used - with cracking ice cubes foreshadowing the accident - an event signaled from the very beginning, with the title flashing out a warning to the reader like a motorway matrix sign.

Following the crash, Donaghy takes us deeper into the recesses of memory - in a half-sleep state - to an abusive childhood - a flashback of a mother 'her thick-tongued anger rearing like a beast.' A six-year-old boy wets his bed in terror 'hot piss spreading through the sheets' before we are suddenly jolted back to the present - years later. 'But when I wake, grown up, it's only sweat.' Reminding us of memory's ability to take control - uninvited - unannounced, Donaghy repeats the phrase 'the past falls open anywhere...' as is the case in *Distant Voices, Still Lives*, triggered by the senses.

¹⁴⁶ Michael Donaghy, *Collected Poems*, 'Black Ice and Rain' (London: Picador, 2009), pp. 124-127, p. 125.

Referring to Davies' autobiographical work, Everett writes:

Each individual memory once recalled may trigger other deeper, less accessible memories. Autobiographical memory can thus be understood to be composed of multiple layers which are elaborately interleaved, or tightly nested one within the other, so that remembering is less a matter of retrieving a single record than moving gradually through a highly complex structure in which each remembered fragment may lead to others, in a process which is entirely fluid and open-ended.¹⁴⁷

Again, we see in this how memory, and the mechanics of memory, dictate form, with Donaghy referencing its structure as he brings us back to where we began, in a bedroom - in the present - sat with a woman whom our protagonist, the 'I' of this narrative monologue, has only just met.

Since then, each night contains all others,
nested mirror-within-mirror, stretching back from then
to here and now, this party, this room, this bed,
where, in another life, we might have kissed¹⁴⁸.

Overall, an important and enabling dimension of Donaghy's poem, and one that has informed my approach to writing *The Dead Room*, is its overall recursive structure. Aside from the recurring motifs already mentioned, Donaghy uses a familiar strategy, the *mise en abyme* (a term the writer Andre Gide first took from the heraldic shield). 'Mirror-

¹⁴⁷ Wendy Everett, *Terence Davies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 64.

¹⁴⁸ Michael Donaghy, *Collected Poems*, 'Black Ice and Rain' (London: Picador, 2009), pp.124-127, p. 127.

within-mirror' in Donaghy's poem is a tacit acknowledgement of such a structure, well-known in literature (the play-within-a-play in *Hamlet*) and the visual arts (see for example Velasquez appearing in the mirror of his painting *Las Meninas*, or the mirror in Van Eyck's *Arnolfini Marriage*). This mirroring effect in literature and art has been described and explored (see Dällenbach, 1977) and *mise en abyme* contested as a somewhat richer and more nuanced device than it might first seem. The structure within a larger structure might simply echo it, or transpose the subject of the larger work into its microcosm. It might set up a 'hall of mirrors' effect of infinite regression. It has also proved promiscuous between artforms in the way it can present an alternative narrative within a larger story that also suggests connections with other works; this is evident in Frank Capra's 1946 film *It's a Wonderful Life*, which presents a metacinematic screening of the protagonist's non-life which echoes Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, and Scrooge's well-known Ghostly visitations and visions (see Chandler, 2013). Thinking about Donaghy's poem, I began to experiment with the overall structure of my radio-play-within-a-screenplay and thinking of ways that might also accommodate the critical reflection surrounding it, and I began to consider how each recursive thread would unify in reaching an ending, as different strands, 'caught up' with themselves.

INT. SITTING ROOM DAY

ALAN BENNETT leans forward and places his empty mug on a low table beside the fireplace.

WRITER

In an interview at the National Theatre, Frances De La Tour described part of the script for *People* as being like poetry, or verse, likening it to the great battle speech in Henry V. Lindsey Anderson in his introduction to *The Old Crowd* described the play as poetic in its setting, and I know you yourself have said how the *Talking Heads* monologues came to you complete 'like poems'. There is something undeniably poetic about the rhythm of your dialogue, not just in the lines themselves but in the back and forth between your characters. Language is clearly hugely important to you, words like 'splotter' and names like Kuala Lumpur are not just there by accident. So I was wondering if you could talk a bit about the poetry in your writing.

AB

There are bits which are poetic and are not naturalistic at all and if I hit on them, it's almost nothing to do with me in a way. I try to smuggle them in. There's a bit in *The History Boys* where Dakin, the good-looking one, talks about (in two long passages) going after girls – they're very literary speeches:

Dakin [...] Still, apropos Passchendaele, can I bring you up to speed on Fiona?

Scripps. No.

Dakin She's my Western Front. Last night, for instance, meeting only token resistance, I reconnoitered the ground...Are you interested in this?

Scripps Go on.

Dakin As far as...the actual place.

Scripps Shit.

Dakin I mean, not onto it and certainly not into it. But up to it. At which point the Hun, if I may characterize the fair Fiona, suddenly dug in, no further deployments were sanctioned, and around 23:00 hours our forces withdrew.

 Like whereas I'd begun the evening thinking this might be the big push.

Scripps You do have a nice time.

Dakin And the beauty of it is, the metaphor really fits.

 I mean, just as moving up to the front-line troops presumably had to pass the sites of previous battles where every inch of territory has been hotly contested, so it is with me...like particularly her tits, which only fell after a prolonged campaign some three weeks ago and to which I now have immediate access and which were indeed the first line for last night's abortive thrust southwards.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ Alan Bennett, *The History Boys* (London: Faber & Faber, 2004), p. 28.

AB

The good thing is that Nick didn't, or doesn't try to tamper with anything like that, whereas the danger would be with a director who is less sympathetic is that they'd be the first thing to get the elbow. I like them and I sometimes think 'oh this like a real play!' They are somehow almost out of my control in a way, I put stuff in (I wish I could think of other examples) which...cos it makes the texture better and richer, and I always think when I've gone and people go through what I've written (if they do), they will find more there than they think is there, I hope so anyway.

WRITER

As well as the literary inclusions within your work, such as Larkin's MCMXIV (1914) in *The History Boys*, it struck me that even within what you might describe as 'naturalist' dialogue, there is poetry. I was reading *All Day on the Sands* the other day, where a couple is ordering bacon at breakfast:

Mrs Thornton I thought I might try kippers this morning but I don't know whether I dare. They have a tendency to repeat. What do you think?

Mr Thornton If you want them, have them.

Mrs Thornton I don't know whether I do.

Mr Thornton Well, have bacon.

Mrs Thornton Shall I?

Mr Thornton She's waiting.

Mrs Thornton What are you having?

Mr Thornton Bacon. She'll have bacon. And I'll
 have bacon too. (FAY goes away.)

Mrs Thornton I wanted kippers.

Fay (Out of vision, as Colin gets up and
 goes out) Two bacon.

WRITER

The word 'bacon' is repeated a number of times so that it starts to create its own rhythm - as might a line of poetry. It's poetic.

AB

It's very nice of you to say so.

WRITER

Do you think that's to do with the particular rhythm of northern speech?

AB

Yes. I think it is to do with rhythm and repetition. There's poetry too in the two Kafka plays. I don't ever set out to deliberately do it, it's stuff that comes to me and I think let's see where I can get this in.

WRITER

But as well as the lines of poetry, there's poetry in the words themselves - in the language you use, words like 'wuther'.

(MORE)

(CONT.)

In *Cocktail Sticks* you describe how your mother kept locks of your hair in envelopes and would periodically compare them for colour. And there's a line from your father, 'Wuther it. Dozy article, saving hair'¹⁵⁰.

AB

Yes well 'wuther' is one of my dad's words and I wasn't sure, very often, even now I don't know what's dialect and what's real, what's standard English. 'Oh your dad's wuthered it', means your dad has thrown it away. It's a kind of word, a sort of windy gust that gets rid of rubbish. That's what that is, I don't know if it was our word or a normal dialect word. 'Splother' is another one that I always think Daddy invented, but whether he did or not, I don't know.

WRITER

My father was born and brought up in Warrington, on the other side of the hill, and uses words that I've grown up with that I don't know, that must be from Lancashire. If someone's having an argument, or fight, he'll say, they're having a good old 'four-by-two'.

AB

I think it just gives some sort of surface to language, some roughness.

WRITER

I've heard you say before that you wished you'd been bolder in your work and I just wonder what you mean by that?

¹⁵⁰ Alan Bennett, *Hymn and Cocktail Sticks: Two Recollections* (London: Faber & Faber, 2012), p. 106.

AB

Well I think about Orton, the way Orton wrote, well that was the way he was, he wrote a wonderful diary from about the age of 14. It took me ages to learn how to write a diary even. And also in a way, I wish I had been bolder, but at the same time if I had been, it would mean that the lid would have come off the pot and there would have been less pressure to do anything. Do you see what I mean? It's *Habeas Corpus*, for instance, if you were openly gay, I wouldn't have written that because it's a play all about sex and desire and so on. And it only works because it's repressed, so in that sense I don't regret it. The thing which really is relevant to what you're doing is the fact that (partly due to me, but really because it's what he wants) my brother is censored totally.

WRITER

I was going to ask about that.

AB

Yes, my brother is censored totally. I said to him when we were doing *Cocktail Sticks*, I've written this thing, do you want me to put you into it, or even to refer to you, and he absolutely didn't want me to, so that's why he's not in. He doesn't feel badly about it. In a sense he's been really so selfless about it. And his version of our parents would be very different to mine, but that's cos I was at home much later than he was. He left home at 18 to go into the RAF and never came back, as it were. Whereas I didn't leave home properly until I was about 30. So my view of them is very different to his. He's never wanted to be acknowledged even. He comes to the first nights and all that.

WRITER

I wondered if you didn't include him because that was sort of 'classified', or 'out of bounds'?

AB

No, not at all. I would have found it difficult to include him, but at the same time, I felt conscious that...and nobody's ever questioned me closely about him, but he doesn't want to be mentioned and that's fine. But then it's what writers do, isn't it? Someone has said it's no fun having a writer in the family, cos you're always watching out for stuff and telling stories and giving his or her version of events. Of course, this puts the backs up of other people, but he's been very, very good about it.

WRITER

Eighty percent of this PhD is a creative project, so I've written a screenplay about the making of an autobiographical radio play. In the screenplay, the writer invites his family into the studio to watch the recording. So on one side of the glass you have the writer, his mother and father and sister and on the other side you have the actors playing the different roles.

AB

That's a good idea. I like that.

WRITER

Then the family begin to dispute the writer's version of what happened - his 'truth'. And you have the actors coming up and asking the father, for instance, advice on how to play him. And you also see how things change, little by little, bits are altered as the director and the cast discuss the script.

AB

Do the parents start knocking on the window?! Sounds really good does that.

WRITER

Thank you. Well whether it'll ever be made, I'm not sure. We'll have to see.

AB

Oh well I hope so.

There is a pause. ALAN BENNETT glances at the clock on the mantelpiece.

AB

What time's your train?

