

***Hilda Mabel and Me: an investigation into the form, structure and
content of radio drama and comedy through practice, with
particular reference to the work of Mabel Constanduros and
Hilda Matheson.***

by
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CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	1
Abstract	2
1 Introduction	3
Content and theoretical contexts	3
The blind and invisible medium	7
The incomplete text	9
 PART 1	 12
2 Prelude	12
Matheson and Constanduros: early practitioners	12
The influence of theatre	16
The origins of radio drama	20
The early radio theorists	23
 3 Hilda Matheson: <i>Broadcasting</i> and Early Radio Drama Theories	 25
Introduction to Hilda Matheson 1888 – 1940	25
Early radio drama theories	26
Sounds versus voices	34
The origins of radio voice technique	38
Matheson's life and work at the BBC	44
 4 Mabel Constanduros: Comedy and Early Radio Practice	 51
Introduction to Mabel Constanduros 1880 – 1957	51
Natural performance and <i>The Bugginses</i>	52
Recreating the scripts	56
The earliest situation comedy	57
Structure and comic devices	59
Characters: the running gags and the underlying sadness	64
Class, language and the Malapropism	68
Voice, personality and Grandma	71
Early soap opera	74
Radio drama and Constanduros's legacy	77

PART 2	80
5 Prologue	80
The relevance of the past to today's writers	80
The nature of radio drama	83
The elements of radio plays	84
Defending the domestic comedy	88
6 Writing the Afternoon Drama	92
Designing story for the radio	92
First ideas	93
Subject matter and genre	95
Structure	100
Plot and action	111
Characters	116
Language and dialogue	121
Setting, sound effects and music	126
Comic business and running gags	130
Denouement	133
7 Twenty One Conversations with a Hairdresser	136
Notes	136
Treatment	137
Script	138
8 Fifteen Ways to Leave Your Lover	170
Notes	170
Treatment	171
Script	172
9 Jesus, The Devil and a Kid Called Death	212
Notes	212
Treatment	213
Script	214
Bibliography	259
Appendices	267
Appendix One	267
CD <i>21 Conversations with a Hairdresser</i>	
Appendix Two	268
CD <i>Fifteen Ways to Leave Your Lover</i>	
Appendix Three	269
CD <i>Jesus, The Devil and a Kid Called Death</i>	

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the work of three women practitioners in radio and examines the process of writing radio drama through a mixture of criticism and practice. It analyzes early theories about radio drama and compares them with those of today, in order to ascertain whether the early ideas are still relevant. Starkey points out that radio has been ‘relatively undertheorized’ (2004: 204), so this evaluation of the practice of writing radio drama adds to knowledge of the medium as a whole. The work focuses on two women practitioners from the past: Hilda Matheson, whose book *Broadcasting* (1933), was ‘the first single authored text on radio and broadcasting by a woman published in English’ (Crook 1999: 12) and Mabel Constanduros, who was a prolific writer and actress of the time, specialising in comedy. Matheson’s ideas are compared with those of Val Gielgud and other early theorists, which were more accepted at the time. This analysis leads to close examination of a debate at the heart of radio drama, that being whether noises or dialogue are the best method of storytelling. Finally there is a consideration of the author’s own writing practice, using three broadcast radio plays, *21 Conversations with a Hairdresser*, *15 Ways to Leave Your Lover* and *Jesus, The Devil and a Kid Called Death*. This provides insight into the changing methods of writing for radio. The findings create a story design for writing the Radio 4 Afternoon Drama. Final written drafts are included, along with audio copies of the plays as they were broadcast. Several different types of criticism create the theoretical base, including works on cultural theory, feminist theory and reception theory, as well as texts on radio, screen, play and comedy writing.

1. INTRODUCTION

Content and theoretical contexts

This thesis explores the work of three women practitioners in radio and examines the process of writing radio drama through a mixture of criticism and practice. I have investigated and analyzed early theories on radio drama and compared them with those that are popular today, in order to ascertain whether the early ideas are still relevant. Part 1 of this thesis creates part of the means by which the radio plays in Part 2 are written and analysed. By rediscovering radio theory and practice from the past and assessing them in the light of recent playwriting, comedy, film and radio theory I have established what is still relevant to a radio dramatist today. Current thinking often encourages dramatists to view radio as an entirely separate medium to theatre and to reject all ideas concerning the writing of stage plays, lest they should find themselves ‘sinking in a quicksand of words, words and more words.’¹ But ‘because all classically constructed writing works the same way’ I have included analysis of plot, structure, character and dialogue with reference to plays and cinema as well as ideas that are specific to radio.² As Starkey points out, radio has been ‘relatively undertheorized’, so an evaluation of the practice of writing radio drama adds to knowledge of the medium as a whole.³ Tim Crook made an attempt to create a ‘theory and practice of writing audio drama’ in *Radio Drama* (1999), but his focus is on sound design in radio, which is why he calls the writer a ‘sound dramatist’ instead of a playwright.⁴

I have focussed on the work of two women practitioners from the past because I feel that their work has been rather overlooked. My feelings stem from a belief that until recently, women’s work has often been neglected by male critics, and I am not alone in thinking this; Mary Louise Hill has a similar opinion of women in radio. In her unusual thesis ‘When the Voice Must Be the Body’ she examines the semiotics of radio through a feminist lens and attempts to offer a new understanding of the medium using feminist criticism as a tool.⁵ My work looks from a slightly different perspective in that it takes as a starting point the fact that the women of the 1920s and 30s were marginalised due to their lack of socioeconomic power. Gale takes this as her theoretical base in her book rediscovering the work of female

¹ Paul Ashton, *The Calling Card Script* (London: A&C Black, 2011), p. 22.

² Vincent McNerny, *Writing for Radio* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2001), p. xii.

³ Guy Starkey, *Radio in Context* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 204.

⁴ Tim Crook, *Radio Drama – Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 1999).

⁵ Mary Louise Hill, ‘When the Voice Must Be the Body’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, New York University, 1997), in *Literature Online* <<http://search.proquest.com/docview/304362078>> [accessed 20 May 2013].

playwrights, *West End Women*.⁶ By accepting this perspective as the correct one I have avoided focussing on the work of the women in this study exclusively through the feminist lens. However, it is the feminist view that made me seek the answer to my question, “Why have they been forgotten?”, in the first place. ‘We only come up with the answers to the questions we think to ask. So the present creates the past – or creates our perceptions of it, which is all we have.’⁷

There are very few people asking questions about radio and Tim Crook is one of those few. He cites Hilda Matheson’s book *Broadcasting* (1933), which was ‘the first single authored text on radio and broadcasting by a woman published in English’ and complains that her achievements have been largely neglected.⁸ I discuss his evaluation of her work and include my own criticism of her ideas with an overview of early radio theories in Chapters 2 and 3. Matheson worked at the BBC from 1926 until her forced resignation in 1933. I have compared her ideas with those of Val Gielgud and other early theorists, which were more accepted at the time. This analysis has allowed for close examination of a debate at the heart of radio drama, that being whether noises or dialogue are the best method of storytelling. I have called this battle sounds versus voices and traced the discussion back to its original source in order to consider whether a greater understanding of sound design or story is more important for the radio dramatist. I have then combined this analysis with a critique of the work of Mabel Constanduros, who was a prolific writer and actress of the time, in order to create an understanding of the ideas and practice prevalent in early comedy writing. According to the playwright Alan Ayckbourn, drama and comedy used to exist together, but ‘somehow they became separated’ in the 1950s.⁹ He is probably referring to the rift that opened when situation comedy became acknowledged as a distinct form, which began in earnest with the recognition of Galton and Simpson’s *Hancock’s Half Hour* as being unique.¹⁰ I discuss this in detail in Chapter 4. Like Ayckbourn, I wish to show that these elements can still co-exist.¹¹ So finally there is a consideration of my own writing practice, using three of my broadcast radio plays, *21 Conversations with a Hairdresser*, *15 Ways to Leave Your Lover* and *Jesus, The Devil and a Kid Called Death*, in order to provide insight into the changing methods of writing for radio. I have used my findings to create a story design for writing the

⁶ Maggie B. Gale, *West End Women: Women and the London Stage 1918-1962* (London: Routledge, 1996).

⁷ Elaine Hobby, *Virtue of Necessity* (London: Virago Press, 1988), p. 204.

⁸ Crook, p. 12.

⁹ Alan Ayckbourn, *The Crafty Art of Playmaking* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 2002), pp. 4-5.

¹⁰ Andrew Crisell, *Understanding Radio – Second Edition* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 168.

¹¹ Ayckbourn, p. 4.

Radio 4 Afternoon Drama and have included my final drafts, along with audio copies of the plays as they were broadcast, to complete the creative section of this thesis.

Micheline Wandor defines creative writing as ‘a mode of imaginative thought’; I would add ‘rigorous’ and ‘analytical’ between ‘of’ and ‘imaginative’ in Wandor’s definition when applied to writing plays.¹² David Edgar discusses the issues relating to the conflict of creative thought versus critical thought at length in *How Plays Work*. The tension between these two ways of thinking will be considered in the analysis of my own work. Edgar argues that while ‘playwriting is an activity subject to the constraints of reason’ we should be mindful that our thinking does not become ‘mechanical and formalistic’.¹³ Robert McKee quotes the critic Kenneth Burke when he writes that ‘stories are equipment for living’.¹⁴ He goes on to point out that humankind is searching for an answer to the question of how one should live life. Our appetite for stories remains enormous. Films, novels, theatre, television and radio, or what he calls the ‘story arts’ have become ‘humanity’s prime source of inspiration, as it seeks to order chaos and gain insight into life’.¹⁵ Wandor describes the creative writer of self-help books searching for ways to be a “‘better” person, whose method is diametrically opposed to the ‘uncontrolled imagination’ and ‘writing derived from misery’, such as that of Dylan Thomas.¹⁶ Neither of these models is useful for the modern professional writer. Playwrights who want to work in the industry have to find a way of allowing the subconscious to function while exercising control over what they actually produce by using rigorous criticism of their own practice. My thesis examines how this might be achieved, in the light of work by radio and drama theorists, present and past.

In order to discuss the ideas in this thesis I have considered a mixture of several different types of criticism. These include works on cultural theory, feminist theory and reception theory, as well as texts on radio, screen, play and comedy writing. There are also occasional references to well known plays, films and television programs in order to illustrate specific points. I have already mentioned the lack of texts on the subject of radio in comparison to those on other media. There is little metatheory, unlike the enormous volume that concerns itself with literature, however, I will deliberate the musings on ‘the blind

¹² Micheline Wandor, *The Author is not Dead, Merely Somewhere Else*, (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 7.

¹³ David Edgar, *How Plays Work* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2009), xv.

¹⁴ Robert McKee, *Story* (London: Methuen, 1998), p. 12.

¹⁵ McKee, p. 12.

¹⁶ Wandor, *The Author is not Dead*, p. 112.

medium' in the next section because it is important to establish a position on this before moving on. The majority of reading available on radio falls into one of these categories:

- How-to-do-it books like Vincent McNerney's *Writing for Radio*.
- Broadly focused texts aimed at media studies students like Shingler and Wierenga's *On Air: Methods and Meanings of Radio*.
- Technical manuals, such as *Radio Production* by Robert McLeish.