CUT TO:

CAPTION:

RADIO ADAPTATION

From: **Richard Monks**
Subject: The Dead Room
Date: 25 October 2016 16:48:36 GMT+01:00
To: James Cook

Hi James,

Hope all's well. Just wondering how you got on the other day with the Commissioning Editor and whether there's any news about *The Dead Room*...

Richard

From: **James Cook**
Subject: RE: Meeting
Date: 28 October 2016 11:35:24 GMT+01:00
To: Richard Monks

Hi Richard,

Sorry not to get back to you earlier. He didn't go for it, I'm afraid. I gave him a couple of options and he's gone for something else.

I think we should keep it in our back pocket though for the next round which will be in the Spring. But sorry it didn't get through this time.

James

EXT. STREET DAY

The WRITER walks down the steps as ALAN BENNETT closes the door behind him. He heads back along the street towards the park, the way he came. A small crowd has gathered on the corner. The WRITER stops to see what's going on.

WRITER

What is it?

PASSER-BY

Cat.

A tabby cat lies on the road. Although unmarked, it is clearly dead. A taxi driver stands over it.

DRIVER

I didn't see it. Just ran out in front of me.

Another man picks up the cat and carries it to the side of the road.

WRITER

What are you going to do with it?

The man shrugs. The taxi driver gets back into his cab and drives off. The crowd disperses. The WRITER looks down at the dead cat lying on the worn verge. He takes a picture with his phone and walks on.

INT. EUSTON STATION DAY

The WRITER sits on a bench on the busy concourse. He takes the mini-disk recorder from his bag and plugs in a pair of headphones. He puts them on and presses 'PLAY'. The recording of the Upgrade meeting is heard.

TUTOR 1

...Of course glass is another manifestation of cinematic effect.

WRITER

Sorry.

TUTOR 1

Glass. I mean you only have to walk through the town centre to see yourself superimposed on a shop window - like a mirror. And there are mirrors throughout this script - both literally (John sees himself in a never-ending series of mirrors in the hotel bathroom, for instance) and in terms of its nested structure. And of course there's the window too into the recording studio - which, in itself, is a framing device - they're looking through at the cast - at a play about their lives. And the curious thing is that you can always see yourself in the glass - especially in a lit room - so you have the characters watching themselves being represented by actors, whilst being projected onto that image.

WRITER

It reminds me of Michael Donaghy's poem, 'Black Ice and Rain'. There's a line in there...I can't remember exactly how it goes.

SUPERVISOR

'Since then, each night contains all others, /nested mirror-within-mirror, stretching back from then/to here and now...'

TUTOR 2

Yes. Structurally it's very similar.

TUTOR 1

And the other thing I must say about the script.

(MORE)

(CONT.)

I usually find scripts incredibly difficult to read but this was incredibly compelling and I'm not just saying that to say something nice at the end - but I read on - and I think that part of the gratification...all text gratifies the reader in some way - but the effect of reading this, for me, was that I made the film and because I was able to assemble coherence from it I got a real deep level of gratification from it - more so perhaps than if you'd written it as a novel - and I find that really interesting - the three-dimensional assemblage that goes on in the mind when you read something like this, it's an intensified level of collusion between the reader and the author.

So, listen - this is all good - you've submitted a screenplay as is the requirement - all in good style. We think it should all move forward now - we're not going to be difficult about it...

Destinations appear on the large departures board. Pixilated orange squares on the black screen - a matrix of flickering colour. Passengers stand beneath it staring up at the train times. The WRITER watches as the columns clear before platform numbers appear. The camera tracks slowly in on his face until we see his eye in extreme close up - the patterning across his iris - his pupil contracts. He blinks. Black. An announcement is heard over the tannoy.

ANNOUNCER

Platform 3 for the 13:30 Virgin train to Glasgow Central, calling at Warrington Bank Quay, Wigan North Western, Preston, Lancaster, Oxenholme the Lake District, Penrith, Carlisle and Glasgow Central.

From: Paul (Creative Writing) Farley
Subject: Conclusion?
Date: 30 March 2017 16:48:36 GMT+01:00
To: Richard Monks

Hello Richard,

The Conclusion question is a big one. I don't really want you to close with a short chapter called 'Conclusion', or anything so explicit or obvious, but there might be a way of adding a little sense of how you've drawn different strands of reading, examples and reflection together in order to find a way out of your own drama? It might be possible to have something here exploring 'the sense of an ending'. How the screenplay, and indeed the project, finds a suitable sense of conclusion, whether that is open-ended or snapping shut. I think poetry might be able to help you here if you decide to, the way poems have closing cadences, the sense of tempo gathering to a point or slowing down or landing on an image of exit or departure. Think of the way 'Black Ice and Rain' does it? Or the way your screenplay itself ends with a litany of place names as the writer boards the train home, mirroring the way Davies' film begins with the Shipping Forecast. Maybe you could let us know you're doing that and perhaps how this felt like a suitable structural way of applying the brakes and finding a place to end?

I've no idea how much further work this will suggest, and these are only suggestions - you can ignore anything that seems redundant or useless.

All bests,

Paul

Shortly after completing *The Dead Room* I received a phone call one night from my older brother to say that my mother had died suddenly, and unexpectedly, from a cardiac arrest. She had been preparing supper when she fell to the floor. The paramedics arrived at the house within ten minutes and tried for almost an hour to resuscitate her. On hearing the news, I wanted to drive down South straight away to be with my family, but was persuaded to wait until the following morning. Stood on Oxenholme station at 6:00am, a crescent moon hanging in a cloudless night sky, I waited for the London train just as John had done in the recently completed script. I was embarking on the same journey that he had made. And, like him, I sat by the window in the warmth of the winter sun. I felt numb.

My three brothers, whom I hadn't spoken to in months, met me at the other end. Whatever petty differences there may have been between us were immediately forgotten; none of it mattered anymore.

I spent the next five days helping with arrangements - cooking for my father and drinking endless cups of tea. And, in that time, as I found myself looking through albums full of old family photographs, I couldn't help but reflect on the fiction I'd recently created. Although I maintained earlier in this thesis that I am not John, that his story is not mine, fiction, it seemed, had become a reality - the boundary between the two had blurred and I was reminded of Alan Bennett's words, that, as a writer, you don't put yourself into what you write, you find yourself there. I certainly never imagined that things would turn out this way.

Being back in the house in which I'd grown up, with its familiar décor, its polished furniture and the silence, broken only by chiming clocks, I felt my mother's presence everywhere. Her embroidery was still by the chair where she'd been sat only minutes before her death; the screwed-up ball of double-sided tape she'd discarded, fitting perfectly into the palm of my hand. A box of Christmas cards, ready to be sent, lay on the sitting room floor. A plastic tree leant against the wall, waiting to be put up in the hallway. Although it was still only November, true to character, she had everything organised. I tried desperately to grasp hold of whatever memories surfaced during those first few days. Some came easily, others eluded me; no matter how hard I tried to remember past events. I suppose, subconsciously, I knew that my own narrative might one day play out in this way; living so far from my parents it was inevitable. Perhaps that was why I wrote *The Dead Room*? I didn't imagine for one moment, however, that it would happen so soon. My mother was in relative good health. I just assumed we'd have more time.

My mother always took an interest in my writing and this project was no exception. 'You'll be relieved when it's all over, I bet,' she'd once said. And with her now gone it does feel as if it has finally reached some sort of conclusion. What began as an investigation into family history ends in my mother's room, looking through black and white studio portraits of her as a child; her eyes no different from when I saw her last, waving us off down the road.

Distant Voices, Still Lives, ends in much the same way as *The Dead Room*, neatly bookended with an exterior shot of Davies' childhood home; having begun with a funeral, he

concludes with a marriage. 'Black Ice and Rain', too, comes full circle by the final stanza. The tempo slows as the poem draws to a close and the narrator suggests he and his friend rejoin the other party guests, having returned to the 'here and now' after revealing his own tragic story. In the closing scenes of *The Lady in the Van*, Miss Shepherd has the last laugh as she ascends into Heaven in spectacular style, leaving behind a bemused Alan Bennett feeling somewhat used. Back in his study, he unpacks copies of his latest play about a writer and his relationship with a cantankerous old woman who ends up living in his driveway.

After my mother's funeral I found myself, once again, stood on the concourse at Euston Station scanning the departures board for the Glasgow train. And, as I waited in the same spot as I'd imagined John standing, the tannoy announced a litany of place names heading north. In truth, I can no longer remember the journey home.

Appendix

INQUEST

A five part series broadcast on BBC Radio 4, 17th - 21st November 2014.

Cast

Hannah	Katie Lyons
Stevens	Matt Stokoe
Jean	Claire Rushbrook
Nicola	Nisha Nayar
Mark	James Norton
Coroner	Philip Fox
Clerk	Mark Edel-Hunt
Lorna	Jane Slavin
Director	Sally Avens
Writer	Richard Monks

DAY 1

MONTAGE

We hear the rush of water from beneath the surface as strong currents drag a body downstream. The abstract sound of bubbles rising.

LORNA

I, Lorna Gibson, swear by Almighty
God that I will be faithful and
bear true allegiance to Her
Majesty Queen Elizabeth II...

We break the surface to hear dogs barking. An air-sea rescue helicopter hovers over-head. People search the riverbank.

LORNA

...I will, as in duty bound,
honestly and faithfully defend...

SEARCHER

Over here!

Beneath the swell the body crashes against submerged rocks.

LORNA

... against all enemies, and will
observe and obey all orders of Her
Majesty...

The distorted squark of a police radio. Rescue crews struggle to reach the blotted corpse.

RADIO

...Female. Caucasian. Aged between
20 and 30...

LORNA

...and of the generals and officers
set over me.

INT. COURT ROOM DAY

Heavy wooden doors open.

CLERK

All rise for Her Majesty's
coroner.

The court rise as the CORONER enters the room. The
CORONER begins.

CORONER

We're here today to complete the
inquest into the death of Gunner
Lorna Gibson. The point of an
inquest is to try and establish
exactly what happened. This is
not a trial, we're not here to
deal with compensation, or
apportion blame – we are simply
here to ascertain the facts. Was
this a tragic accident? or did
Lorna take her life by her own
actions? If that is the case,
then what were the causes that led
her to do so?

Firstly I'm going to deal with the
post-mortem report which gives the
cause of death as drowning. Bloods
were also sent for analysis and
found to contain 190ml/per of
alcohol, twice that of the legal
driving limit.

Now if at any point any of you
wish to leave you may of course do
so, but I know that people do find
it beneficial to hear the evidence
all the way through, however
distressing that may be.

Could we have the first witness
please?

HANNAH takes the stand.

CORONER (CONT.)

If you could please read from the card.

She takes the card from the CLERK and reads from it.

HANNAH

I solemnly and sincerely declare and affirm that the evidence I shall give will be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

CORONER

Could you please give your full name?

HANNAH

Hannah Davies.

CORONER

I believe you are no longer serving in the army. Can you tell me your rank when you left and where you were serving?

HANNAH

Private. Felton Barracks.

CORONER

Thank you. Now before we get to the tragic events of March 8th this year I'd like to take you back a bit to when you and Lorna first met. It was on basic training, I believe.

HANNAH

That's right.

CORONER

Tell me about that.

HANNAH

Well we just clicked – straight away, pretty much – both liked the same sort of things – music. I didn't really know what I wanted to do – but she did, she was determined to get on – do well.

CORONER

What was it that appealed to her about the army?

HANNAH

It was all she'd ever wanted to do - since she was young. Her FATHER was in the army.

CORONER

And how would you describe her, as a character, at this time.

HANNAH

Confident. Easy going. She never let anything bother her - all the stuff you had to put up with.

CORONER

What sort of things?

HANNAH

Getting balled out. Having senior NCOs pulling your kit out your locker for no reason.

CORONER

This was during phase one training?

HANNAH

Yes. Blokes making comments.

CORONER

What sort of comments?

HANNAH

About your looks. Your figure. You got it all the time, in one form or another. Lads mags. Pictures on the walls. They just expect you to put up with it.

CORONER

And this was something Lorna experienced as well.

HANNAH

Yes.

CORONER

From anyone in particular?

HANNAH

Sergeant Stewart. He was the worst. He was one of the instructors.

CORONER

In your statement you say that he picked on Lorna especially.

HANNAH

Yes.

CORONER

Did she complain?

HANNAH

No. She knew that if she made a fuss it'd count against her.

CORONER

In the file in front of you you'll find a copy of the MoD guidelines for dealing with harassment and bullying (2004), with an introduction by the then Secretary of State for Defence. 'I accept that there is a fine line between unnecessarily overbearing behaviour and the robust approach to training and discipline that the armed forces have to take to prepare their people for the harsh environment in which they operate.' In your view did the treatment Lorna received cross that line?

HANNAH

Definitely. Definitely.

CORONER

How was Lorna with discipline, in general?

HANNAH

Fine - so long as it was fair. She did whatever they threw at her - and did it well. Even the small stuff - like ironing.

CORONER

Ironing?

HANNAH

You had to iron your combats in a certain way – with a straight crease all the way down – she was a perfectionist. If it weren't for her I'd never have made it past locker inspection.

CORONER

And from Pirbright you went onto your phase two together.

HANNAH

Yeah. For ordinance training and gunnery, before moving to the regiment.

CORONER

Which is when, as I understand it, things began to change.

HANNAH

It just felt different, from the minute we got off the train. We weren't top of the pile anymore. They were all veterans – all been to Afghan, Iraq – we had to prove ourselves all over again.

CORONER

Presumably, though, you had some idea of what to expect?

HANNAH

In terms of training, yes. But I mean whereas before you'd get comments – sexist remarks – this was different.

CORONER

Were you able to speak to anyone about it?

HANNAH

Not really. They said their doors were always open but you kept things to yourself.

CORONER

What about the Unit Welfare Officer? Warrant Officer Stevens.

HANNAH

No one went to him.

CORONER

Why not?

HANNAH

He wasn't the sort you could talk to.

CORONER

OK. Moving on to the events of April 21st 2013. You have your statement in front of you?

HANNAH

Yes.

CORONER

Could you tell me what happened?

HANNAH

We'd all been drinking in the naffy – the blokes, especially, were pretty rowdy. I was on guard duty the next morning so I'd left to get ready for bed – have a shower. And as I was coming out I heard laughing, disappearing down the other end of the corridor – I couldn't see exactly who it was. You get blokes coming into the block all the time. And I get back to the cubicle I find Lorna sat on her bed in tears – and at first she wouldn't say anything. Tried to brush it off – saying it didn't matter. But I knew she wouldn't be in that state if it was nothing – so I sat down, put my arm round her and just waited – let her calm down. Eventually she tells me what happened. Turns out one of them, one of the officers, had come in with a hard on.

CORONER

Into her cubicle?

HANNAH

Yes. And ordered her to...

She pauses – embarrassed.

CORONER

You say in your statement –
'perform a sexual act on him.'

HANNAH

Yes.

CORONER

And who was this?

HANNAH

Staff Sergeant Stewart.

CORONER

Whom you knew, of course, from
basic training?

HANNAH

He'd been transferred and
promoted. She told him to get
lost – and he left. They all
thought it was hilarious, the
others – jeering him on from out
in the corridor.

CORONER

Did she report the incident to the
chain of command?

HANNAH

No.

CORONER

Why not?

HANNAH

It would've just been her word
against his.

CORONER

But there were witnesses. The
police would've had to have taken
it seriously.

HANNAH

The police wouldn't have even been involved. It would've been investigated internally, by the chain of command. If someone flashes at you, or pervs at you in the shower – it's the commanding officer that deals with it. It's up to him what happens – or not, as the case maybe.

CORONER

Did you, yourself, see any of this take place?

HANNAH

No.

CORONER

So this account of the incident was as Lorna described it to you? It came from nobody else?

HANNAH

No. But I mean I've no reason to disbelieve her.

CORONER

And this happened, you say, three months before your first deployment to Afghanistan.

HANNAH

Yes.

CORONER

And what bearing did it have on how Lorna felt about that first tour?

HANNAH

It made her more nervous than she would've been. You've got to trust people – know that they'll be there for you, otherwise you've had it.

CORONER

According to your statement you say that once out in Helmand Lorna settled into a routine.

HANNAH

You do – sleeping – sunbathing,
between attacks. Gym.

CORONER

And in terms of how she was in
herself.

HANNAH

She kept strong. Amazingly.
Sometimes we'd take heavy incoming
for hours at a time. You've got
to keep it together, physically as
well as mentally.

CORONER

And had there been anything wrong
she would have told you?

HANNAH

Yes.

CORONER

What was Lorna's specific role
within the unit?

HANNAH

She was responsible for the ammo –
ammunition – setting fuses
etc...keeping the gun crews supplied
with shells during bombardments.

CORONER

But she would also join patrols?

HANNAH

If needed.

CORONER

Was that normal – to go out with
infantry soldiers?

HANNAH

Yeah. If they were searching
compounds where there were women
they'd need a female presence.

CORONER

And she received a commendation, I understand.

HANNAH

Yes. Lorna's unit came under heavy fire – RPGs, small arms, one of the guys got hit. Lorna risked her life to get him back – could have easily got herself killed.

CORONER

So when it came to the end of the tour – presumably Lorna was looking forward to going home?

HANNAH

We all were.

CORONER

Tell me what happened then, on your way back to the UK? January 19th.

HANNAH

We flew to Cyprus first for a 24-hour stop over – a chance to relax – few beers, bit of sun before seeing our families again.

CORONER

And how would you describe Lorna's mood?

HANNAH

Happy. Relieved. There was a group of them in the mess after the CSE show...

CORONER

CSE?

HANNAH

Combined Services Entertainment – for the troops. Staff Sergeant Stewart and other NCOs were in there playing drinking games. I'd had enough by then so went back to our billet – but Lorna stayed on. And I don't know what it was – what woke me – a noise, it sounded like an animal almost – crying.

HANNAH (CONT.)

I looked at my watch it was two o'clock. I got up and walked down the corridor. I could hear water running. No one else around. I opened the door to the showers and found Lorna sat on the floor with no clothes on - desperately washing herself - soap everywhere - trying to get rid of the smell of him. I switched off the tap, put a towel round her. Couldn't make out what she was saying hardly. Shaking like a leaf. So I just held her - tight as I could - I knew it could only be one thing. He'd asked her back to his room. She'd thought there'd be others - a whole crowd.

CORONER

This was Staff Sergeant Stewart?

HANNAH

Yes. She thought that if she didn't go - it'd be worse - that he'd take it out on her somehow. And by the time she realized it was just her it was too late.

CORONER

But she didn't report the assault straight away?

HANNAH

No.

CORONER

Why not?

HANNAH

Same reason as before - she knew it'd be the end of her career.

CORONER

But you persuaded her to go to the O.C.

HANNAH

Captain Thompson. 2 I.C.

CORONER

I beg your pardon. Yes. And this was once you'd got back to the UK.

HANNAH

I told her she had to this time. Stewart needed to be taught a lesson.

CORONER

Staff Sergeant Stewart. Those were your sentiments, or Lorna's?

HANNAH

He thought he could treat people like dirt.

The CORONER pauses.

CORONER

Prior to Afghanistan, you were sanctioned, I believe, for misconduct. Is that right?

HANNAH

What?

CORONER

If you could just answer the question.

HANNAH

Why?

CORONER

There was an incident in a local bar involving threatening behaviour towards a senior officer, which resulted in a period of detention - something that now appears on your army record.

HANNAH

It had nothing to do with Lorna. She wasn't even there.

CORONER

No. But it was Staff Sergeant Stewart who reported the matter to the chain of command. According to the military police report you threatened him with a broken bottle.

HANNAH

I tripped and fell.

CORONER

The two of you had been in a brief relationship, as I understand it, which he had just ended.

HANNAH

It was an accident. He knew damn well.

CORONER

If I could draw your attention to his statement, he goes on to say that you had seen him with another woman and become abusive.

HANNAH

I don't see how this is relevant.

CORONER

To what extent did your feelings towards Staff Sergeant Stewart influence Lorna's decision to report the sexual assault?

HANNAH

Are you saying she shouldn't have done?

CORONER

I'm simply trying to establish the degree of pressure Lorna may have felt at the time to make a statement – something that she was clearly in two minds to do.

HANNAH

I just told her that she'd regret it if she didn't. If he could do it once he could do it again.

CORONER

In another witness statement a colleague describes an argument between the two of you (that took place some days later) where Lorna accused you of trying to take over her life, during which you became angry.

HANNAH

No.

CORONER

'No' to the argument, or 'no' to becoming angry?

HANNAH

I was frustrated, not angry. All she could think about was her career.

CORONER

And did this have anything to do with your falling out?

HANNAH

No. It was nothing to do with that. I'd applied for a transfer - Royal Logistic Corps - a while before.

CORONER

And had you told her?

HANNAH

Not until then, no. It never seemed the right moment. And I didn't think I'd get it - not so quickly anyway. They must've been desperate to get rid of me.

CORONER

When did you find out?

HANNAH

Just after Lorna reported the assault?

CORONER

I imagine it must've come as quite a blow to her?

HANNAH

Yes. I think she felt like I was deserting her. She said as much - leaving her to cope on her own. I told her that we'd be able to text and keep in touch on Facebook but...

CORONER

Was there anyone else in the unit she could turn to for support?

HANNAH

Not really.

CORONER

Chain of command?

HANNAH

No.

CORONER

Welfare?

HANNAH mumbles.

HANNAH

No.

CORONER

Could you speak up please? For the tape.

HANNAH

No one.

CORONER

And how would you describe her mood at this point?

HANNAH

Low. Very low.

CORONER

Did she ever talk about harming herself?