There are fewer references to works from the final category because, although I recognize the importance of the 'acoustic environment', my work will show that, on the whole, a radio dramatist does not require a detailed knowledge of this area; s/he is better advised to 'get on with scene and story, and allow the producer and sound engineer to do the rest.'¹⁷ There are only a few texts that approach radio plays in a way that is really useful for my practice as a writer and researcher. As a result I have used a combination of methods espoused by a carefully selected mixture of contemporary radio, film and playwriting theorists to assess my own plays, and those of Constanduros, along with Matheson's and other early radio ideas, in an efficient way. These include Tim Crook, David Edgar, Paul Ashton, Robert McKee and Frances Gray. I am particularly indebted to John Drakakis for his analysis of early radio drama.¹⁸ Although many of Wandor's ideas are helpful she seems to be contentious for the sake of it when she says that drama is not a collaborative art and everything in this thesis refutes this, so I will not discuss it further here.¹⁹

Crook may simply be reiterating a common argument in his discussions on blindness, but I am grateful to him for attempting to create a critical framework for evaluating radio drama; he goes a long way towards developing a system that works. He identifies what he calls 'the six ages of radio drama', and although I don't examine these in depth it is worth noting that Matheson and Constanduros lived and worked in the 'Fifth Age: symbiosis with film and television from 1926 onwards', while my career started in the 'Sixth Age: Internet and digital communication from 1994 onwards', which is the one we are still in.²⁰ Given that Crook begins his ages with the period before 1878, which he calls a time of 'oral culture or single voice narratives', my time would seem to be closer to that of Constanduros and Matheson than I originally thought. He also points out that 'sound theatre exists as a dramatic storytelling form communicating action as well as narrative', but Edgar's definitions and analysis of 'action' have proven more helpful in writing this. Edgar uses the term 'action' to

¹⁷ Ashton, p. 24.

¹⁸ John Drakakis, 'Introduction', in *British Radio Drama*, ed. by John Drakakis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 1-36.

¹⁹ Michelene Wandor, *The Art of Writing Drama*, (London: Methuen Drama, 2008), pp. 18-20.

²⁰ Crook, pp. 21-29.

explain the underlying meaning in the narrative progression of a play.²¹ He puts the overall meaning at the forefront of drama, thus echoing Robert McKee's *Story*, which is still the seminal work concerning storytelling for the screen.²² It was Matheson who first observed that the microphone is like a camera, so screen theory seems perfectly valid when discussing radio.²³ Gielgud's ideas, on the other hand, were more in keeping with ideas on writing for the stage, so a mixture of screen and playwriting theory is combined with ideas specific to radio in creating the 'story design' for my own plays. Both Edgar's and McKee's theories are rooted in Aristotle's *Poetics*. They are invaluable when considering plot and structure in any kind of drama and radio is no exception. It is true that *Poetics* is short and incomplete, consisting of what seem more like 'lecture notes' than clearly argued theories, but there is no getting away from Aristotle's 'big idea', which is the three act structure.²⁴ As Mamet puts it, 'the story is all there is in the theatre – the rest is just packaging, and that is the lesson of radio'.²⁵

The blind and invisible medium

Despite Crook's best attempt to argue his case his evidence remains unconvincing; his assertion that that 'radio is not a blind medium' is based on semantics and deserves closer scrutiny.²⁶ He takes real issue with the word 'blind', which is also a major concern of other radio theorists such as Alan Beck, Martin Shingler and Andrew Crisell; they all agree that the word has negative associations and implies some kind of disability.²⁷ But disability is no longer considered to be a negative thing and many disabled people would prefer not to be thought of as in any way disadvantaged.²⁸ The *Collins English Dictionary* lists 33 definitions for blind, only two of which actually refer to the physical impairment of being sightless: number 6 reads 'out of sight, as in "blind bend"', and that is the meaning that best sums up radio. The popular BBC talent show, *The Voice*, calls its early rounds the 'Blind Auditions' and thousands of viewers understand that this term simply means that the people being auditioned are only judged on the way they sound; the panel sit with their backs to the stage

²¹ Edgar, p.17.

²² Crook, p. 7.

²³ Matheson, pp. 112-113.

²⁴ Edgar, pp.17-18.

²⁵ David Mamet, 'Radio Drama' in *Writing in Restaurants*, p. 15.

²⁶ Crook, pp. 53-69.

²⁷ Alan Beck, 'Is radio Blind or Invisible? A call for a wider debate on listening-in.' in *World Forum for Acoustic Ecology* <<http://www.savoyhill.co.uk/blindorinvisible/blindorinvisible.html>> [accessed 10 April 2013].

²⁸ Colin Burns and Geoff Mercer, *Disability* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), p. 44.

and don't look at the contestants until they have finished performing.²⁹ The term 'blind' when used in this way is not derogatory. Actors cannot be seen on the radio. They are invisible, which is presumably why Shingler and Wierenga, like Alan Beck, call it 'the invisible medium' as if this were a new thing, although this is a term that is used quite commonly in early theory and means exactly the same thing as 'the blind medium'. Ivor Brown, the journalist and drama critic for the Observer, wrote a report on BBC radio drama in 1942 in which he states that, 'the condition of invisibility must be the governing consideration in the choice of broadcasting material.'³⁰ Everything is invisible on the radio, so in this respect the audience is blind to the actors and settings (like the bend and the auditionees) and therefore becomes the listener; this is just obvious and true, which is why the actual concept of invisibility is almost impossible to achieve on the radio. Steve Nallon made this mistake in a series written with Turan Ali called *The Ghost of Number 10*, which was first broadcast in 1990 on Radio 4.³¹ The series wasn't recommissioned because the ghosts had to be invisible to some people and visible to others in order to be funny, so the writers had to keep describing their appearance and disappearance to the listener, which ruined the jokes.³² There are much closer examinations of radio comedy in chapters on Constanduros and my own plays, which show how the fact that you cannot see the actors on radio can be used to great effect. As a writer of radio drama one must never forget that the listener cannot physically see what is happening; it is both a blessing and a curse, as Styran points out:

We are not so ready to believe the radio play to be different from the stage play, yet the blind medium of radio in its unique power upon the ear of stimulating the imagination makes for a kind of drama which can embrace subjects film and theatre can never approach. It's subtle and mercurial manipulation of sounds and words, allied to its quality of immediacy and intimacy with the listener, give it possibilities of development that await only the right dramatist.³³

So then, invisibility (or blindness) is integral to radio. Crook goes on to emphasize the fact that the listener can use his imagination to create what he calls 'the fifth dimension', which is a sort of cinema-in-the-mind, in keeping with an original concept of Matheson's, along with Styran's cited above.³⁴ Now it may be the case that some or even many listeners do this, but it doesn't alter the fact that in reality the actors are usually squashed into a cramped

²⁹ 'Blind Auditions 1-6', *The Voice UK – Series 2*, BBC 1, April/May 2013.

³⁰ BBC Written Archive Centre, File R19/276, *Entertainment: Drama Department 1924-1948*.

³¹ *Radio Listings Database* <http://www.radiolistings.co.uk/programmes/g/gh/ghost_of_number_ten_the.html> [accessed 10 April 2013].

³² Told to me in a personal conversation.

³³ J.L., Styran, *Modern Drama in Theory and Practice 1: Realism and Naturalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 287.

³⁴ Crook, pp. 62-65.

studio, wearing clothes that almost certainly do not suit the characters they are playing, whilst sitting on a motley assortment of chairs or standing up to their knees in audio tape (used to simulate walking on grass), with a spot effects technician attempting to create sounds using a variety of implements that bear no resemblance to the things they are representing, and this is all that is meant by the phrase ‘the blind medium’. David Mamet, the American dramatist, believes that radio drama is successful precisely because we cannot see the characters, so we are never distracted from the essence of the story. He explains that if a character is described to us we become critics instead of listening without judgment, because the description will indicate that the protagonist is quite unlike us and prevent us from subconsciously identifying with him or her, which Mamet believes is the most important thing in storytelling.³⁵

Radio works in the mind when the listener is responding to the kind of play that contains a lot of images, which can be created by many things, including voice, and there is some examination of this further on, but my plays owe a great deal to one of Matheson’s other ideas, also supported by Gielgud, in that they are ‘plays of discussion’, and these have proved as successful today as they were in the 1920s and 1930s.³⁶ In fact they were still very much in evidence when Ivor Brown was writing his report in 1942. He was a listener who could not create the ‘fifth dimension’ and praises an ‘argumentative type of play’ called *The Corner Stone*, stating that ‘the invisibility mattered very little’.³⁷ These plays demonstrate a different kind of writing for radio to those advocated by the radio-as-a-visual-medium theorists.

The incomplete text

Crook observes what Lance Sieveking called the ‘ghastly impermanence of the medium’ and goes on to say that ‘without permanent record radio drama is an ephemeral art form. It exists in the moment of its produced performance.’³⁸ This, of course, refers to when radio was broadcast live in the 1920s and 1930s, and certainly caused difficulties when it came to assessing plays by Constanduros because so few were actually available to be listened to. ‘One of the problems faced in studying the pioneer women in broadcasting is the very ephemeral nature of their product, irretrievably lost in the ether when recording was still

³⁵ Mamet, p. 13.

³⁶ Matheson, p. 111.

³⁷ WAC, File R19/276.

³⁸ Crook, p. 7.

virtually unknown'.³⁹ Very little remains of most radio drama from the early days. In the case of Constanduros there is not even much in the way of scripts, so I have had to recreate some using stage adaptations of her work; there is a detailed explanation of how I did this in Chapter 4. These recreated scripts would constitute enough evidence for analysis if Wandor's theory that these are complete in themselves was true; she argues eloquently that the dramatist's job is finished once the words are on the page and the text is more important than the final performance. But the problem associated with assuming that the text is complete is illustrated in an interesting essay by Angela Frattarola called 'The Modernist "Microphone Play"'.⁴⁰ She analyses some famous radio plays, the scripts of which are published in early radio theory books. She then asserts that 'sound permeates a body; vibrations physically enter and affect the ear. This intimacy made radio drama strike chords in audiences that modernist writers were likewise trying to strike.'⁴¹ While her point about what modernist radio writers were trying to achieve is perfectly valid it does not take into account what was possible in terms of the technical limitations of the medium and what the listener actually heard. The truth is that while some early plays that used a lot of noises to tell the story, like Tyrone Guthrie's, *The Flowers are not for You to Pick*, might be interesting on the page because they are full of imaginative stage directions and descriptions of what is going on in people's heads, they proved very annoying for the listener and have largely been abandoned as a form.⁴² I discuss the reasons for this at length in Chapter 3. These plays did not 'strike chords' with the listeners, only with the producers, who were experimenting on their audience. 'Guthrie abandoned the medium, and concentrated his efforts upon the visual theatre' shortly after this broadcast.⁴³ In her final summing up Frattarola states that 'if we listen to British radio drama from the 1920s to the 1940s we will [...] discover modernist drama.'⁴⁴ Susan Bennett takes issue with eminent reception theorist Wolfgang Iser's similar mistake in his reading of Beckett's stage plays; he makes assumptions about the text without considering actual performance and 'how the system of response is necessarily different' in the 'presence of real signifiers'.⁴⁵ In radio the 'signifiers' are audible, but not visual. The important point being that

³⁹ Fred Hunter, 'Hilda Matheson and the BBC 1926-1940', in *This Working-Day World: Women's Lives and Culture(s) in Britain 1914-1945*, ed. by Sybil Oldfield (London: Taylor & Francis Ltd, 1994), p. 169.

⁴⁰ Angela Frattarola, 'The Modernist "Microphone Play"' in *Modern Drama*, Volume 52, Number 4, Winter 2009, pp. 449-68 in *Literature Online*

< <http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk> > [accessed 24 April 2013].

⁴¹ Frattarola, 'The Modernist "Microphone Play"', p. 464.

⁴² Tyrone Guthrie, *The Squirrel's Cage and Two Other Microphone Plays* (London: Cobden-Sanderson, 1931)

⁴³ Gielgud, *British Radio Drama*, p. 44.

⁴⁴ Frattarola, 'The Modernist "Microphone Play"', p. 465.

⁴⁵ Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 51.

we cannot listen to radio drama from the 1920s to the 1940s as Frattarola suggests because hardly any of it exists in audio form. In order to experience what those early audiences experienced the plays would have to be recreated, which would almost certainly prove that they sound nothing like the script indicates that they should, even with all the benefits of modern technology. These were brave experiments in sound, but have not stood the test of time. It is vital to take into account the gap between script and performance when analyzing audio drama or there is a danger of assuming that radio had capabilities in the past that it never possessed.