HANNAH

Once, in Afghan. I don't know what had happened exactly - she wouldn't tell me - but she wished she could just end it all.

CORONER

She said that?

HANNAH

I don't remember the exact words.

CORONER

What did you do?

HANNAH

I told her to pray. I'm not a particularly religious person, in fact I'm not really religious at all, but sometimes, if you've tried everything else...

CORONER

And do you know if she took your advice?

HANNAH

I don't know.

CORONER

You received a General Discharge from the army in September this year. Was there any particular reason why you decided to leave?

HANNAH

It just wasn't for me.

CORONER

You've since enrolled on a catering course, I gather.

HANNAH

That's right.

CORONER

And as far as Lorna was concerned – did you keep in touch after you left the regiment?

HANNAH

We'd text each other every now and again – see how things were. Not so often though.

CORONER

When was the last time you were in contact with her?

HANNAH

Just before she died. She texted – upset – to say Staff Sergeant Stewart had just returned from leave and was behaving as if nothing had happened. I texted back but she didn't reply.

CORONER

And how did you hear of her death?

HANNAH

Mark, her boyfriend, rang.

CORONER

How did you feel?

HANNAH

I can't say I was surprised.

END OF EPISODE

DAY 2

MONTAGE

We hear the rush of water from beneath the surface as strong currents drag a body downstream. The abstract sound of bubbles rising.

LORNA

I, Lorna Gibson, swear by Almighty
God that I will be faithful and
bear true allegiance to Her
Majesty Queen Elizabeth II...

We break the surface to hear dogs barking. An air-sea rescue helicopter hovers over-head. People search the riverbank.

LORNA

...I will, as in duty bound,
honestly and faithfully defend...

SEARCHER

Over here!

Beneath the swell the body crashes against submerged rocks.

LORNA

... against all enemies, and will
observe and obey all orders of Her
Majesty...

The distorted squark of a police radio. Rescue crews struggle to reach the blotted corpse.

RADIO

...Female. Caucasian. Aged between
20 and 30...

LORNA

...and of the generals and officers
set over me.

INT. COURT ROOM DAY

Heavy wooden doors open.

CLERK

All rise for Her Majesty's
coroner.

The court rises as the CORONER enters the large room.

CORONER

Could we have the next witness
please?

STEVENS takes the stand.

CLERK

If you could take the book in your
right hand and read from the card.

STEVENS takes the bible from the CLERK and reads from the
card.

STEVENS

I swear by almighty God that I
shall tell the truth, the whole
truth and nothing but the truth.

CORONER

Would you state your name, rank
and where you are currently
serving.

STEVENS

Terence Angus Stevens, Warrant
Officer, North Hill.

CORONER

I understand that you were the
Unit Welfare Officer at the time
Lorna joined the regiment.

STEVENS

That's correct.

CORONER

And what did the role encompass?

STEVENS

It was my job to provide confidential welfare support to the soldiers, families and the Chain of Command, in order to help alleviate any potential issues associated with military service.

CORONER

Such as?

STEVENS

Social Integration. Help individuals settle into their new surroundings. Support them during periods of separation.

CORONER

Unit Welfare Officers are not trained counsellors though, as such?

STEVENS

No. But if necessary we're able to refer cases onto others, such as the Army Welfare Service (which is separate from the unit) or Victim Support.

CORONER

And this was something you felt able to do.

STEVENS

Absolutely.

CORONER

So you were the first port of call for junior NCOs experiencing problems?

STEVENS

Yes. Although individuals can go to anyone senior to them within their chain of command, whether that be a Lance-Bombadier, or their Platoon Commander.

CORONER

And typically these problems might include bullying, or sexual harassment?

STEVENS

That's right.

CORONER

And when did you first encounter Lorna?

STEVENS

In a welfare capacity?

CORONER

Yes.

STEVENS

Not until the allegations of sexual assault were made, but obviously I came across her some time before that.

CORONER

We've heard from other witnesses that Lorna found the transition from phase 2 training difficult.

STEVENS

That wasn't something I was aware of.

CORONER

She never complained to you about receiving unwanted sexual attention? Either verbal, or physical?

STEVENS

No.

CORONER

And as the officer responsible for welfare, how proactive would you say you were?

STEVENS

I'm not sure I understand the question.

CORONER

Well, if you saw somebody, or heard of someone, who was having difficulties, would you approach them, generally speaking?

STEVENS

Of course.

CORONER

And you saw nothing unusual in Lorna's behavior?

STEVENS

Not particularly. No. She seemed no different to any of the others. She joined us shortly before deployment – things were running quite 'hot'. It's a time of increased pressure – workload – it's demanding preparing for theatre – especially so first time around.

CORONER

From a welfare point of view, given the potential problems that may arise, do you keep an especially close eye on new recruits?

STEVENS

All recruits are trained on how to make a complaint as part of their basic training.

CORONER

That wasn't my question.

STEVENS

They know where to find me if necessary.

CORONER

It's been said by other witnesses that junior NCOs, particularly female personnel, often find it difficult to confide in senior officers within their chain of command.

STEVENS

That's not my experience.

CORONER

How would you know?

STEVENS

There were never any concerns raised.

CORONER

If I could take you to a statement in your file from Ms. Davies, Gunner Davies, as she was then, describes welfare in the unit as a 'joke'. 'People were reluctant to go to the chain of command – they knew nothing would happen.'

STEVENS

With respect, she would say that.

CORONER

Why?

STEVENS

Well we've already heard, by her own admission, that she wasn't suited to army life.

CORONER

I believe you once described Ms. Davies as 'vexatious'.

STEVENS

She had a reputation for making unsubstantiated claims.

CORONER

And in this case, as regards her views on welfare?

STEVENS

It's not a view I recognize.

CORONER

Do you accept that certain junior NCOs – those at the end of the chain might have felt intimidated?

STEVENS

I see no reason why they should have been.

CORONER

If I could draw your attention to JSP 763 – The MOD Bullying and Harassment Complaints Procedure. Updated 1st July 2013. You have it in front of you I believe?

STEVENS

Yes, sir.

CORONER

P.8 section 1.6. 'Complainants should not feel discouraged from making bullying or harassment complaint for fear of negative consequences and should be reassured that they will be protected against victimization. Commanding officers should be aware that having a bullying and/or harassment complaint made within their command is not a sign of failure; the failure is not taking appropriate and timely action. Did you see such complaints as a sign of failure?

STEVENS

No, sir. I did not.

CORONER

Did you feel that they might be perceived as such by those senior to you in the chain of command? and that consequently you discouraged complainants from coming forward?

STEVENS

Absolutely not. No.

CORONER

We've heard, again from Ms. Davies, about an incident of sexual harassment that is alleged to have taken place on April 21st 2013 involving Staff Sergeant Stewart. Did you know anything about this at the time?

STEVENS

No, sir.

CORONER

It's claimed that a number of officers followed Stewart into the female accommodation block where he ordered Gunner Gibson to perform a sexual act on him.

STEVENS

I've heard about it since, but not at the time. No.

CORONER

But you were in the mess that night?

STEVENS

Earlier, yes. It was quiz night.

CORONER

But you left early, according to your statement.

STEVENS

That's right.

CORONER

And your accommodation is roughly how far from the female block?

STEVENS

Just next door.

CORONER

Near enough then, to hear things pretty clearly.

STEVENS

Yes.

CORONER

I believe in the past you've complained about music being played by female soldiers keeping you awake at night.

STEVENS

That's correct.

CORONER

Yet on this occasion, according to your statement, you didn't hear anything.

STEVENS

No.

CORONER

Other witnesses described the men as 'laughing loudly and shouting obscenities'.

STEVENS

I went straight to bed.

CORONER

And the incident wasn't reported to you either?

STEVENS

If it had been I'd have filed a report and the H.I.O. would've investigated.

CORONER

The Harassment Investigation Officer?

STEVENS

Yes.

CORONER

Who would've then reported to the O.C., Major Lee.

STEVENS

That's correct.

CORONER

Why do you think Lorna didn't report the incident?

STEVENS

I couldn't say.

CORONER

Might one reason have been that she felt embarrassed to go to a male officer?

STEVENS

I couldn't say.

CORONER

Knowing that the matter would be discussed by her chain of command.

STEVENS

I couldn't say.

CORONER

You knew Staff Sergeant Stewart though, didn't you?

STEVENS

Yes.

CORONER

Socially, as well as professionally.

STEVENS

Sir.

CORONER

You were in Northern Ireland together?

STEVENS

That's correct.

CORONER

In the same section, I believe.

STEVENS

Yes.

CORONER

Where he was your second-in-command.

STEVENS

Yes.

CORONER

A soldier whom, according to your statement, you respected and relied on heavily during two previous tours of Afghanistan.

STEVENS

Yes. And I stand by that. Absolutely.

CORONER

You also describe the unit as being close-knit. I would've thought it was difficult not to pick up on gossip.

STEVENS

There's a difference between gossip and facts. People say all sorts.

CORONER

So you did hear something?

STEVENS

I didn't say that.

CORONER

Did you confront Staff Sergeant Stewart at any stage about the allegations?

STEVENS

There were no allegations. No formal complaint was made.

CORONER

By which you mean, in writing?

STEVENS

Correct.

CORONER

Did you check on Lorna, though, all the same?

STEVENS

Where we are aware of sexual harassment, or bullying we deal with it robustly.

CORONER

Internally.

STEVENS

The army has a zero tolerance policy. However, we can't simply act on rumour and hearsay. If harassment has taken place the victim must come forward.

CORONER

If I can draw your attention again to JSP 763. Page 7 1.5 - MOD Policy. 'They (the Chain of command) must be vigilant and proactive in preventing bullying and harassment from occurring within their units (rather than waiting for complaints to arise.) If it does occur they must have the moral courage to deal with it properly and promptly, *whether or not a complaint has been made.*' Why do you think she didn't report the incident at the time?

STEVENS

I've no idea.

CORONER

Could it be a lack of trust in the chain of command?

STEVENS

If that was the case then her mistrust was unjustified.

CORONER

In your opinion?

STEVENS

Obviously.

CORONER

Let's move on then. Two months later the regiment was deployed to Helmand.

STEVENS

That's correct.

CORONER

And Lorna worked well by all accounts, in terms of performing her duties.

STEVENS

Yes.

CORONER

Did she have any difficulties with other members of the unit?

STEVENS

Not that I was aware of.

CORONER

She didn't talk to you about any worries?

STEVENS

No.

CORONER

Were you aware that she had spoken to the company padre whilst in Helmand?

STEVENS

No. I wasn't.

CORONER

Apparently she had continued concerns about Staff Sergeant Stewart and complained of further unwanted sexual attention. Witnesses say she spoke to the padre, who in turn reported his concerns to you. Yet these, it seems, were never flagged up. Do you recall such a conversation?

STEVENS

No.

CORONER

If I could take you to bundle 2, page 921 – we have a statement from the padre claiming to have spoken to you on 25rd September 2013. So this is just over half way through the tour. 'Spoke to Warrant Officer Stevens about Gunner Gibson who has been to see me several times. In the past she has been reluctant to report incidents of sexual harassment to her chain of command – fearful of the impact it may have on her future career. I attempted to reassure her that any complaint made would not be held against her. She was extremely tearful and talked about missing her boyfriend whom she had just spoken to on the telephone. Particularly concerned she may self-harm. Asked Warrant Officer Stevens whether she should be placed on SVRM register.'

STEVENS

I don't recall.

CORONER

You don't recall mention of the SVRM?

STEVENS

No. I don't recall the conversation.

CORONER

Would you tell us what the SVRM register is, please?

STEVENS

It's the Suicide Vulnerability Risk Management register. It's a tool that allows the chain of command to identify and manage those service personnel deemed to be at risk.

CORONER

And I understand it's not just used for those at risk of self-harm, or suicide.

STEVENS

That's right.

CORONER

So it can be used in the case of someone suffering from depression, PTSD, or stress, for example. Is that right?

STEVENS

If it's felt that it's appropriate. Yes, sir.

CORONER

And had this happened, in Lorna's case, proper assessments would've been made at the time? A Care Assessment Plan would've been put in place to consider the level of support, level of mentoring and she would have been referred up the Chain of Command to prevent things from escalating. She would also have been discussed at regular Unit Health and Welfare Committee meetings, for example. Monitored properly.

STEVENS

Had it been deemed necessary, yes.

CORONER

So there are proper procedures in place to deal with cases such as this? Cases like Lorna's.

STEVENS

Absolutely.

CORONER

Which rely heavily on effective communication within the chain of command.

STEVENS

Yes. But, as I say, at that stage, she hadn't reported any of this directly to me. I had no knowledge of any alleged harassment, sexual, or otherwise.

CORONER

Do you have any idea why that may have been?

STEVENS

No.

CORONER

Could there be a conflict of interests between the two roles you're tasked to perform? Disciplinarian and confidant.

STEVENS

It's not a problem I've ever encountered.

Pause.

CORONER

Moving forward then to January 19th 2014 – the day of your return to the UK. On your way back you stopped off briefly in Cyprus.

STEVENS

Yes.

CORONER

Where, as you know, Gunner Gibson alleged Staff Sergeant Stewart sexually assaulted her.

STEVENS

Yes.

CORONER

But yet again, for the third time in fact, she chose not to come to you, the Unit Welfare Officer, but went instead to the 2 I.C., Captain Reid.

STEVENS

That's correct. Who immediately informed the O.C.

CORONER

Major Lee, to whom she then made a formal complaint, with the help of an Assisting Officer. So given this trail of events, at what point did you finally make contact with Lorna?

STEVENS

The moment I heard. By then she'd been moved to the safe house where a number of meetings subsequently took place.

CORONER

And how was she when you saw her?

STEVENS

Very emotional. I think up until that point she'd been in shock and now that she'd told someone it was something of a release for her.

CORONER

Were you worried at that stage about the risk of her self-harming?

STEVENS

No. There was nothing to suggest suicidal thoughts, or anything of that nature.

CORONER

And had the military police been informed?

STEVENS

As soon as it became clear that this was an alleged serious sexual assault they were notified by the H.I.O. — who, incidentally, was outside of Lorna's immediate chain of command.

CORONER

But who, nevertheless, knew Staff Sergeant Stewart, I understand.

STEVENS

Possibly.

CORONER

And were you aware of threats
being made to Lorna at the time?

STEVENS

I appreciated there was a degree
of hostility in the unit, yes.
It's inevitable.

CORONER

Inevitable?

STEVENS realises he's spoken out of turn.

STEVENS

He was a popular officer.

CORONER

Amongst the men?

STEVENS

Yes.

CORONER

And Gunner Gibson? How would you
describe her?

STEVENS

An able soldier.

CORONER

Can I ask you turn to p.942 of the
file in front of you. A witness
statement, referring to a
conversation between yourself and
Staff Stewart, that's alleged to
have taken place shortly after the
first incident, in the female
accommodation block. If you could
read the highlighted section,
please.

STEVENS

'Warrant Officer Stevens told Staff Sergeant Stewart not to worry, that if Lorna reported anything he'd set her straight. It's what they do. Get drunk, then cry rape.'

END OF EPISODE

DAY 3

MONTAGE

We hear the rush of water from beneath the surface as strong currents drag a body downstream. The abstract sound of bubbles rising.

LORNA

I, Lorna Gibson, swear by Almighty
God that I will be faithful and
bear true allegiance to Her
Majesty Queen Elizabeth II...

We break the surface to hear dogs barking. An air-sea rescue helicopter hovers over-head. People search the riverbank.

LORNA

...I will, as in duty bound,
honestly and faithfully defend...

SEARCHER

Over here!

Beneath the swell the body crashes against submerged rocks.

LORNA

... against all enemies, and will
observe and obey all orders of Her
Majesty...

The distorted squark of a police radio. Rescue crews struggle to reach the blotted corpse.

RADIO

...Female. Caucasian. Aged between
20 and 30...

LORNA

...and of the generals and officers
set over me.

INT. COURT ROOM DAY

Heavy wooden doors open.

CORONER'S OFFICER
All rise for Her Majesty's
coroner.

The court rises as the CORONER enters the room.

Could we have the next witness
please?

JEAN takes the stand.

If you could take the book in your
right hand and read from the card.

She takes the bible from the CLERK and reads from the
card.

JEAN
I swear by almighty God that I
shall tell the truth, the whole
truth and nothing but the truth.

CORONER
Would you state your full name,
please.

JEAN
Jean Elizabeth Gibson.

CORONER
And you are Lorna's MOTHER?

JEAN
Yes.

CORONER
What sort of person was Lorna?

JEAN

She was a happy, positive person. Bright. Determined. Once she put her mind to something that was it - there was no stopping her - even when she was little.

CORONER

And what sort of relationship did you have with your daughter?

JEAN

We got on well. Mostly. I mean she could be incredibly stubborn. Took after her Dad in that respect. Very similar.

CORONER

I understand he was in the army as well.

JEAN

Twenty-two years with the Green berets. Which is why Lorna was so keen to join. Grown up with it.

CORONER

And was this something you encouraged?

JEAN

It didn't really matter what I thought.

CORONER

In your statement you mention the passing out parade - feeling proud.

JEAN

Yes. I didn't think I would be, but seeing her in her dress uniform for the first time - beaming away. She looked so happy. Mike videoed the whole thing, of course - all of them marching to the band. He used to watch it over and over again.

CORONER

We know from Lorna's diary and from other witnesses that she had issues with one of the officers at the camp.

JEAN

Sergeant Stewart. Yes.

CORONER

Did she ever mention him to you?

JEAN

I know she was anxious about joining the regiment. She'd heard he was transferring too. There were rumours she'd be in his platoon.

CORONER

What was it about him she didn't like? Did she say?

JEAN

In the beginning he'd single her out for extra drills. She was just as fit as everyone else. She proved as much in Afghanistan.

CORONER

And how did you feel while she was away on that first tour?

JEAN

You try not to think about it too much. If worrying helped, then I'd worry – but it doesn't – so while she was away I just tried to get on with it as best I could.

CORONER

Did she call?

JEAN

Once a week.

CORONER

And how did she sound, generally?

JEAN

It was hard to tell - we never had long. Mike was always there, fidgeting, wanting me to hand her over.

CORONER

He'd served in the Falklands?

JEAN

And Northern Ireland. I know it's different now, but he knew what it was like - could give her advice.

CORONER

Presumably, though, he'd have told you if anything was wrong.

JEAN

You'd have thought so.

CORONER

We've heard evidence, from various witnesses, about two incidents of sexual harassment in particular that are alleged to have taken place, prior to Cyprus. One in the barracks, here in the UK, involving Staff Sergeant Stewart and one in Afghanistan, after which Lorna spoke to the company padre. Were you aware of either of these?

JEAN

No.

CORONER

Or any other incidents that may have taken place?

JEAN

She never said a word.

She breaks down.

CORONER

I realize this is distressing for you. Are you OK to carry on?

JEAN

I'm sorry.

CORONER

That's OK. Did she ever give the slightest indication that she was unhappy?

JEAN

There was one time – just before her birthday and I remember thinking she seemed quieter than normal but I just assumed she was homesick. Of course she wouldn't say.

CORONER

Did your husband comment at all?

JEAN

Not really. But then if anything was wrong he'd just dismiss it anyway. It was the Taliban I worried about – IEDs – not our lot. I just assumed they were taking care of her.

CORONER

When did you first hear of the incident that allegedly took place in Cyprus.

JEAN

About a week after she'd got back I had a phone call – which I thought was odd as I'd have expected her to ring pretty much the minute they landed at Brise Norton to say she was safe – that everything was OK. Mike was out – which was the only reason I got to talk to her properly. I could tell that she'd been crying.

CORONER

Did she say what had happened?

JEAN

Just that she'd been to see
Captain Thompson, who'd exploded
at her – accused her of making it
up – of trying to ruin an
officer's career.

CORONER

And what was Lorna's reaction?

JEAN

She couldn't believe it. Something
like that happens and you're made
to feel it's your fault. He told
her to think very carefully before
she did anything. That it was a
serious allegation she was making.

CORONER

Lorna told you this?

JEAN

Yes. Yes. She was on the phone
for over two hours. It was the
first time I had any idea what was
going on. She said she'd tried to
tell Mike a couple of times, once,
when she was on basic training,
when Stewart had come onto her,
and once in Afghanistan when
things had got worse.

CORONER

We know from Lorna's diary that
after her initial meeting with
Captain Thompson he then referred
it up to Major Toyn, the O.C.

JEAN

He had no choice. She wasn't
going to let it go.

CORONER

And with the help of an assisting
officer she made a formal written
complaint.

JEAN

Yes.

CORONER

That must've taken a lot of courage.

JEAN

She told me later that her hand had been shaking so much she could barely hold the pen properly. The thing was they all knew him, Stewart. Even the assisting officer was a mate of his.

CORONER

And at this point she was transferred from her accommodation to a safe house.

JEAN

She couldn't face going back to the platoon. Everyone gossiping.

CORONER

That was her perception?

JEAN

Yes.

CORONER

And once the complaint had been made, the RMP duty officer was informed who, in turn, passed it over to the SIB to investigate.

JEAN

Yes.

CORONER

And Lorna was then given two weeks compassionate leave.

JEAN

Yes.

CORONER

That must have been a relief – to have her home.

JEAN

You've no idea. Mike was usually the one who'd collect her from the station – get the low down on the way back – but this time he had something on, or so he said. So I went instead. Anyway I got caught up in traffic, going round the one way system, so by the time I got there I was about ten minutes late. Dumped the car where the buses park and ran in – looked around but she was nowhere to be seen. Thought maybe she'd caught a taxi, or something. Then I heard a voice behind me – I turned around and there she was. This pale, washed out little thing. She looked awful. Almost a stone lighter. Dreadful skin. I'd run straight past her. Hadn't even recognized her.