Peter Lewis supports this in his introduction to *Radio Drama*, which is a useful collection of essays by prominent radio researchers, when he states that ‘radio exists as performance’.⁴⁶ And Esslin agrees when he says that ‘the dramatic text is always incomplete’.⁴⁷ The script of a radio play is like a musical score:⁴⁸ As with music we can hold and look at the score, but we cannot understand its full significance without the orchestra; the actors are musicians with the director as conductor. ‘The writing down isn’t the art itself and [the piece] wouldn’t exist at all unless somebody took the decision to recreate it’.⁴⁹ Despite this issue I have managed to glean information from Constanduros’s letters to the BBC and her autobiography, *Shreds and Patches*, and I have evaluated her work using these along with the recreated scripts and few available recordings. The next chapter introduces Constanduros and Matheson and puts them, along with their ideas and working practices, into context.

⁴⁶ Peter Lewis, ‘Introduction’, in *Radio Drama*, ed. by Peter Lewis (New York: Longman, 1981), p. 11.

⁴⁷ Martin Esslin, *The Field of Drama*, (London, Methuen, 1988), p. 83.

⁴⁸ Crook, p. 7.

⁴⁹ *The Science of Music*, BBC Radio 4, 06 June 2013.

PART ONE

2. PRELUDE

Matheson and Constanduros: early practitioners

The first half of this thesis addresses early theory and practice of writing and performing radio drama and comedy through examination of the work done by two female pioneers of early radio. In *West End Women* Maggie Gale questions the way in which histories of playwriting for the London stage have been constructed. She suggests that rather than viewing the value of plays written by women according to the standards set by men, which have actually created the ‘boundaries of research on the history of women’s playwriting’ researchers should transcend these and look at women’s practice ‘from a number of ideological positions.’¹ Although radio is a comparatively new medium and theatre an ancient one, this still seems an appropriate way to view early practice in radio, given that it was similarly dominated by men, so I have adopted Gale’s perspective and looked at the women in this study ‘as a social and cultural “out-group”’, who lacked real power, but nonetheless ‘infiltrated and integrated with a dominant form’.² ‘By taking away the closed feminist framework of analysis’ and considering their work on its own merits I hope to demonstrate that Hilda Matheson and Mabel Constanduros are worthy of recognition beyond the constraints associated with the feminist lens.³ In other words, there is now such a large body of work arguing that women were (and still are) marginalised that I do not feel I have to keep making the case. Matheson and Constanduros were brilliant practitioners regardless of their gender and this work seeks to demonstrate that. However, they were marginalised because of their gender, as Matheson’s battle with John Reith (the notorious first Director General of the BBC) demonstrates; and this is discussed in detail in Chapter 3. It is almost certainly the fact of Matheson and Constanduros being women that is responsible for them not being given the recognition they deserve. Reith and the critics of the day damned women

¹ Maggie B. Gale, *West End Women: Women and the London Stage 1918-1962* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 4.

² Gale, p. 4.

³ Gale, p. 197.

with faint praise, which means that their ideas and abilities were never discussed in print with the seriousness that men's were, and so scholars have lost sight of them. The men who were prominent in early radio drama are well known, the women are far less so and I wish to make these female pioneers more visible. 'Re-charting the work of women [radio practitioners] is [...] a useful and necessary part of challenging the male canon.'⁴

Hilda Matheson's influence permeated the BBC from News and Talks to Drama, but she is only remembered today by people with a particular interest in radio. The names of Val Gielgud, who was made BBC Head of Programmes in 1929, and John Reith are synonymous with the medium in the UK. When it comes to early radio they are the two men who have been most revered by radio theorists. Lance Sieveking, who wrote *The Stuff of Radio* in 1934 is rather less well known, but still discussed more often than Matheson. These men made a huge contribution to broadcasting, but radio theorists have perhaps been guilty of the sin of omission in failing to recognize the contribution made by Hilda Matheson. She was in charge of the BBC's Talks Department from 1927-1932 and was never directly involved with producing drama, however her innovative approach may have been the forerunner of what we think of as contemporary radio technique. When broadcasting was in its infancy, she grasped the process from the outset and conveys this in her book, *Broadcasting*, in clear and simple terms for the uninitiated:

Broadcasting may be described briefly, as the process of starting a set of vibrations in what is conveniently termed the ether, and of amplifying them, and if need be re-amplifying them along their journey. The listener's receiving set catches them again and reverses the treatment given at the transmitting end; it reduces them, as it were, to their original proportions, and conveys them to the ear as nearly as possible in the form in which they started life.⁵

She brought this kind of clarity to all of her thinking about radio. Her work on voice technique with presenters, which was unheard of at the time, went on to be the main influence for producers of radio drama in years to come, although they rarely know that this is the case. The chapter about her will show that she was given little credit for her ideas originally and as time passed they became thought of as received wisdom. This could have been because she was a great collaborator and unselfishly shared her ideas with everyone she worked with. Ironically it was perhaps her ability to collaborate that was also the key to her success.

Collaborative ability is also demonstrated by Mabel Constanduros, who is mostly remembered today as a popular actress, but she was also a prolific writer, and considered this

⁴ Gale, p. 4.

⁵ Hilda Matheson, *Broadcasting* (London: Thornton Butterworth Ltd, 1933), p. 39.

aspect of her practice to be the most important.⁶ Often her work was light-hearted, but she had a profound understanding of the medium of radio, and her accessible style endured from the broadcast of her first short radio play, *Devoted Elsie* in 1926.⁷ Her career spanned five decades in contrast to the six years that Matheson spent at the BBC. Whilst there is little evidence to suggest that Constanduros was directly influenced by Matheson I will show how her methods resonate with Matheson's. There is a possibility that Matheson and Constanduros worked together on a series called *Conversations in the Train*, which is discussed in my section on early soap opera later in this thesis.⁸ Both women were working at Savoy Hill on The Strand during the late 1920s and early 1930s. This was the home of the BBC from 1923 until the cramped conditions became impossible and the organisation moved to Broadcasting House in 1932. Savoy Hill only had two studios and it boasted 'the atmosphere of a gentleman's club'.⁹ Given the close proximity in which they were working and the fact that the BBC was such a male dominated institution at the time, it is hard to imagine that the two women never spoke to each other. They must have met and perhaps chatted on occasion over a whisky and soda, like HG Wells and George Bernard Shaw.¹⁰ This could have led to a sharing of thoughts.

If Matheson and Constanduros did collaborate in any way it must have been a difficult process because their cultural perspectives were entirely different. Matheson was a great believer in education and was determined to deliver what Herbert J. Gans calls "higher taste" to the masses.¹¹ While her desire was admirable her thinking was very much a product of the time. In fact the tension at the heart of cultural studies as a subject is the same as that at the core of the BBC in those early days. Richard Hoggart, the founder of the Birmingham Centre for Cultural Studies and writer of *The Uses of Literacy* (1957) recognised that he found 'canonical texts richer than so-called "mass culture" yet he mourned the demise of a traditional working-class life 'untouched by commercial culture and educational institutions.'¹² These were exactly the people that Matheson sought to educate, but the truth

⁶ DNB.

⁷ BBC Written Archives Centre, *Mabel Constanduros: Copyright File 1A 1926 – 1938*.

⁸ See Chapter 4 of this thesis.

⁹ 'BBC Buildings – Savoy Hill' in *The BBC Story*,

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/historyofthebbc/collections/buildings/savoy_hill.shtml> [accessed 30 September 2013].

¹⁰ 'BBC Buildings – Savoy Hill' in *The BBC Story*.

¹¹ Herbert J. Gans, *Popular Culture and High Culture: An Analysis and Evaluation of Taste* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), p. 9.

¹² Simon During, 'Introduction' in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. by Simon During (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 1-25 (p. 3).

was that a large proportion of these listeners failed to like or understand many of the items she broadcast, which ultimately led to her dismissal. Adorno and Horkheimer took issue with radio's approach in their essay 'The Culture Industry: enlightenment as mass deception' written in the mid-1940s. They state that radio turns all participants into listeners and authoritatively subjects them to broadcast programmes which are all the same.¹³ Fortunately cultural studies has moved on as a subject and Simon During notes that 'the cultural industry, while in the service of organised capital, also provides the opportunities for all kinds of individual and collective decoding.'¹⁴ Indeed contemporary work in cultural studies has shown that the idea of "cultural mobility", which advocates providing 'the economic and educational prerequisites for choosing high culture', has been unsuccessful on the whole.¹⁵ "Subcultural programming" is now considered the better option because it 'encourages all taste cultures, high or low and gives them equal value.'¹⁶ Constanduros represented that different 'taste culture'. Her style of performance included 'the physical comedy associated with low culture', which, at the time, was considered inferior by the likes of Matheson.¹⁷ This kind of cultural snobbery may partially explain why so little is known about Constanduros's work today. Early cultural theorists even argued that popular culture was a system of hegemonic control, but more recently it has become acceptable to research popular work because the benefits have been recognised; cultural studies is now 'most interested in how groups with the least power practically develop their own reading of, and uses for, cultural products – in fun, in resistance, or to articulate their own identity.'¹⁸ Constanduros appealed to those 'with the least power' and it required no special education in order to appreciate what she did. Harriett Hawkins argues that popular culture can be as enriching as traditional high culture by pointing out that if the 'traditionally "canonised" works were eliminated overnight [...] comparable problems of priority, value, elitism, ideological pressure, authoritarianism and arbitrariness [would] arise with reference to *whatever* works, of whatsoever kind of nature were substituted for them'.¹⁹ She goes on to give *King Lear* and *King Kong* as examples of what she means and explains that academics

¹³ Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, 'The Culture Industry: enlightenment as mass deception' in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. by Simon During (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 30-43 (p. 31).

¹⁴ During, p. 30.

¹⁵ Gans, p. xv.

¹⁶ Gans, p. xv.

¹⁷ Gans, p. xv.

¹⁸ During, p. 7.

¹⁹ Harriett Hawkins, *Classics and Trash: Traditions and Taboos in High Literature and Popular Modern Genres* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), p. 107.

‘currently debating the relative merits of the Quarto, the Folio or a conflated version of *King Lear* would [...] have to decide whether to concentrate [...] on Merian F. Cooper’s original version of *King Kong* (1933) or to focus on the 1976 [or 2005] remake’. She asks the question ‘who, if any one of us, ultimately has the right to decide whether *King Lear*, *King Kong* or [any work] should or should not be [a suitable subject for criticism]?’²⁰

Both of these extraordinary women deserve to be assessed on their own merits and considered in the light of more recent thinking as well as within the context of the period in which they were working. By analyzing what I consider to be the most important of Matheson’s ideas, within the knowledge of critical work relating to early radio drama, along with evaluating Constanduros’s most significant radio plays and sketches in accordance with contemporary comedy theory, I will show the overall impact of their work and its relevance to today’s radio practitioners.²¹

The influence of theatre

Matheson and Constanduros were involved with broadcasting very early in the life of radio, before many ideas on the precise nature of the medium and best methods of practice had been posited. They must have been influenced by some external notions of what constituted drama and performance process, which most likely came from the theatre. So I would like to examine briefly the theories concerning stage drama that were already in evidence at the time. Marvin Carlson’s *Theories of the Theatre* provides a useful overview of ideas that were prevalent in the run up to the introduction of radio drama. He explains that, ‘an interest in developing a drama relevant to the concerns of the common man and to the problems of contemporary society was wide-spread in the 1930s.’²² This is in keeping with Matheson’s communist ideals and her philosophy of making education accessible to everyone. In this respect she agreed with George Bernard Shaw, ‘who insisted that the primary aim of art should be didactic’. In Shaw’s drama ‘there is no clear-cut conclusion, just as there are no clear heroes or villains; there is instead a serious consideration of significant contemporary

²⁰ Hawkins, p. 107.

²¹ In the early days of radio theorists did not separate drama and comedy writing. There was no real written theory considering the technical side of how humour worked on the wireless. Gielgud thought there were no formulas for writing comedy.