CORONER

Did she talk about what had happened? Give any detail?

JEAN

Not straight away. And I didn't press her either. I thought, in a way, the best thing for her was to have a break – a complete break. We got back – had a proper meal. (Her favourite – roast chicken.) Then after she said she was tired so she went up to her room and I took her some tea. She looked exhausted. All her confidence had gone. The old Lorna – vanished. And when it came to bedtime she asked me to leave the landing light on. We'd not done that in years.

CORONER

And what was your husband's reaction to having her home?

JEAN

He didn't know how to deal with her. I think Lorna found that hard. One minute he wants to know everything, when she's out in Afghan – the next he's not interested. Or that's how it seemed. I think he felt partly responsible – well I know he did. Still does.

CORONER

In what way?

JEAN

The army had been his family. He'd trusted them completely – with his life and with his daughter's. And they'd let her down. Totally.

CORONER

And how would you describe Lorna's mood at this point?

JEAN

I think she just felt lost. It was like everyone had turned against her – insinuating she'd made the whole thing up.

CORONER

Why did she think that?

JEAN

Gossip going round the camp. They obviously didn't believe her – said she'd consented. And the nearer it got to going back the more anxious she got.

CORONER

Was she on any form of medication at this time?

JEAN

The doctor had given her some sleeping tablets. She was having nightmares. Panic attacks.

CORONER

Did she ever talk to you about suicide?

JEAN

No. Absolutely not. Absolutely not. And I know that wouldn't have even entered her mind – in spite of everything. She had too much going for her.

CORONER

Do you think she would've told you if that's what she had been thinking?

JEAN

Not before, no. But I think we must've talked more during those two weeks than at any other time. The thing is, she thought I wasn't interested. That I didn't care what she did. I was so busy just getting on, organizing everything, day to day, that, according to Lorna, I never took the time to find out about her – who she was – what made her tick. And I can see now why she thought that, especially in her teens. We just seemed to rub each other up the wrong way. Whereas Mike – he'd be off for months on end – get back on leave and have all the time in the world for her. I've spoken to people about it since – friends who are separated, divorced, and they say the same thing – 'the weekends are always fun with Dad,' whereas the rest of the time you've just got to get on with it – school, work...whatever. It wasn't true though. I told her. Of course I cared. All I ever wanted was for her to be happy.

CORONER

In your statement you talk about her boyfriend, Mark.

JEAN

Yes.

CORONER

It appears that their relationship wasn't as strong at this point as it had been.

JEAN

It was difficult – she'd been away a lot, but I know they'd kept in touch. She was worried what he'd think. He'd ring up, wanting to speak to her, and she'd get me to answer and come up with some excuse why she couldn't come to the phone. I don't think he believed me for a minute.

CORONER

So he didn't know at this stage?

JEAN

No.

CORONER

And what was your impression of Mark?

JEAN

We didn't know him that well – but I mean he seemed concerned. He wanted to help.

CORONER

He was supportive?

JEAN

Yes. One of the few.

CORONER

And how confident was Lorna about the outcome of the investigation?

JEAN

Very. From her point of view it was a clear-cut case. There were witnesses.

CORONER

Bombadier Travis and Lance-Bombadier Ross?

JEAN

Yes. Both of whom had heard
Stewart bragging about it
afterwards.

CORONER

So after a fortnight's leave she
returned to the regiment - to her
battery.

JEAN

Yes.

CORONER

And how did she feel?

JEAN

Umm...lonely. Very lonely.

JEAN breaks down.

JEAN

I'm sorry.

CORONER

That's OK. In terms of welfare
at this point, what support did
she receive?

JEAN

Once she reported the assault the
Unit Welfare Officer came to see
her.

CORONER

Warrant Officer Stevens?

JEAN

Yes. But I know she didn't rate
him.

CORONER

Did she say why?

JEAN

She found him very unapproachable
- not in the least sympathetic.

CORONER

That was her view?

JEAN

Yes. My understanding is that they were just ticking boxes – going through the motions.

CORONER

Why do you say that?

JEAN

Because nothing really seemed to happen – issues weren't properly addressed. If they'd really cared they'd have got Stewart off the base. Away from there.

CORONER

Was she told about Victim Support, do you know? Or any of the other services? Chaplaincy?

JEAN

I can't say.

CORONER

Do you think she would've felt more comfortable speaking to another female?

JEAN

I'm sure she would've. Yes.

CORONER

Shortly after returning to the regiment she was interviewed, for a second time, by another SIB officer.

JEAN

'The Gestapo', she called him.

CORONER

Why was that?

JEAN

She said he treated her more like a criminal than the victim. And I remember sitting on the other end of the phone feeling utterly useless - I couldn't do anything - it was out of my hands. There she was, miles away, and I couldn't do a thing. Couldn't even give her a hug.

CORONER

Why do you think she delayed reporting the incident? Did she tell you?

JEAN

She didn't have to - she was terrified. It was obvious. W.O. Stevens, Captain Reid, Major Lee...the whole chain of command - all men. It took courage to do what she did - no one seems to understand that - my husband, ex-husband, included. When she joined up - she joined up thinking she was fighting on the same side - she trusted them - and they betrayed that trust. They had a duty of care to look after her and they failed. 'Be the best', that's their motto. Well in my view they fall short by a long way. A long way short.

CORONER

As we know a couple of weeks later Lorna received a letter from the Service Prosecuting Authority informing her of their decision to drop the case.

JEAN

'Insufficient evidence'. She couldn't understand it. Turns out both witnesses had retracted their statements.

CORONER

Did she have any idea why?

JEAN

There were rumours that someone had threatened Lance-Bombadier Price with a posting abroad. She was engaged to one of the soldiers at the camp and didn't want to be separated.

CORONER

And it's your understanding that this was used as a threat?

JEAN

That's what Lorna said. 'That she'd been got at.' Bombadier Graham as well - withdrew his statement - said he'd made a mistake.

CORONER

And how did this make Lorna feel?

JEAN

I can't begin to imagine.

END OF EPISODE

DAY 4

MONTAGE

We hear the rush of water from beneath the surface as strong currents drag a body downstream. The abstract sound of bubbles rising.

LORNA

I, Lorna Gibson, swear by Almighty
God that I will be faithful and
bear true allegiance to Her
Majesty Queen Elizabeth II...

We break the surface to hear dogs barking. An air-sea rescue helicopter hovers over-head. People search the riverbank.

LORNA

...I will, as in duty bound,
honestly and faithfully defend...

SEARCHER

Over here!

Beneath the swell the body crashes against submerged rocks.

LORNA

... against all enemies, and will
observe and obey all orders of Her
Majesty...

The distorted squark of a police radio. Rescue crews struggle to reach the blotted corpse.

RADIO

...Female. Caucasian. Aged between
20 and 30...

LORNA

...and of the generals and officers
set over me.

INT. COURT ROOM DAY

Heavy wooden doors open.

CLERK

All rise for Her Majesty's
coroner.

The court rises as the CORONER enters the room.

Could we have the next witness
please?

NICOLA takes the stand.

CLERK

If you could take the book in your
right hand and read from the card.

She takes the bible from the CLERK and reads from the
card.

NICOLA

I swear by almighty God that I
shall tell the truth, the whole
truth and nothing but the truth.

CORONER

Would you state your full name,
rank and where you are currently
based.

NICOLA

Nicola Jane Roberts. Captain.
Currently based with the
Department of Community Mental
Health at Northhill.

CORONER

And your role within the DCMH?

NICOLA

Community Psychiatric Nurse.

CORONER

When did you first come into
contact with Lorna?

NICOLA

Following the sexual assault allegation she was given a fortnight's compassionate leave. Shortly after returning to the regiment she was informed that the case against Staff Sergeant Stewart was being dropped. Lorna was subsequently found in a distressed state and was immediately referred to me by Major Lee.

CORONER

And how would you describe her at that first meeting?

NICOLA

Extremely angry. Lorna had been convinced that Staff Stewart would be prosecuted and now it seemed that everything she'd gone through – the stress of reporting the assault – the hostility from colleagues – everything, had been for nothing. Lorna also felt that she could no longer trust her chain of command.

CORONER

You were aware, presumably, that following the allegation she'd been placed on the Suicide Vulnerability Risk Management register?

NICOLA

Yes.

CORONER

And that a care plan had been put in place?

NICOLA

Yes.

CORONER

And the purpose of the Care Assessment Plan?

NICOLA

To determine the level of support,
level of mentoring – whether or
not an individual should have
access to weapons. It's a
management tool, principally.

CORONER

I see. Tell me then about that
initial meeting.

NICOLA

Well the idea is to build up a
general picture of the patient –
so history of presenting profile,
medical history and so on. I also
make mental state observations so
how a patient dressed, speech, eye
contact...it all helps to build a
picture.

CORONER

And what conclusions did you make?

NICOLA

She showed signs and symptoms
consistent with depression.

CORONER

That was your diagnosis?

NICOLA

I don't diagnose. I only make
recommendations.

CORONER

To the Medical Officer?

NICOLA

Yes.

CORONER

And this was something you passed
on to the M.O.?

NICOLA

Yes.

CORONER

And what was your plan? having
assessed Lorna for yourself.

NICOLA

I began Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) during a series of one to one sessions.

CORONER

The aim of the therapy being?

NICOLA

To address negative thought processes and reach a point where she was able to discuss certain issues.

CORONER

And how willing was she to engage in the process?

NICOLA

There was an initial hesitancy. It's sometimes difficult for patients, particularly those who are junior in rank – there's a suspicion – a reluctance to confide in a senior officer. I explained that, as CPNs, we're obviously outside of her unit and that although the chain of command would be informed of certain aspects of her case, for management and operational reasons, our conversations would remain confidential.

CORONER

Unless, presumably, there was a risk of self-harm.

NICOLA

Yes.

CORONER

And on what do you base your assessment?

NICOLA

It's something I ask directly, as part of the risk assessment. Question 10. Evidence of significant risk behavior.

CORONER

And you asked Lorna?

NICOLA

I did.

CORONER

What was her answer?

NICOLA

At that stage she had no suicidal thoughts.

CORONER

Presumably you can't just rely on her answer?

NICOLA

Of course not. Eye contact, body language etc....you get a pretty good idea of whether someone's telling the truth.

CORONER

And if she were contemplating suicide do you think she would have told you? Given what you said earlier about junior NCOs.

NICOLA

I believe so. Yes.

CORONER

You had a good rapport?

NICOLA

Yes.

CORONER

Is it possible that, as a female officer, Lorna felt able to be more honest with you?

NICOLA

Yes, I think so.

CORONER

I understand from your statement that Lorna's case was by no means unique.

NICOLA

No. From my experience the majority of female recruits have been exposed to sexual harassment of one form, or another. I think the figure's somewhere in the region of two-thirds. It's part of army life.