²² Marvin Carlson, *Theories of the Theatre* (London: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 286.

questions.’²³ Shaw paved the way for Matheson’s ‘plays of discussion’; she uses his plays as good ‘examples of this class’ in her book.²⁴ He asked the question of any drama or performance, ‘What work will it do in this world?’²⁵ The idea of making the mind work was very important to Matheson and she was determined to make her listeners work by thinking for themselves. This also connected with Brecht’s political views and thoughts on didactic theatre. While Matheson did not acknowledge Brecht’s ideas directly his theories of estrangement were being experimented with in the early 1930s.²⁶ His method of making the familiar seem new by the use of ‘metaphor, ornament, and strange or rare words’ stems directly from Aristotle’s *Poetics*.²⁷ This has links with Matheson’s support for plays that use poetry and experiment with language. Her reasons for advocating this were similar to Brecht’s in that she wanted to keep the listener’s focus on the play, which she thought was apt to wander if ‘the matter and content [was not strong enough] to hold the attention by hearing alone.’²⁸

Early radio came hot on the heels of late 19th Century ideas of drama, which still bore the legacy of ‘nineteenth-century stage speech [...] associated with a special ‘theatre voice’ and a rich declamatory manner.’²⁹ Matheson’s battles with performers echoed Émile Zola’s of fifty years previously and she found that like Zola, she ‘could not change her actors overnight.’³⁰ Her problems in achieving the realism she required reflected those of Ibsen, Shaw and Chekhov, who had had similar struggles in the theatre and ‘had to accommodate or do battle with the very actors on whom they depended.’³¹ Stanislavski’s major ideas on achieving naturalism in performance had not yet found their way to Britain. They were not published until Hapgood’s translation of *An Actor Prepares* in 1936 and his methods were only just beginning to be experimented with in the theatre; *My Life in Art* was published in 1930.³² This meant that the trained actors Matheson found herself working with had no real

²³ Carlson, p. 237.

²⁴ Matheson, p. 111.

²⁵ Carlson, p. 239.

²⁶ *Verfremdungseffekte* – although Brecht did not actually coin this term until 1936. For a good explanation of this idea see: J.L. Styan, *Modern Drama in Theory and Practice 3: Expressionism and Epic Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 139-49. See also: Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. by John Willett (London: Methuen, 1978).

²⁷ Carlson, p. 385.

²⁸ Matheson, p. 111.

²⁹ J.L. Styan, *Modern Drama in Theory and Practice 1: Realism and Naturalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 9.

³⁰ Styan, *Realism and Naturalism*, p. 9.

³¹ Styan, *Realism and Naturalism*, p. 9.

³² Carlson, pp. 379-80.

concept of natural speech and she was obliged to rehearse rigorously in order to change the elocuted voices she was presented with and achieve her aims. Her intense rehearsal methods reflected the widely read English critic and director, Harley Granville-Barker. In his book, *On Dramatic Method* (1931), Granville-Barker explains that ‘a director should ‘set the actor impossible tasks and he will do better by them than the possible ones: let him be himself to the utmost’.³³ Matheson’s inclination and ability to collaborate in her working methods, as well as her lack of tolerance for any kind of false vocal styles and her tendency to ‘set [...] impossible tasks’, may have been responsible for her early success, but perhaps also contributed to her eventual fall from grace with the BBC.

Constanduros acknowledges novels as an influence on her work; as a child she was encouraged to read by her father and she was reading ‘Scott, Dickens and Thackeray [...] at an age when most children [were] reading rubbish.’³⁴ Her influences can also be found in the theatre. David Edgar offers the pertinent observation that ‘playwrights insist that their voice is unique, and they don’t start a new project with an audit of how many other people have been here before.’³⁵ It is true that Constanduros did not recognise any previous playwrights as having inspired her, but she was taken to see Henry Irving in *A Story of Waterloo* and *The Bells*.³⁶ She saw Ellen Terry play Portia in Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice*.³⁷ Constanduros also attended the pantomime at Drury Lane from a very young age.³⁸ She was excited by these performances, and her desire to be an actor probably started with this exposure to late Victorian theatre. She wrote her ‘first play at the age of about nine’ so that she could be in it.³⁹ By the time she was in the Upper School at Mary Datchelor School in Camberwell Constanduros was winning elocution prizes.⁴⁰ As a result she was invited to be in a production of the farce *The Area Belle* (1862) by William Brough and Andrew

³³ Carlson, p. 372.

³⁴ Mabel Constanduros, *Shreds and Patches* (London: Lawson and Dunn, 1946), p. 15.

³⁵ David Edgar, *How Plays Work* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2009), p. 5.

³⁶ *The Bells* is a translation by Leopold Lewis of the 1867 play *Le Juif Polonais (The Polish Jew)* by Erckmann-Chatrian. *A Battle of Waterloo* (1894) is by Arthur Conan-Doyle. Both were hugely successful melodramas starring the legendary Victorian actor, Henry Irving. He often worked with the equally revered Ellen Terry. See George Rowell, *The Victorian Theatre: A Survey* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956) and also his *Theatre in the Age of Irving* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981) for a detailed guide to the kind of theatre Constanduros talks about. It must have been a memorable experience.

³⁷ See YouTube <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iDjnl77pt4>> [accessed 1 October 2013] for a recording of Ellen Terry’s famous performance.

³⁸ Constanduros, p. 24.

³⁹ Constanduros, p. 24.

⁴⁰ Constanduros, p. 28.

Halliday.⁴¹ Harry Péliissier, who was to become a famous composer and satirist, was in the cast.⁴² These early experiences must have given her a sound grasp of differing types of humour, particularly farce and satire, which can both be seen in her work.

As an adult Constanduros was a member of several amateur dramatic societies before becoming professional and took part in *The Eldest Son* (1912) by John Galsworthy just before the onset of World War 1.⁴³ Perhaps she was influenced by his naturalistic drama and his view that ‘the artist should set before the public “the phenomena of life and character, selected and combined, but not distorted, by the dramatist’s outlook.”’⁴⁴ It is probable that being in plays by the great writers of the period gave Constanduros ideas that she put into her own work. Her emphasis on character in her work is in keeping with Galsworthy’s view that ‘a human being is the best plot there is’.⁴⁵

Comedy was the genre in which Constanduros excelled; her use of language as a ‘source of laughter’, along with content that includes ‘deception’ and ‘the unexpected’, stems from Greek theatre and Aristotle’s *Poetics*, which was later ‘defined and analyzed in the puzzling fragment known as the *Tractatus coislinianus*’ by the Romans.⁴⁶ It is probable that through performing in amateur dramatics and then attending drama school Constanduros encountered many of the great plays from the canon, which stemmed from the classics, before she began writing for radio. The same ‘sources of laughter’ can be seen in the comedies of Shakespeare, Molière and plays of the Restoration all of which were (and still are) regularly produced by amateurs and drama schools. Sheridan’s wonderful comedy, *The Rivals* (1775) may have been among the plays she encountered. His famous character, Mrs Malaprop would seem to have inspired the errors of language used by some of Constanduros’s characters.⁴⁷ The farcical nature of some of her situations could easily have

⁴¹ *DNB*.

⁴² Constanduros, p.28. NB While weak burlesques of Shakespeare and other serious dramas had been done before, Péliissier and his troupe broke new ground. Under his direction the Follies parodied not only the plots but the music of grand opera, musical comedy, the current rage for patriotic and sentimental songs, and every topic of the moment. Péliissier’s pastiches of patriotic songs and ballads were so accurate that it is difficult for modern readers to distinguish them from the originals. Making full use of his musical inventiveness, topicality, wit, and a carefully chosen cast of artistes, the Follies became known up and down the country and achieved success in London with a brilliant satire of the pantomime *Bill Bailey* at the Palace Theatre in 1904. *DNB*.

⁴³ Constanduros, p. 36.

⁴⁴ Cited in Carlson, p. 307.

⁴⁵ Cited in Carlson, p. 307.

⁴⁶ Carlson, pp. 22-23.

⁴⁷ See Chapter 4 of this thesis.

their origins in work by Ben Travers, such as *Rookery Nook* and *Thark*, which were very popular during the 1920s.

The characters in Constanduros's comedies often behave in ways that are completely inappropriate for the sort of person that they are.⁴⁸ This fits in with Pirandello's 'perception of the opposite', which was detailed in his famous essay *L'umorismo* (1908). Pirandello believed that 'humour does not try to make you laugh, but instead gives you "the feeling of the opposite"'.⁴⁹ Like Pirandello Constanduros tore down the facades people hid behind. She exposed the truth about the family, particularly concerning the role of women, through comedy.

The origins of radio drama

Before considering the impact Matheson and Constanduros had on British radio drama it is worth a brief reminder of how the medium of radio came into being. Following the success of Morse Code, the telegraph and Alexander Graham Bell's invention of the telephone in the nineteenth century, the early twentieth century saw the development of Guglielmo Marconi's wireless signal. America was the first to exploit the power of radio when Fessenden formed the National Electric Signaling Company; and although John A. Fleming also tried to progress the use of wireless at the British Marconi Works, Britain was some way behind America. In the early part of the century all wireless-making was on an amateur basis; in America it became something of a national obsession, particularly amongst young men, and the government were forced to bring in licensing laws to prevent interference caused by these enthusiasts, who were broadcasting on the same wavelengths as the Navy. Amateur radio continued to expand in America until they became involved with the First World War and operations were taken over by the armed forces, during which time amateur radio operators were banned. In 1919 the ban was lifted, but concerns over the number of amateur users continued and they were eventually banned from the airwaves. The Radio Corporation of America was then formed, which was to become the largest radio station in the world by the 1920s.

⁴⁸ See Chapter 4 of this thesis.

⁴⁹ J.L. Styan, *Modern Drama in Theory and Practice 2: Symbolism, Surrealism and the Absurd* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 78.

Although developments were slower in Britain, the Marconi Company began irregular broadcasts in 1920 and in 1922 the Radio Society of Great Britain was formed. On 18th January 1923 the British Broadcasting Company (BBCo) received its license and became the only broadcasting company in Britain. Over the next few years the BBCo established five main stations in London, Manchester, Birmingham, Cardiff, and Glasgow. The two-tier system of national and regional programming was created by Peter Eckersley the Chief Engineer and John Reith, the first Director General, who took the opportunity to strengthen his control over British broadcasting. In 1927 the BBCo became the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) when the government bought out all of the private shares to ensure that it became a non-profit-making organization.⁵⁰

In 1928 Val Gielgud joined the BBC as Head of Drama and from then on radio plays began to develop into the kind of work we are familiar with now. Some recent scholarship asserts that Gielgud was a conservative influence on radio drama, particularly in his later years in the post. When Barbara Bray was working as his script editor from 1953 to 1960 they often fought over her more ‘avant-garde’ recommendations.⁵¹ She was a champion of ‘radically new work written in French, German and Italian’ and a great supporter of Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter.⁵² According to Hugh Chignell in his recent paper, ‘British Radio and the Absurd’, Gielgud ‘resisted all the “phoney” qualities of European writers, including, and especially, Samuel Beckett.’⁵³ Chignell explains the Martin Esslin replaced Gielgud in 1963 and allowed this avant-garde work to flourish.⁵⁴ But as Esslin himself points out in his seminal work *The Theatre of the Absurd* these types of plays were ‘a part of a developing [...] convention that [had] not yet been understood’.⁵⁵ It seems rather unfair to judge Gielgud’s whole career on his lack of understanding of absurdist drama before it became truly established as a form. In the early part of his career he was certainly not afraid to experiment and that is what I will be focussing on.

⁵⁰ Martin Shingler and Cindy Wieringa, *On Air: Methods and Meanings of Radio* (London: Arnold, 1998), pp. 1-6.

⁵¹ Jim Knowlson, ‘Barbara Bray’, *Journal of Beckett Studies*, 20.1 (2011), 96–101 (pp. 96-97).

⁵² Knowlson, ‘Barbara Bray’, p. 97.

⁵³ Hugh Chignell’s paper was given at the conference of ‘Audio Drama – Histories, aesthetics and practices’ at the University of Copenhagen in 2014 <<http://www.radiodrama.nu/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/AUDIO-DRAMA-SEMINAR-programme-with-abstracts.pdf>> [accessed 6 October 2014].

⁵⁴ Hugh Chignall, ‘British Radio and the Absurd’ <<http://www.radiodrama.nu/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/AUDIO-DRAMA-SEMINAR-programme-with-abstracts.pdf>> [accessed 6 October 2014].

⁵⁵ Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (London: Methuen, 1991), p. 21.

In *British Radio Drama* (1957), Gielgud explains that the precise dates of the first ‘radio-dramatic transmission’ are somewhat hazy and there is some argument as to whether it was 1922 or 1923, but that the archives and the memories of the people involved agree that it was definitely Shakespeare with scenes from *Julius Caesar* and *Much Ado About Nothing* being broadcast.⁵⁶ The first play written specifically for radio was *Danger* by Richard Hughes, which was produced in 1924 by R. E. Jeffrey. In July that year Jeffrey was appointed as Productions Director and he ‘[established] a regular department for the presentation of broadcast plays’.⁵⁷ These formed a major part of the BBC’s output, along with Talks and News, Light Entertainment and Music, and Sport. In those days it was common for people to move between disciplines and the actor, Howard Rose, was appointed to work with Jeffrey. Gielgud asserts that it was this combination that instigated early forms of all the types of radio drama he was to go on to produce and develop, including adaptations of novels (Kingsley’s *Westward Ho!* was the first in 1925, produced by Rose) and series with common themes, like the dramatized histories of famous British regiments broadcast in 1925.⁵⁸ His admiration for Rose is apparent in his praise of *The White Chateau* by Reginald Berkeley, which was the first full-length play written for radio. It was produced by Rose in 1925 and ‘was generally acknowledged as being of both importance and quality, [it] marked a great advance on anything that had been done before.’⁵⁹ Significantly, ‘it killed the curiously persisting doubt as to whether any play that lasted for more than half an hour was suitable for broadcasting.’⁶⁰ It may have been this groundbreaking play that led to the most common length for radio dramas being 45 minutes.

Gielgud identifies the importance the development of the technical side of radio with ‘the discovery of the combined Mixing-and-controlling Unit’, which allowed the use of more than one microphone and enabled program makers to produce more complex work.⁶¹ He goes on to explain that it was his involvement with Lance Sieveking’s *The First Kaleidoscope* as a studio manager that led to his increased excitement about the possibilities of radio, which he was able to indulge when he took over from Jeffrey in September of 1928.⁶² *Kaleidoscope* was distinctive because it was one of the first feature programs, described by Sieveking as ‘an

⁵⁶ Val Gielgud, *British Radio Drama 1922 – 1956* (London: George G Harrap & Co Ltd, 1957), p. 17.

⁵⁷ Gielgud, *British Radio Drama*, p. 20.

⁵⁸ Gielgud, *British Radio Drama*, p. 22.

⁵⁹ Gielgud, *British Radio Drama*, p. 22.

⁶⁰ Gielgud, *British Radio Drama*, p. 22.

⁶¹ Gielgud, *British Radio Drama*, pp. 22-23.

⁶² Gielgud, *British Radio Drama*, pp. 24-25.

arrangement of sounds which has a theme but no plot'.⁶³ This was the environment of experimentation in which Matheson and Constanduros were working and in the next chapter I discuss this issue of sounds versus voices in more detail, but before moving on I will identify the main protagonists in those early theoretical debates.

The early radio theorists

Four significant texts were published during the early 1930s as a result of the period of intense experimentation described above. The first was Gielgud's *How to Write Broadcast Plays* (1932), which is a thoroughly practical guide to writing many types of plays and contains a little history of the BBC. Although this thesis is chiefly aimed at recognising the achievements of the two women already introduced I have modelled the structure of my work on Gielgud's text and quoted from it throughout because my work is largely about the writing and production of radio plays and so many of Gielgud's thoughts are relevant.

Hilda Matheson's *Broadcasting* was published a year later; this is elegantly written and a more philosophical work than Gielgud's. It ponders the cultural and sociological effects of radio as a medium, along with airing views on types of program. It is described in the *DNB* as 'Matheson's revenge on Reith [which] was sweet.' Just why Matheson wished to get revenge on Reith is discussed in the chapter that follows and her ideas are examined in detail throughout.

Lance Sieveking published his *The Stuff of Radio* in 1934; it is more autobiography than critical work in that it describes rather than analyses early radio practice: 'someone had to go down stairs in twenty-five minutes' time and operate the handles in the little box on that office table... that someone was *me*.'; the italics are Sieveking's.⁶⁴ He is starring as the hero in the book of his early adventures in radio; it captures some of the excitement of broadcasting live using the dramatic control panel. Sieveking describes the lead up to airing his famous play, *Kaleidoscope*, as if he were a World War One fighter pilot, which is what he was until shot down in 1917.⁶⁵

The red light came on and stayed on. Above every door of every studio a red light had come on and stayed on. The world was listening. Now turning back *now*! We were off. The rotary engine roared just

⁶³ Cited by Tim Crook in *Radio Drama – Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 201.

⁶⁴ Lance Sieveking, *The Stuff of Radio* (London: Cassell and Company, 1934), p. 19.

⁶⁵ *DNB*. Sieveking seemed to be generally interested in flying. He was in the RAF and stationed in India from 1923 – 1924, before joining the BBC in 1925.

behind my back – forward the little joystick! I'm rolling, rolling, faster, faster. Balance her! Balance her! A touch of rudder! *Now*. Back with the joystick and up we go! – I pressed a cue-light switch.'⁶⁶

His book contains a great deal of technical information, which is rather off-putting for the radio dramatist, and he uses eight of his own plays as examples. The book is similarly structured to *How to Write Broadcast Plays*, with theory and description in the first half and scripts of creative works for radio in the second.

Matheson's work does not contain any examples of scripts and neither does the other important work of the time, Filson Young's *Shall I Listen*, which came out in 1933, like *Broadcasting*. His book has other parallels with Matheson's; it is rather philosophical in tone, musing on the composition of the audience and their lives; it is also similarly split into chapters with titles like 'Radio Drama' and 'Humour'. But that is where the similarity ends. Young's book is often patronising: 'What a blessing to these poor isolated people must be the opportunity of listening to what millions of their fellow-men are listening to, and so being united to them by an invisible bond and having their dull bare lives enriched!'⁶⁷ He and Matheson despised each other and this is also mentioned in what is to follow. Young is the only one of the four writers discussed here who is not listed in the *DNB*; he was never actually on the permanent staff at the BBC, which could also explain the difference in his tone; he was a journalist not a broadcaster and he did not make radio programs, only criticised programs others had made.⁶⁸ This is a perfectly valid thing to do, but it does indicate a different type of thought process. However my aim is to consider ideas and so there are references to Young's book throughout; he is particularly useful in his thoughts on radio comedy because he is the only one of the four that actually attempted any analysis of comedy. These four books demonstrate the opposing views of the main protagonists in the battle over radio technique and the next chapter puts their ideas into context and considers them in the light of other prominent radio practitioners of the period.

⁶⁶ Sieveking, p. 20-21.

⁶⁷ Filson Young, *Shall I Listen: Studies in the Adventure of Broadcasting* (London: Constable and Co Ltd, 1933), p. 8.

⁶⁸ Richard North, 'Filson Young' in *rdn.com/filsonyoung*
<<http://richarddnorth.com/archived-sites/filsonyoung/>> [accessed 26 October 2013].

3. HILDA MATHESON: *BROADCASTING AND OTHER EARLY RADIO DRAMA THEORIES*

Introduction to Hilda Matheson 1888-1940

This exceptional woman has been largely ignored by critics since she left the BBC in 1932. One can only speculate as to why that might be. Despite the fact that the BBC owes the success of its news service largely to Matheson she is given scant recognition. ‘Today [she] only appears in books about other people’s lives where she features, usually in a lesbian relationship with someone better known than herself’.¹ The BBC news website devotes a mere two hundred and forty words to her contribution.² Until very recently her name was largely unheard on Radio 4, but a short item on female broadcasting pioneers, first aired in October 2013, mentions her as having instigated the earliest political programmes.³ Cheryl Law is aware of her existence in *Women, a Modern Political Dictionary*, and clearly full of admiration, describing how she ‘used her intelligence, vision and considerable intellectual and artistic contacts to produce eclectic programming’; she confirms Matheson as a ‘confessed lesbian’ whose ‘department consisted of Women’s, General and News sections’ and goes on to explain briefly that ‘the talks in the Women’s programme often tackled controversial issues such as married women’s right to work by ex-suffrage activists such as Ellen Wilkinson’.⁴ Tim Crook attempts to redress the balance by discussing her theories in some depth and I examine his analysis later in this chapter. Shingler and Wieringa also mention her in their chapter, ‘Words, Speech and Voices’, but they do not recognize her influence on radio as a whole and have not included her in their ‘Radio Time-line’.⁵ Alan Beck’s definitive work on 1920’s broadcasting ‘The Invisible Play’ omits any mention of Matheson; despite charting the controversy that raged over plays that challenged the attitudes of the day he makes no links with the parallel disputes over news and talks.⁶ It is unlikely that Beck’s omission is deliberate; his position is merely a logical one, given that he is interested

¹ Fred Hunter, ‘Hilda Matheson and the BBC 1926-1940’, in *This Working-Day World: Women’s Lives and Culture(s) in Britain 1914-1945*, ed. by Sybil Oldfield (London: Taylor & Francis Ltd, 1994), pp. 169-74.

² Martha Kearney, ‘Women in news or “news tarts”?’ in *BBC News* <<http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/newsnight/newsnight25/4227695.stm>> [accessed 24 April 2007].

³ ‘The Female Pioneers’, *Getting on Air: The Female Pioneers*, BBC Radio 4, 28 October, 2013.

⁴ Cheryl Law, *Women: A Modern Political Dictionary* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2000), p. 107.

⁵ Martin Shingler & Cindy Wieringa, *On Air – Methods and Meanings of Radio* (London: Arnold, 1998), pp. 1-51.

⁶ Alan Beck, ‘The Invisible Play’ in *Radio History Database* <<http://www.kent.ac.uk/sdfva/invisibleplay/mainindex.html>> [accessed 28 April 2007].

in radio drama; he has simply failed to make a connection with talks and news. However, in the early days of radio there were so few people involved and the medium was at such an experimental stage, the methods used seem closely aligned. Matheson was a pioneer in ‘training would-be broadcasters how to write [and speak] for the ear. One of her colleagues credited [her] with “discovering, by trial and error, the technique of the spoken word over the air”.⁷ Ian Rodger devotes a whole chapter to discussing the evolution of speech and vocal techniques from the 1920s to the early 1960s in his book, *Radio Drama*, and bemoans the slow inclusion of natural voices for radio, but does not credit Matheson’s efforts to develop this.⁸ When John Drakakis pleads the case for radio ‘being seen in the larger context of experimentation in all the arts’ during the 1920s and early 1930s and cites ‘the experiments with literary form, as evidenced in James Joyce’s *Ulysses*’ he does not recognize that it was Matheson who led this particular experiment and lost her job in the process.⁹

In an attempt to re-instate Matheson into the public consciousness Michael Carney wrote a biography of her called *Stoker*, which he published himself in 1999. Although this work concentrates as much on Matheson’s personal life as it does on her career it gives a valuable insight into her job at the BBC. By using information from Carney’s book, along with memos and news cuttings from the Written Archive Centre, it is possible to gain a more complete view of Matheson’s life and work at the BBC. This chapter examines Matheson’s theories of radio in the light of other prominent radio ideas and then charts her time at the BBC, finally offering some possible reasons for her lack of recognition within the organisation.