CORONER

And it's also something you could relate to on a personal level.

NICOLA

Yes. I was sexually assaulted by a senior officer when I first joined.

CORONER

Although you didn't report it?

NICOLA

No.

CORONER

May I ask why?

NICOLA

The same reason as everyone else - fear.

CORONER

And was Lorna aware of this?

NICOLA

No.

CORONER

So you were sympathetic?

NICOLA

Yes. Very.

CORONER

And had you been especially concerned about Lorna's condition you would presumably have then fed back any relevant information to her commanding officer.

NICOLA

I'd have reported it to the M.O. who attends the monthly Unit Healthcare and Welfare meetings, where patients are discussed with the military chain of command.

CORONER

So ultimately the Medical Officer makes a judgment based largely on the recommendations contained within your report.

NICOLA

Yes.

CORONER

And who else would be present at these meetings?

NICOLA

As well as the M.O. there'd be the O.C., 2 I.C., BSM and Unit Welfare Officer.

CORONER

So in this case, Major Lee, Captain Reid and Warrant Officer Stevens.

NICOLA

I believe so, yes.

CORONER

The same men whom Lorna had been afraid to go to with her complaint, whom she felt unsupported by, were now discussing her mental state. Would this not have only added to her anxiety?

NICOLA

All those at the Unit Health and Welfare meetings share the same goal - to get soldiers returned to work - an unfit soldier is an inefficient soldier. There's no benefit in having personnel who can't perform.

CORONER

And prior to the alleged sexual assault Lorna had performed extremely well, according to her annual appraisal.

NICOLA

Yes. So I understand.

CORONER

She was a highly competent soldier, who was, as I'm sure you are aware, commended for her bravery in Afghanistan.

NICOLA

Yes.

CORONER

And yet in the space of a few months she was presenting with signs of depression.

NICOLA

Yes.

CORONER

Could it have been PTSD? Post Traumatic Stress?

NICOLA

It obviously crossed my mind but at that stage I couldn't be sure.

CORONER

But some of the signs – the nightmares, for instance.

NICOLA

Yes. Common symptoms. Hyperarousal.

CORONER

So you didn't rule it out?

NICOLA

No. But given what had happened it seemed more likely that Lorna was reacting to the alleged assault.

CORONER

How many times did you see her in total?

NICOLA

Seven.

CORONER

And you say she kept a diary?

NICOLA

Yes.

CORONER

And did she find it useful?

NICOLA

Yes. It's tended to form the basis for discussion, initially at least, and helped Lorna to develop coping strategies.

CORONER

And what were her principal concerns?

NICOLA

As well as the problems she was facing within the camp she talked a lot about Mark, her boyfriend.

CORONER

What did she say?

NICOLA

Essentially she felt unsupported by him – certainly while she was on tour in Afghanistan. At one point she intimated that she suspected he might be seeing someone else.

CORONER

And why did she think that?

NICOLA

From their telephone conversations – at times she felt he seemed disinterested.

CORONER

Obviously it's difficult
conducting a long distance
relationship.

NICOLA

Yes – which was something we
talked about. Nevertheless,
whether her fears were justified,
or not, they still caused Lorna
considerable upset.

CORONER

And was there anything else?

NICOLA

She talked a lot about her
parents. From what I understood
their marriage was breaking up.
Having always felt secure within
her own family I think she
realized things were changing at
home – that things weren't as
'safe', was the word she used.

CORONER

Did she ever speak to either of
them directly about this – their
relationship?

NICOLA

No. She didn't feel she could –
certainly not to her MOTHER. From
what I understand they'd never
been particularly close.

CORONER

From the sound of it she took you
into her confidence.

NICOLA

Yes. She responded well to the
sessions.

CORONER

Something you note in the FMed7 –
the outpatient record.

NICOLA

Yes.

CORONER

And then one day she doesn't appear for her appointment. You make enquiries and discover that she's signed herself off.

NICOLA

Yes.

CORONER

Were you surprised?

NICOLA

Yes.

CORONER

Why?

NICOLA

She hadn't said anything. There was no indication that she'd intended to stop coming.

CORONER

But you weren't 'unduly worried', according to your statement.

NICOLA

The thing is, unless someone's sectioned, under the mental health act, you can't make them attend clinic. It's up to them. Besides, she was making good progress.

CORONER

On what did you base this assessment?

NICOLA

On the way Lorna presented. She was making regular eye contact, she smiled, dressed well, her speech was varied...all signs that she was anxious to put what had happened behind her - to move on.

CORONER

Yet only six weeks earlier you'd felt that she might benefit from further specialist help.

NICOLA

People get better. They recover.

CORONER

I understand that during this time she had been downgraded.

NICOLA

To non-deployable. Yes.

CORONER

Because of her depression?

NICOLA

Yes. Given the nature of her work - with weapons.

CORONER

So if, for instance she was hoping to apply for a new posting...what would the significance of this be?

NICOLA

There'd be a CAP in place that would be flagged up on Lorna's records. And whoever would see that.

CORONER

In other words it could count against her?

NICOLA

It would be an issue that would need to be raised, yes.

CORONER

Which might be another reason why she wouldn't want her chain of command knowing that she was suffering from depression.

NICOLA

They wouldn't need to be aware of the causes - the background details - only whether a person is fit, or unfit.

CORONER

But by your own admission there is still a stigma over mental health issues within the army.

NICOLA

As there is in the wider community, unfortunately. It's something we need to address.

CORONER

The perception being, amongst the ranks, that it could affect promotion.

NICOLA

Yes. Very much so.

CORONER

Is it possible, therefore, that this was the reason Lorna withdrew from treatment?

NICOLA

Possibly.

CORONER

And am I right in thinking that, at this stage, she was no longer on the SVRM register?

NICOLA

That's correct.

CORONER

And the decision to remove her from the register would have been made by whom?

NICOLA

Ultimately it would have been the O.C., Major Lee, who made that decision.

CORONER

At the monthly Unit Health Care Committee meeting.

NICOLA

Yes.

CORONER

Who presumably signed her off as it was no longer felt she was at risk.

NICOLA

Yes.

CORONER

So, for the sake of clarity, Major Lee's decision to remove Lorna from the SVRM register would have been based primarily on the Medical Officer's recommendations..

NICOLA

Yes.

CORONER

Whose conclusions, in turn, would have been drawn from, amongst other things, the Fmed7, the outpatient report, completed by yourself.

NICOLA

Yes. Although the M.O. had contact with Lorna as well and would have been able to draw his own conclusions from those meetings.

CORONER

With the benefit of hindsight do you think you may have been overly optimistic about the speed of Lorna's recovery?

NICOLA

Not based on the evidence I saw.

CORONER

To what extent could Lorna have manipulated that evidence – 'put on a show'.

NICOLA

Unlikely – given the timescale.

CORONER

I realize that this is perhaps something you might not want to consider, but is it possible that she may have used you, in order to have her name taken off the SVRM register? Given the fact that once it'd been removed she was immediately upgraded to M.F.D., medically fully deployable.

NICOLA

I have considered that – yes, and if it were the case then I wouldn't blame her at all.

CORONER

Why?

NICOLA

She was marked – through no fault of her own. She didn't want that. She just wanted to get on.

CORONER

Do you mean that, at this point, she still saw a future for herself in the army?

NICOLA

She once told me that without the army she'd be lost – in spite of everything.

CORONER

Three weeks later – after her missed appointment – she got back in touch.

NICOLA

Yes.

CORONER

Tell me what happened.

NICOLA

I had a call from her saying Staff Sergeant Stewart had returned from leave and was back on the base.

CORONER

And had spoken to Lorna, according to your statement.

NICOLA

Yes.

CORONER

Did she tell you what he said?

NICOLA

'No hard feelings.' That was all. I found in her cubicle in tears. I thought the best course of action was to get her away from the unit as quickly as possible and spoke to the M.O. to arrange for sick leave. I also gave Lorna the number for Victim Support. I knew she didn't want to see me again, but I thought there was a chance she'd speak to them.

CORONER

And that was the last time you saw Lorna?

NICOLA

Yes. Within a matter of hours she was on the train home.

CORONER

I gather you spoke to her, though, a couple of days later, on the afternoon of March 8th.

NICOLA

Yes. She phoned.

CORONER

And what did she say?

NICOLA

I think she wanted to reassure me that she was ok – after everything that had happened. She knew I was concerned. Mark had arranged a few days holiday in the Lake District – a mini-break. She said she was out walking in the snow – that they were staying in a beautiful place. We laughed about me being stuck in my office and Lorna asked what was happening back at the unit. I told her to try and forget about things, to enjoy being away.

CORONER

Did you get any indication of her mood during the conversation?

NICOLA

It was difficult. It was a bad signal. She kept cutting in and out, until eventually I lost her altogether. I tried calling back – but she didn't pick up.

END OF EPISODE

DAY 5

MONTAGE

We hear the rush of water from beneath the surface as strong currents drag a body downstream. The abstract sound of bubbles rising.

LORNA

I, Lorna Gibson, swear by Almighty
God that I will be faithful and
bear true allegiance to Her
Majesty Queen Elizabeth II...

We break the surface to hear dogs barking. An air-sea rescue helicopter hovers over-head. People search the riverbank.

LORNA

...I will, as in duty bound,
honestly and faithfully defend...

SEARCHER

Over here!

Beneath the swell the body crashes against submerged rocks.

LORNA

... against all enemies, and will
observe and obey all orders of Her
Majesty...

The distorted squark of a police radio. Rescue crews struggle to reach the blotted corpse.

RADIO

...Female. Caucasian. Aged between
20 and 30...

LORNA

...and of the generals and officers
set over me.

INT. COURT ROOM DAY

Heavy wooden doors open.

CLERK

All rise for Her Majesty's
coroner.

CORONER

Could we have our final witness
please?

MARK takes the stand.

CLERK

If you could take the book in your
right hand and read from the card.

He takes the bible from the CLERK and reads from the
card.

MARK

I swear by almighty God that I
shall tell the truth, the whole
truth and nothing but the truth.

CORONER

Thank you. And would you state
your full name, please?

MARK

Mark Adams.

CORONER

Before we come to the events of
the 8th March of this year, I'd
like you to tell me a little bit
about Lorna. How long had you
known each other?

MARK

Two years - just over. We met
just before she joined up.

CORONER

Now we've already heard from a number of witnesses about Lorna's time at Pirbright, as well as her transfer to the regiment after phase two training, I'd like to take you to July 2013 when she was deployed to Afghanistan. Could you tell me about that?

MARK

Well it was straight in at the deep end. One minute they were getting their cap badges – the next they're on a plane to Kandahar.

CORONER

Did that worry her?

MARK

It was what she wanted – what she'd trained for.

CORONER

And in terms of your relationship? You'd not been going out long.

MARK

The army came first. Definitely. And to be honest I don't think either of us, at that stage, expected the relationship to last.