Early radio theories

Although they are not published in any books, the earliest ideas on the nature of radio drama were posited by the first BBC Productions Director, R. E. Jeffrey, in 1924, according to the BBC Written Archives and Asa Briggs, but he, along with Matheson, has been largely, and perhaps unfairly, forgotten. It seems that some contemporary theorists (Crook, Drakakis and others cited in this chapter excepted) have not traced their own ideas on radio drama back far

⁷ Hunter, p. 171.

⁸ Ian Roger, ‘The Revolution in Diction’ in *Radio Drama* (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press LTD, 1982), pp. 39-53.

⁹ ‘Introduction’, in *British Radio Drama*, ed. by John Drakakis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 2.

enough; Shingler and Wierenga have based their chapter ‘The Mind’s Eye’ on ideas that have been in existence since the early days, but don’t seem to acknowledge this, which is an unfortunate oversight, given that radio as we know it would not exist without the pioneers discussed here.¹⁰ Briggs cites Matheson’s *Broadcasting* as being one of the most ‘informative’ books on broadcasting written between 1927 and 1939; he also cites *The Stuff of Radio* (1934), *Shall I Listen* (1933) and *British Radio Drama, 1922-1956* (1957) as being useful in the writing of *The Golden Age of Wireless* (1965). Gielgud was Jeffrey’s successor and he is respectful of Jeffrey’s work; Young was Matheson’s most hated colleague; Sieveking and Gielgud were frequently at odds; Matheson’s ideas seem to agree with Gielgud’s in respect of radio drama, but as they never refer to each other directly it is difficult to say whether one inspired the other. This is examined in my discussions of sounds versus voices. Matheson’s ideas on actual radio performance by readers seem revolutionary for the time and will be considered separately. Briggs sums up the main theories relating to early radio drama briefly, stating that there were conflicting ideas on using adapted stage plays; plays of discussion and plays of ‘suspense and mystery’.¹¹ Whatever the disagreements on suitable types of play, Briggs emphasises the fact that everyone was in agreement that radio’s intimacy was what made it significantly different to other types of performance. He goes on to suggest that ‘there were two other approaches to radio drama – the first imaginative rather than theoretical and the second supremely practical’ or, what I call, ‘sounds versus voices’.¹² What follows is an overview and analysis of these arguments.

Jeffrey fell largely into the practical camp. He ‘had firm ideas about what could and could not be done on the air’ and ‘believed that radio plays should not last longer than 40 minutes’; he often wrote articles for the *Radio Times*.¹³ His attempt to explain the essence of drama performed in this medium drew on classical Greek ideas of shared emotions and a letting go of those that are suppressed.¹⁴ In ‘Wireless Drama’ (1924), a document which was originally published in the *Radio Times*, he points out the limitations of poor sets and stresses that there were no barriers to what we imagine with radio; there are no visual images to

¹⁰ Shingler & Wierenga, pp. 73-93.

¹¹ Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom Volume II: The Golden Age of Wireless* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 164-65.

¹² Asa Briggs, *The Golden Age of Wireless*, pp. 164-65.

¹³ Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom Volume I: The Birth of Broadcasting* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 281.

¹⁴ Catharsis: Aristotle’s view that tragedy rids the spectator of unwanted ‘passions’, see Marvin Carlson, *Theories of the Theatre* (London: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 18.

contradict our imagined ones.¹⁵ He saw radio drama as a battle between theatre and the airwaves and argued for the superiority of radio on the grounds that as the listener saw nothing to contradict the voice s/he heard s/he was free to imagine a god or mythical creature without the visual truth of a disappointing costume.¹⁶ This is the first description I have been able to find of what Matheson went on to champion as her cinema-in-the-mind, which in turn became Crook's 'fifth dimension', and this concept is explained very well by David Mamet:

We hear "a windswept moor" and immediately supply the perfect imaginary moor. And the moor we supply is not perfect "in general", but perfect according to our subconscious understanding of the significance of the moor to the story.¹⁷

In 'Notes on Techniques of Playwriting', which is in the same WAC file as *Radio Drama*, Jeffrey acknowledges an issue that has never gone away; that of holding the listener's attention when 'the effect of a thoroughly good story will be nullified by any slight irritation in the [...] mind.'¹⁸ In other words, it is only too easy to switch off at the slightest annoyance. If you have paid your money for a theatre or cinema seat and are surrounded by others you are unlikely to give up and leave if you are distracted, so radio was at a distinct disadvantage because of the ease with which the audience could abandon the performance. Jeffrey thought that the lack of concentration was due to the listener being unaccustomed to the practice of listening because wireless was so very new:

Until the public imagination is trained to almost instantaneously create a complete picture from a subtly insinuated description, moderately broad methods of building and sustaining the required picture must be used.¹⁹

Jeffrey goes on to provide some suggestions as to how the radio dramatist might keep his audience's attention. These include 'avoiding confusion of characters' by:

- a) More frequently referring to characters by name
- b) Drawing characters whose expression by voice effect will be widely differentiated
- c) Introducing the fewest possible characters in the foreground action.²⁰

¹⁵ WAC, File R19/276, *Entertainment: Drama Department 1924-1948*, R. E. Jeffrey, 'Wireless Drama', p. 2.

¹⁶ Jeffrey, 'Wireless Drama', p. 3.

¹⁷ David Mamet, 'Radio Drama', in *Writing in Restaurants* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), p. 14.

¹⁸ WAC, File R19/276, *Entertainment: Drama Department 1924-1948I*, R. E. Jeffrey, 'Notes on Techniques of Playwriting', p. 1.

¹⁹ Jeffrey, 'Notes on Techniques of Playwriting', p. 1.

²⁰ Jeffrey, 'Notes on Techniques of Playwriting', p. 1.

He also includes ideas on how to create a ‘mental picture of the scene and appearance of characters’:

- d) Pointers in dialogue which will indicate scene of the action – type of locale (exterior or interior, garden room, wood, ship’s dock, country, etc) – class of occupier – period – time of day or year – etc.
- e) Similar pointers for expectation of entrance and exit, and actual entrance and exit, of characters
- f) Short lines interpolated which will create figure, dress and style of character, if necessary.
- g) Introducing of marked effects, such as sea, wind, crackling fires, motor noises, mobs, carriage noises, explosions, and any other sounds possible of reproduction.²¹

He advises the aspiring writer that:

When introducing sound effects, it is advisable to suggest by means of a prior phrase in the dialogue the coming effect. This makes for clarity and avoids indefiniteness in the listener’s mind, as occasionally two effects may be somewhat similar.²²

Finally Jeffrey gives his opinion on how the writer might create ‘an anticipatory atmosphere for the situation’:

- h) Frequent, although not obtrusive, finger-posts which will arouse anticipation of coming climax in play.
 This can be accomplished in several ways; here are two –By dialogue – By placing action in a surrounding where noise effects may be used to develop atmosphere of climax being built up to.
- i) Effective minor situations steadily mounting in crescendo to climax.²³

It is probably true that if followed exactly much of this advice would lead to a play similar to Timothy West’s famous spoof, which is used on induction courses at the BBC, *This Gun That I Have in My Right Hand is Loaded*, in which every imaginable awful radio cliché is employed.²⁴ But the notes on avoiding character confusion are still relevant, as are Jeffrey’s comments on indicating character entrances and exits, so long as they are used with some discretion. The instructions concerning sound effects are more problematic; sound design has progressed enormously since the early days and things sound more like what they are, but even in the days when plays were broadcast live and effects were created live it must have been strange to listen to sounds being introduced in the dialogue.

²¹ Jeffrey, ‘Notes on Techniques of Playwriting’, p. 1.

²² Jeffrey, ‘Notes on Techniques of Playwriting’, p. 2.

²³ Jeffrey, ‘Notes on Techniques of Playwriting’, p. 3.

²⁴ In *Radio Listings Database*

<http://www.radiolistings.co.uk/programmes/t/th/this_gun_that_i_have_in_my_right_hand_is_loaded.html>
 [accessed 11 May 2013].

Crook cites Matheson as creating one of the first classifications of audio drama in 1933; in addition to the ‘plays of discussion’ already mentioned and ‘plays of great poetry’ like Shakespeare’s, she typifies them as stage plays, with ‘microphones in theatre wings’, ‘action plays’ and ‘incident plays’ (which involved a ‘confusion of noises’), and doesn’t particularly like any style, except the first two.²⁵ But it was actually Jeffrey who first categorized them as early as 1924. Archivists at WAC are unsure whether the precise year is 1924 or 1925, but it was certainly earlier than Matheson’s attempt. Jeffrey details these in the same document intended for writers, *Notes on Technique*. He describes them as ‘the three types of play suited to broadcast’, which included ‘comedy, drama or tragedy’, and arranged them as follows:

1. PLAYS WITH ACTION SET IN ONE SCENE.

These are similar to the usual stage play, but written with the previous general methods in mind. Ordinary stage business with minor properties is naturally ineffective as it must be seen to be appreciated. For instance “Raffles would not be broadcast because the two important scenes were a) Detective Bedford works out by dumb show the action of Raffles in stealing the necklace and b) Raffles escaping through the cloak, could not be indicated without sight.”²⁶

2. PLAYS WITH ACTION SET IN ONE SCENE BUT INTRODUCING IMAGINATIVE PICTURES.

This type is the stage equivalent of dream scenes, where an illuminated gauze cloth allows another scene to be shown and played while the foreground scene remains. It is also equivalent to the cinema play, where the thoughts of the character are reproduced on the screen in picture form to illustrate what is passing in his mind.

3. PLAYS WITH ACTION WHICH MOVE FROM PLACE TO PLACE FOLLOWING THE CHARACTER’S ADVENTURES.

This type has practically no adequate stage equivalent. In the broadcast it is possible to commence play action in, say, an hotel, continuing with the same character (and others fitting into change of scenes) down the stairs, in a taxi to a wharf-side, across the gang-way to a cutter, out to a liner, and continue with possibly a wreck at sea. By aiding the imagination at all points with dialogue and effects the unbroken progress of such a journey may be effectively presented.

3A Practically simultaneous action in two different places can also be presented, as we have the apparatus to ‘fade out’ any scene at will, and simultaneously ‘fade in’ another scene going on in another studio.²⁷

Jeffrey was keen to impart ideas concerning the structure of radio plays to future writers and some of his thoughts are still relevant to structure today.²⁸

In the section marked 3A Jeffrey is referring to the new developments in the use of the dramatic control panel, or combined mixing-and-controlling unit, as it was called before

²⁵ Tim Crook, *Radio Drama – Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 74. Matheson, pp. 111-13.

²⁶ Arthur J. Raffles is a character created in the 1890s by E. W. Hornung. He is a gentleman thief and a master of disguise. See E.W. Hornung, *Raffles: The Amateur Cracksman* (London: Penguin Books, 2003).

²⁷ Jeffrey, ‘Notes on Techniques of Playwriting’, p. 3.

²⁸ See Chapters 5 and 6 of this thesis for a more detailed explanation of this and examples of how my own plays fit into these categories.

Sieveking re-named it.²⁹ In 1924 it simply allowed the producer to ‘listen to the performance of a play in the amplifier room and speak back through a microphone operating a loud speaker in the studio in order to give directions to the performers during the rehearsal’.³⁰ By 1926 Jeffrey was requesting a special control room, so that several studios could be operated at once. Initially his request was turned down by the Programme Board.³¹ But in 1927 he got his way and a new studio was constructed, which was divided into two parts; ‘one side was for the actors and the other for the effects’.³² More gadgets were introduced over the next two years, including a device for controlling the volume of the microphone and various signalling instruments. In 1927 a special echo room was introduced in order to create the sound quality of large halls and the dramatic control panel allowed for all these things to be used at the same time, thus paving the way for Sieveking’s controversial *Kaleidoscope* in 1928. Matheson makes the point that the dramatic control panel put the producer ‘in the position of the listener’ in Britain, which differed from Germany where actors, musicians and sound effects were all in one big studio with the producer acting as a conductor.³³ At the time the German method may well have been preferred by some actors, who disliked the new arrangements because they ‘involved prolonged rehearsals and they felt that they were isolated from each other – the producer in his box, the actors on the floor. Directions by microphone were not always as effective as directions from the floor’.³⁴ Whatever its merits or otherwise, the introduction of the dramatic control panel was largely responsible for the polarizing sounds versus voices debate.³⁵

Jeffrey also made notes on use of music. He identifies that music works as background and can be used to suggest locations; it can also be ‘used as a relief for dialogue’ if some music is performed by ‘a character or characters in the play’ because ‘in this form it supplies some relief to the mind of the of the listener, who is apt to be wearied by continuous concentration required in following a wholly spoken story’.³⁶ This may seem like a condescending approach, but actually it is a very good point. Listening to radio is, for most

²⁹ Briggs, *The Golden Age of Wireless*, p. 165.

³⁰ WAC, File R19/276, ‘Dramatic Broadcasts’, no author.

³¹ These were committee meetings that were attended by all the heads of “the output departments” as they were called, along with other full-time or part-time members of the BBC’s staff. For a fuller description see Briggs, *The Golden Age of Wireless*, p. 31.

³² Briggs, *The Golden Age of Wireless*, p. 31

³³ Matheson, pp. 119-20.

³⁴ Briggs, *The Golden age of Wireless*, pp. 165-67.

³⁵ Briggs and Drakakis write that experimentation with sound became outdated, but Crook, doesn’t entirely agree and thinks we are still experimenting.

³⁶ Jeffrey, ‘Notes on Techniques of Playwriting’, p. 4.

people, hard work, and theorists have been pointing this out since broadcasting began. Matheson says that ‘the art of listening is as important as the art of breathing’.³⁷ Unusually she and Filson Young agreed in this respect, he states that ‘it would require some time and practice on the listener’s part before he would acquire the habit of sympathetic listening.’³⁸ There is some physical effort involved with using the ears and imagining the rest, which is similar to the physical effort of using the eyes to read words by looking at the page and filling out the images and sounds in the imagination.³⁹ Jeffrey believed that music could give some light relief from the hard work of listening and concentrating, which Gielgud explains is because ‘people are trained by habit and custom to listen to music, while they are not trained to listen to plays’.⁴⁰ He also describes how it can be used as a scene break or indicator of ‘another scene where the major action is not taking place’, as in his category 3A play explained above.⁴¹ Crook notes that it was Matheson who first identified ‘that music can provide the appearance of a particular character’, and ‘was decades ahead of experimental practice’.⁴² She progressed ideas on music beyond Jeffrey’s rather simple concept. To her it ‘was the means to create atmosphere and emotion and to change scene mellifluously. She said choice of music should be as much a part of the writer’s craft as making decisions about theme, plot and characters.’⁴³ Matheson’s progressive views on music are certainly relevant today, particularly her point that ‘it suggests ‘by association, an epoch, a fashion, a place, a company, an individual’.⁴⁴

Jeffrey’s final section of *Notes on Technique* considers the content of plays, and this is where he differs considerably in his views from both Matheson and Gielgud. He would be dismissed today as old-fashioned, but it is important to remember that he, along with Howard Rose, was responsible for ‘embryos of practically all the later and well-known offspring of the Drama Department’.⁴⁵ Jeffrey describes the audience as a ‘heterogeneous collection of mentalities’ and suggests that:

A play plot should be, as far as reasonable, based on some situation, emotion or experience (actual, or psychologically imaginable) which will be appreciated, or rather applicable to the average mind.

³⁷ Matheson, p. 121.

³⁸ Young, p. 140.

³⁹ Peter Lewis, ‘Introduction’, in *Radio Drama*, ed. by Peter Lewis (New York: Longman, 1981), p. 11.

⁴⁰ Gielgud, *How to Write Broadcast Plays* (London: Hurst & Blackett, Ltd, 1932), p. 28.

⁴¹ Jeffrey, ‘Notes on Techniques of Playwriting’, p. 4.

⁴² Crook, p. 92.

⁴³ Crook, p. 92.

⁴⁴ Matheson, p. 118. Also cited by Crook, p. 92.

⁴⁵ Gielgud, *British Radio Drama 1922 – 1956*, p. 21.

Knowledge of the average mind will thus be an important factor in deciding choice of plot and method of development.⁴⁶

In other words, writers of radio drama should avoid complex plots and ideas that might tax the average brain. He realized that radio was being broadcast into homes of people with little or no formal education, who were quite different to the usual theatre audience, and sought to encourage them to listen. Gielgud echoes this a few years later in *How to Write Broadcast Plays* when he describes the audience as:

A cross-section of society made up of individuals, for the most part by their firesides, and in the company, not of strangers interesting or irritating as the case may be, but of their relatives or friends. Secondly, it is an audience comprising all sorts and conditions of men and women.⁴⁷

But then he makes the point that while it is almost impossible to appeal to the entire listening population, which will include ‘children and grown-ups, dukes and dustmen, clergymen and charwomen, Philistines and Intellectuals’, writers should attempt to make the subject matter of their plays ‘as broad as possible’.⁴⁸ Both men felt that the subject matter of radio plays had to be made accessible, which Matheson certainly agreed with, but her approach was to challenge the audience. ‘Radio was the medium which brought the fine arts to the common people’ and Matheson was hugely instrumental in making it happen.⁴⁹ She thought that the term illiterate should not be synonymous with uneducated. In her chapter ‘Living Speech’ she argues that the inability to read should not preclude engagement with complex ideas and enthuses about the way in which the new medium of radio could facilitate this:

Broadcasting is enabling complicated, difficult and novel ideas and experiences to be conveyed to people whose lack of literary education would ordinarily prevent or hinder them from getting in touch with those ideas and experiences direct from printed books. It is moreover providing a bridge, a connecting link between ear and eye impressions of words and sentences. Readings of prose and poetry, and plays, are giving them new life to many people who had missed the sound and significance of them in print.⁵⁰

Where Jeffrey, and then Gielgud, sought to entertain Matheson hoped to educate the listener, which was what began her battle with Filson Young, who ‘had a firm belief in radio as a popular medium’.⁵¹ Matheson’s difficult working life is considered later in this chapter, but

⁴⁶ Jeffrey, ‘Notes on Techniques of Playwriting’, p. 4.

⁴⁷ Gielgud, *How to Write Broadcast Plays*, p. 27.

⁴⁸ Gielgud, *How to Write Broadcast Plays*, p. 27.

⁴⁹ Crook, p. 10.

⁵⁰ Matheson, p. 77.

⁵¹ Carney, p. 29.

before moving on to that subject I wish to examine what Briggs calls the ‘practical’ (voices) and ‘imaginative’ (sounds) theories in more depth. Gielgud’s ‘practical’ methods have been the subject of much radio criticism and John Drakakis gives an excellent overview of Gielgud’s career in his ‘Introduction’ to *British Radio Drama*.⁵² I have considered some of Gielgud’s ideas in the light of his predecessor, Jeffrey, above, but I want to elaborate on this and put the ensuing sounds versus voices arguments into context in order to establish Matheson’s position in the debate before moving on to her theories on voice training, which were so far ahead of their time.

Sounds versus voices

The essential nature of the form is that it suffers immediately from the addition of production values. [...] Radio drama can be produced by anybody with a microphone and a tape recorder.⁵³

This is the opinion of David Mamet, who champions the importance of story in radio drama. Although he is writing many years after radio drama’s inception, the issue of sounds versus voices is still very much in evidence. Mamet believes that simplicity is the key to good drama in the theatre and that too much description detracts from the story. He explains that by ‘writing for radio [he] learned a lot about playwriting [because] more than any other medium it teaches the writer to concentrate on essentials’.⁵⁴ From Mamet’s point of view, ‘good drama has no stage directions.’ In radio this means sound effects, and while it is almost impossible to proceed without any background sound at all, this should not take precedence over the story. Mamet, like Gielgud and Matheson in the 1930s, believes in ‘practical’ (voices) methods of radio production, because good drama is produced by ‘the iteration of the characters’ objectives expressed solely through what they say to each other – not through what the author says about them’.⁵⁵ In other words, it doesn’t matter how much atmosphere the producer attempts to create through background sound, this will be insufficient to create good drama. To do that the writer must focus on story not production values, which is as true today as it was in the earliest days of radio drama, when Lance Sieveking, who represented the ‘imaginative’ (sounds) side of the debate, was obsessed with effects as the future of radio:

⁵² John Drakakis, ‘Introduction’, in *British Radio Drama*, ed. by John Drakakis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 1-36.

⁵³ Mamet, p. 18.

⁵⁴ Mamet, pp. 13-14.

⁵⁵ Mamet, p. 14.

The sound effect, I repeat, is most truly the *stuff* of radio, because whereas everything else that is broadcast existed before wireless was invented, including the father and mother of radio sound effect, namely the noises-off of the theatre, the art of painting with sound is a new thing peculiar to radio.⁵⁶

Sieveking was largely responsible for Gielgud's reference to the fact that radio plays were considered to be 'subjects of exhibitionist activity by a number of exhibitionist young men' in his document 'Considerations Relevant to Broadcast Drama Based Upon Experience In the Years 1929 to 1948'.⁵⁷ He wrote this report when about half way through his distinguished career, by which point he had definitely decided which side of the argument he was on. He had come to believe that 'the play was the thing and the machinery for its production little more than a necessary evil.'⁵⁸ He came to this conclusion following a period of experimentation between 1929 and 1932, which he also describes in *How to Write Broadcast Plays*. It was during this period that he worked on a wide range of plays and found that that 'content must not be sacrificed to mere technical ingenuity'.⁵⁹

Matheson supported Gielgud's view. In *Broadcasting* she points out that this advance in technology 'sometimes led to a wearisome preoccupation with sound'.⁶⁰ Crook believes that this remark is a reference to Sieveking's program making, but doesn't provide any evidence for this, so he can only speculate.⁶¹ However, articles Matheson wrote in the *Week-End Review* support Crook's supposition. In an article dated 14 May 1932 she is very critical of recent programs, believing that while 'ingenuity and enthusiasm' are a natural result of the available techniques in production and presentation 'it becomes dangerous if experiments in sound-effects are held to excuse indifferent subject matter'.⁶² There is no mention of Sieveking here, but the following week there is a further article in which she consolidates this view by commenting on a feature program called *The End of Savoy Hill*, which she obviously found to be something of a curate's egg. She rather dismissively 'suppose[s that it was] one of the most ambitious and successful ever attempted, and represented months of work and weeks of rehearsal', and then goes on to say that she 'found Mr. Sieveking's choice of

⁵⁶ Sieveking, p. 73.

⁵⁷ WAC, R19/276, Val Gielgud, 'Considerations Relevant to Broadcast Drama Based Upon Experience in the Years 1929 to 1948', p. 2.

⁵⁸ Gielgud, 'Considerations Relevant', p. 2.

⁵⁹ Gielgud, 'Considerations Relevant', p. 2.

⁶⁰ Matheson, p. 113.

⁶¹ Crook, p. 75.