CORONER

Did she talk much about Afghanistan?

MARK

Only the good stuff – about Camp Bastian; the burger joints, the gym. I never heard much about the actual fighting. I guess whenever we spoke Lorna was more interested in hearing about what was going on at home.

CORONER

Did you get a sense of how she was finding it?

MARK

I could tell when they moved onto Lashkar Gah that it was a different ball game.

CORONER

In what way?

MARK

The pressure of attacks – IEDs. There was one phone call when I could tell things were obviously getting to her.

CORONER

How?

MARK

She'd been out there a couple of months and I'd been sending her welfare boxes – with chocolate and that – stupid stuff, just to make her laugh. And she was thanking me for some party hats and blowers that I'd sent out for her birthday. And I was asking how it was going, whether her mates had made her a cake and she suddenly starts crying. She said she wasn't, but I could tell from her voice. So I asked what was wrong but she never said – just changed the subject. And that's how it was basically. You couldn't ever talk properly. And each time I put the phone down I'd feel crap. I hated it. Absolutely hated it.

When she got back on leave I tried to find out what was going on – because it was more than just being homesick. Only before I know it we're having this blazing row – out of nowhere – telling me to mind my own business – accusing me of interfering – being possessive. So after that I backed right off. It was mental.

CORONER

You broke off the relationship?

MARK

No.

CORONER

But according to your statement
you started seeing someone else.

MARK

Yes.

CORONER

Was Lorna aware of this?

MARK

I don't think so. Or if she was,
she never said. It only lasted a
few weeks. I was going to tell her
when she came back, at the end of
the tour – but when I went
round...well there was just no way.
I could tell something was up – by
how she looked. Then she tells me
about Cyprus. Everything. And I
felt sick. There I was, acting
like a total knob, while she was
going through hell.

CORONER

So you didn't say anything?

MARK

I thought it'd just complicate
things. She told me about the
phone call too, on her birthday.
It turns out he'd groped her in
the corridor the night before –
hands down her front. Told her
she was his personal property.

CORONER

Now we know that she spoke to the
camp padre at the time, although
didn't give any details.

MARK

I didn't realise that 'til now.

CORONER

Do you know if she spoke to anyone
else?

MARK

No. She kept quiet. He said that if she said a word she'd lose everything. Even me.

CORONER

And after Lorna returned to barracks did you remain in regular contact?

MARK

I made her promise to phone every night.

CORONER

Did you ever feel there was a risk that she might harm herself?

MARK

No. But I mean the whole internal investigation was a farce. It was like they were just going through the motions.

CORONER

And was this Lorna's view?

MARK

At first I think she felt confident that they'd do something – that they'd have to. Then one by one witnesses started dropping out.

CORONER

And how did that make her feel?

MARK

Betrayed. Totally betrayed.

CORONER

And what was your impression of Lorna's mood at this point?

MARK

Anxious. Frightened. She felt she had no support from her chain of command and was concerned how it'd impact on her career.

CORONER

Did she talk to you about the medical treatment she was receiving?

MARK

Not really.

CORONER

If you were here yesterday you will have heard that Lorna withdrew from her therapy sessions with Captain Roberts, of the Community Mental Health Team.

MARK

Yes. I heard.

CORONER

Did she give you any reason for this?

MARK

I think she thought that the longer it went on the more it might count against her – in terms of promotion.

CORONER

So as far as you were aware she was still considering a career in the army?

MARK

Definitely. I thought she was mad. All they were worried about was their reputation – how it reflected on the unit. They didn't give a toss about her.

CORONER

We've heard from Captain Roberts that, following the investigation being dropped, Lorna was granted a further week's sick leave.

MARK

Yes. And when I heard she was coming back I booked a cottage in the Lake District for a few days. Give us a chance to escape and just be together.

CORONER

How did she seem, when you met her off the train?

MARK

Angry. Upset.

CORONER

And in terms of plans. Did you discuss the future?

MARK

Like I say, up until then she'd been fixated on working her way up the ranks. It hadn't really occurred to her that there was a life outside the army.

CORONER

Why was that, do you think?

MARK

She felt under a lot of pressure, I think, from her Dad, especially. But just talking things through she realized that it was a possibility at least. We even talked about her retraining – maybe as a P.E. teacher.

CORONER

So would you describe this as a turning point, in that sense?

MARK

Yes. Definitely.

CORONER

If we could move on then to the events of March 8th. You say in your statement that you'd planned to propose that day.

MARK

Yes.

CORONER

And, as far as you know, was Lorna aware of this?

MARK

No. I wanted it to be a surprise. We'd been out to the pub the night before so we got up fairly late - had lunch. She was much more relaxed by now.

CORONER

And had Lorna any more to drink that day?

MARK

There was a bottle of wine left over that we finished off. And then at about 3 o'clock she announces she's going for a run. It had started snowing again by then - I said I thought she shouldn't.

CORONER

You say in your statement that the snow had thawed and frozen overnight.

MARK

Yes. There was a lot of ice about. Paths were pretty slippery.

CORONER

So you tried to stop her?

MARK

She could be very stubborn at times - told me to stop being a control freak. I thought if that's what she wants to do, then fine - expecting her to get a hundred yards down the track and realise her mistake.

MARK (CONT.)

So she puts on her running stuff and sets off. There was a footpath behind the cottage that crossed some fields down towards the village – after a bit it forks right and takes you along the river. When she's been out before she's kept left, ended up at the pub and then doubled-back on the lane. Which was what I assumed she'd do – the same. Takes about an hour.

After she'd gone I thought I'd tidy up – get the place ready for the evening – which was when I planned to propose. Having made a fuss about her going I realized it suited things quite well – to have her out the way.

So I tidied up – sorted the room with some T-lights – tried to make the place look nice. And I remember looking at my watch and realizing it'd already been two hours. I could see the snow was getting heavier – and the light was starting to go. I tried her mobile but there was no answer, which didn't totally surprise me, as the signal was lousy.

After about another half an hour, or so, I started to get worried. I went out the front to see if she was coming along the lane. No sign of her. So I went up the back onto the fell to see if she was there – half expecting to see her walking back across the fields. And still nothing. I started walking along the path – following her footprints – until I got to where the path forked and instead of keeping left, as I thought she would've done, there was a faint trail to the right – leading down towards the river. It was getting dark by then.

MARK (CONT.)

I carried on, along the riverbank, but by then the footprints had disappeared pretty much under the snow. And I thought there was no way she'd have got that far – so I turned back. I thought maybe I'd missed her somehow – that she'd be back at the cottage. But as I got nearer I could see there were no lights on inside and that's when I started to panic and called 999.

CORONER

Another witness recalls seeing a woman, matching Lorna's description, running down the path towards the river, listening to headphones. Do you recall if she had an iPod, or phone, with her?

MARK

I didn't see her actually take it, but I know she listened to music while running.

CORONER

Could it be she lost her bearings?

MARK

It's possible – but she was used to navigating in the dark, out on exercises...

CORONER

Were you aware that she was still on anti-depressants?

MARK

No.

CORONER

When she left did she seem at all drowsy to you? Unsteady?

MARK

Not that I noticed.

CORONER

And in your statement you described her mood that day as 'good'.

MARK

Yes. Apart from this...well it wasn't even a row. She was positive - she'd made up her mind.

CORONER

To leave the army?

MARK

Yes.

CORONER

We've heard from the police that her body was recovered some two miles downriver, having been in the water for almost twenty-four hours. In your statement you mention following a trail of footprints close to the riverbank and that they seemed to stop just south of the old pack-horse bridge?

MARK

Yes.

CORONER

This also ties in with statements made by rescuers at the scene, where her mobile was found lying on the ground.

MARK

Yes.

CORONER

I appreciate how difficult this has been for you. We've now gone through all the evidence so if there's anything you would like to add before I sum up then now is the time.

MARK

Lorna would never have taken her own life. I know that's what people are thinking. If nothing else she wanted to prove she wasn't beaten.

CORONER

Thank you. We'll take a short break now before I conclude.

FADE.

The CORONER refers to his papers and collects his thoughts.

CORONER

It is now my job to sum up the evidence in relation to Lorna Gibson who was born on September 22th 1990 and died on March 8th 2014 in tragic circumstances. I am going to record that death occurred due to drowning before giving my conclusion.

It's clear from the evidence heard over these past five days that Gunner Lorna Gibson was a particularly able soldier who had high hopes of a promising army career. It is also clear that she lost trust in her chain of command after making a formal complaint of sexual assault – something that, to her mind, was not investigated thoroughly, nor taken seriously, by those who had been entrusted with her care.

This failure of the army to prosecute, in this instance, caused Lorna great distress and I am under no doubt that it contributed largely to the deterioration of her mental health in the final months of her life.

CORONER (CONT.)

Whilst the medical care she received following the alleged sexual assault was of a good standard, Lorna was clearly of the view that she would have been prevented from fulfilling her ambitions had she remained on the Suicide Vulnerability Risk Management register - and subsequently withdrew from treatment against advice. However, from the evidence given by friends and family it seems that Lorna had come to accept that there were avenues open to her outside of the army.

To conclude, therefore, I must first deal with the question of suicide. In order to make such a conclusion I have to be sure that Lorna deliberately took some action that lead to her death. Despite the allegations made by Lorna and their subsequent affect on her well-being, I cannot say, with absolute certainty, that, on this day, it was Lorna's intention to end her own life. That does not mean, however, that it is not a possibility.

It is also possible that her death was accidental, the result of a momentary lapse of judgment as she ran along the footpath, beside the river, in treacherous winter conditions. We know that she was listening to music over headphones and perhaps would have been less aware of the environment around her. We also know from the toxicology report that traces of citalopram were found in her blood, which, when mixed with alcohol, can increase the chance of side effects - one of which is sleepiness that could have affected her balance.

CORONER (CONT.)

Both the possibilities I have outlined bear scrutiny; that Lorna either went into the water with intention or that she slipped. Therefore I believe the only appropriate verdict in this case is that of an open conclusion.

As the CORONER delivers his verdict we hear the sound of someone running – feet pounding the footpath alongside the swollen river. We hear LORNA breathing hard. Strains of a military brass band emerge above the sound of the water – a passing-out parade captured on video, the camera buffeted by the wind. A Regimental Sergeant Major yells orders to lines of stamping boots on the parade ground. A crowd cheers as soldiers march past the stands. Proud families applaud. The sound of running continues as the CORONER concludes. We hear LORNA posing for a photograph taken by her FATHER, MIKE.

LORNA

Come on, Dad. Hurry up and take it.

MIKE

Alright. Alright. Big smile.
One...two...three...

The marching band reaches a crescendo with the crash of cymbals. A large splash – slowed down to sound like a shell being fired from a 13 pounder – as a body falls into the torrent. Bubbles from the sinking corpse drown out the noise of the ceremony until all that is left is a hollow, eerie silence.

MIKE

So. How do you feel?

LORNA

Like a proper soldier.

END OF EPISODE

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