⁶² Hilda Matheson, 'Broadcasting' in the *Week-End Review*, 14 May 1932, WAC, File 3A, *Collected Articles*, 1932.

excerpts, both of speech and music, occasionally odd.’⁶³ *The End of Savoy Hill* is one of Sieveking’s landmark programs, the script of which is published in *The Stuff of Radio*. These articles prove that Matheson is indeed referring to Sieveking in *Broadcasting* when she follows the point cited by Crook with an insightful précis of the issue:

The author’s or producer’s imagination has often been more engrossed with atmosphere and sound-effects than with the ideas which they were intended to illustrate. The end of the world, the transition from life to death, from the earth into space, living backwards in time – all such speculative or fantastic scenes offer scope to the radio-dramatist; but if their expression depends too much upon the humming of super-dynamos, on the beat of railway engines, aeroplane engines or submarine engines, a certain monotony may easily supervene. There has been, however, a quite noticeable trend away from sound-effects to ideas, and this is surely a healthy sign. Plays for the microphone must, as we have seen, possess that solid basis of intrinsic interest without which virtuosity in noises is of no permanent avail.⁶⁴

Gielgud’s discussion of the arguments surrounding the debate in *British Radio Drama* is informative. He acknowledges the experimental nature of the early days and sympathizes with Sieveking’s frustration regarding the limitations imposed on him by the BBC:

Experimental programmes had to be found a place in normal programme hours, and “tried out” upon a patient, but necessarily largely uncomprehending public. And there was not infrequent expression of resentment that producers should apparently be learning their business at listeners’ expense. Inevitably as a result, Sieveking got publicity rather than credit, while other less audacious producers benefitted from his mistakes.⁶⁵

The tactfulness of Gielgud’s comments on Sieveking in *British Radio Drama* belies the rift that was separating the two sides of the controversy at the time. Sieveking was less reticent when it came to expressing his true feelings:

Mr Val Gielgud says in his book, *How to Write Broadcast Plays*, a great many things with which I disagree violently. But that is only natural, for in life I disagree with him on almost every subject, even about the desirability of being alive at all.⁶⁶

The minutes of a research meeting that took place 11 November 1929 also give a truer picture of how the two men felt about each other’s ideas.⁶⁷ Sieveking was upset about his idea for a colour and sound project being rejected; he argued for the inclusion of a program of sounds in

⁶³ Hilda Matheson, ‘Broadcasting’ in the *Week-End Review*, 21 May 1932, WAC, File 3A, *Collected Articles*, 1932.

⁶⁴ Matheson, p. 113.

⁶⁵ Gielgud, *British Radio Drama*, p. 26.

⁶⁶ Sieveking, p. 56.

⁶⁷ WAC, R49/389, *Staff Policy Meetings*, 1929-1930, Memo, ‘Minutes of Research Meeting’, 11 November 1929.

the broadcasting schedule with images to be published in the *Radio Times*. Gielgud's response is recorded as follows:

Mr Gielgud said that he disagreed with the publishing of the experiment from the deepest conviction. In his opinion the experiment would prove nothing. It was a bastard form of art, and was nothing but an attempt to make a flash in the pan by dabbling with science – an attempt that would only bring us into absurdity in the public eye⁶⁸.

This proposed experiment clearly divided opinion as much as the earlier broadcast of 'gramophone records run backwards', which Gielgud described as a 'stunt'.⁶⁹ It would seem that the listening public did indeed have rather a lot to put up with at the point in broadcasting history when 'producers concentrated more upon knobs and switches than upon actors and acting.'⁷⁰ 'The overall impression was one of a complicated mechanical toy with which a few odd young men were having a great deal of private fun.'⁷¹

When Gielgud declares *How to Write Broadcast Plays* 'out of date' in *British Radio Drama* he is being too modest.⁷² His earliest ideas were ultimately proven and it is still true that the 'elaborate machinery' (technical innovations) of radio should serve the play and not the other way around.⁷³ The things that Matheson was saying publicly were being echoed in the privacy of BBC meetings and radio studios by Gielgud. He believed then, like Mamet today, that the difficulties of stage and radio structure had similarities and 'the writing of plays is not only an art, but also a craft, and that it is good craftsmanship ['practical' technique or voices] rather than artistry ['imaginative' technique or sounds] which is the deciding factor in the production of most plays that are [broadcast]'.⁷⁴

It may be the case that the voices have, on the whole, won the battle of the theories, but the importance of sound design must be recognized. Sieveking's role in the development of this field should not be underestimated. In pursuing what might seem to us, unnecessarily elaborate sound experiments, Sieveking was simply doing his job, which was to research 'aesthetic qualities of "radiogenic" expression' and he actually echoed Matheson in his 'exploration of the avant-garde through voice, music and sound.'⁷⁵ He simply had a very

⁶⁸ Memo, 'Minutes of Research Meeting', 11 November 1929.

⁶⁹ Memo, 'Minutes of Research Meeting', 11 November 1929.

⁷⁰ Gielgud, *British Radio Drama*, p. 60.

⁷¹ Gielgud, *British Radio Drama*, p. 61.

⁷² Gielgud, *British Radio Drama*, p. 7.

⁷³ Gielgud, *How to Write Broadcast Plays*, p. 19.

⁷⁴ Gielgud, *How to Write Broadcast Plays*, pp. 20-21.

⁷⁵ Paddy Scannell in a short paper to the Prix Italia symposium on the radio documentary in Naples, June 1996, cited by Crook, p. 202.

different method of doing it. Crook explains that he ‘appears to be the first radio producer who attempted to define the rules of sound production in audio drama.’⁷⁶ Crook also thinks that the art of creating sound has been neglected by theorists.⁷⁷ He certainly has a point, but this is because in radio drama dialogue is a more important storytelling device than sound effects. Radio drama theorists have only neglected the important, but secondary, discipline of sound design because it is less vital to the process of radio drama. Fundamentally the author ‘has nothing but his dialogue’ with which to tell his story.⁷⁸ Sound design has simply been eclipsed by the primary concern of drama, which is to tell the story in the clearest way possible, which in turn means using voices.

The origins of radio voice technique

Having established the importance of voices in radio it is worth pausing to consider how those natural voices we are accustomed to hearing today are conveyed to us, and how much we take them for granted. In *Broadcasting* Matheson lists the faults in acting and production that are exacerbated by radio:

The performers, if not rightly produced, seem embarrassingly close to [the listener] in the room. Faults of construction, loose ends, lack of clarity, a poor texture, are made painfully clear [...], just as corresponding faults in casting and in presentation, and a lack of restraint in exploiting the intimacy of the microphone, may equally ruin his whole enjoyment.⁷⁹

These issues are as real today as they were then and radio actors require careful training. The audience should be completely unaware of the techniques being used by the actors when listening to a radio drama, but the intimacy of the medium makes this especially difficult:

Being ‘on’ the words in radio most often means being more intimate, ‘bringing it down’, and judging, for example not just rhythms and timing, but even whether to use an inbreath or an outbreath. You direct the flow of energy in the voice stream in crucially different ways, depending on what I term the five positions at the microphone and on how ‘opened out’ the sound set is. The microphone cruelly exposes technique, imperfections of the vocal mechanism and insincerity.⁸⁰

While all of the early theorists agreed that radio’s intimacy was its main differentiating factor, they were mostly unsure of how to translate this unique quality into

⁷⁶ Crook, p. 70.

⁷⁷ Crook, p. 73.

⁷⁸ Gielgud, *How to Write Broadcast Plays*, p. 18.

⁷⁹ Matheson, p. 111.

⁸⁰ Alan Beck, ‘Introduction’ to *Radio Acting* (London: A & C Black, 1997)

<<http://www.savoyhill.co.uk/technique/radio-acting-book-intro.html>> [accessed 18 June 2013].

actual performance. Matheson was the only one who seemed to grasp what was required, but few people acknowledged her wisdom at the time. There was an attempt to form a special company of radio actors in 1925 before she started working at the BBC, ‘but it did not survive’ and the emphasis shifted from actors’ voices to technology.⁸¹ This could explain why early attempts to portray characters on the wireless resulted in what Reith called ‘staginess’, a trait he discouraged in a memo to all of his Station Directors in 1926: ‘The quickest way to alienate sympathy for and interest in radio plays is for any “staginess” to be suggested, either in characters or method of treatment.’⁸²

Unfortunately many of the early radio dramas were extremely ‘stagy’, or described in the press as ‘no more than a recitation, which is something quite different from acting, or else it is an exercise of ingenuity in the dramatic use of what are commonly known as “noises off”’.⁸³ In an attempt to improve the problem of actors being unused to the requirements of the medium, Jeffrey liaised with Kenneth Barnes, Director of Studies at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, and began the first ‘special course of training’ for radio actors.⁸⁴ By 1928 students were graduating from RADA with training in voice and microphone technique:

Notable is Lillian Harrison, a youthful graduate of the R.A.D.A., who, when she acted her first small part in a wireless play was found to have a voice so arresting and perfect for the microphone that the BBC gradually gave her more work.⁸⁵

Apparently Ms Harrison became the ‘best known female actress of the air’ despite ‘the stage never [having] heard her name.’⁸⁶ However, Matheson disagreed with the style that was being used; she couldn’t bear elocuted voices and in December of 1928 wrote a letter to Vita Sackville-West, who was her lover at the time, complaining about an actress called Lillian Harris, who I suspect was the same person as the famous Ms Harrison above:

I rehearsed a woman called Lilian Harris [*sic*] reading De La Mare yesterday and she made me sick. She has a good voice – the trained professional – but this damned sloppy, sentimental, coy, bright way of reading fills me with loathing. She ruins the meter and the scansion and overloads the words with emotion. I toned her down and levelled her down as far as I could and shall have to hope for the best, but oh for the non-professional.⁸⁷

⁸¹ Gielgud, *British Radio Drama*, p. 21.

⁸² WAC, R19/276: ‘Memo from John Reith to Station Directors’, 20 December 1926.

⁸³ WAC, 3127, *Programmes*, 1926: ‘A School of Voices’, *Manchester Guardian*, 11 August 1926.

⁸⁴ WAC, 3127, ‘Special Training for Broadcast Artists’, *Evening News*, 10 August 1926.

⁸⁵ WAC, P129, *Press Cuttings, Programmes*, 1928: ‘Secrets of the Microphone’, *London Opinion*, 8 December 1928.

⁸⁶ ‘Secrets of the Microphone’.

⁸⁷ Cited by Carney, p. 42.

Matheson believed in using scripts, but at the same time developing a relaxed style and encouraged young broadcasters to rehearse. In letters to Sackville-West written early in 1929 she describes some of the methods she employed in order to encourage readers into adopting a more natural tone; ‘I have just been voice-testing Fabia Drake. Nice and intelligent [...] but like other actresses, however intelligent, she recites. I believe one ought to tell them to read as if they were reading to themselves, not performing.’⁸⁸ And it would seem that Matheson was regularly exacting, as this further extract from another letter the same year shows:

I put [a reader] through it for an hour, till she was in shreds, poor thing. I imitated her and parodied her and bullied all the coyness and brightness I possibly could out of her and all her damnable elocutionist tricks.⁸⁹

Matheson was already practicing the methods that she later wrote about. But when she wrote her weekly column for the *Weekend Review* 9 July 1932, it would seem that there had been little actual improvement in production quality, despite the best attempts by the BBC to address the issue:

It seems ungrateful to complain when intelligent attempts are made to broadcast works of poetry and imagination. And yet for me they failed to satisfy the requirements of listening because they clung to a stage convention of delivery, and missed the opportunity which broadcasting provides of allowing Shakespeare the poet as well as Shakespeare the dramatist to speak to us. “Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounce it to you... but if you mouth it, as many of your players do, I had as lief the town crier spoke my lines... O it offends me to the soul, to hear a periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags... for anything so overdone is for the purpose of playing, whose end is to hold the mirror up to nature”. This passage, if I remember right, was omitted from the recent production of “Hamlet”. None of it would apply to the very brilliant cast upon the stage, but to my mind it did constantly apply to the microphone version. Would it not be interesting for the listener, as well as instructive for the BBC, to experiment with a number of less dramatic presentations and watch the results?⁹⁰

On the whole it is only possible to judge the acting in early plays by what is written about it because so few recordings have survived in the public domain.⁹¹ However there are recordings from the early 1940s available at the BBC Sound Archive in the British Library. In 1941 Gielgud’s plays were still theatrical and his actors declaimed their lines.⁹² Matheson would have found Gielgud’s actors guilty of ‘addressing the microphone like a public

⁸⁸ Cited by Carney, p. 42.

⁸⁹ Cited by Carney, p. 42.

⁹⁰ WAC, File 3A, *Collected Articles*. Hilda Matheson, ‘Broadcasting’ in the *Week-End Review*, 9 July 1932.

⁹¹ See Chapter 4 of this thesis for more details on this. Some of Constanduros’s work was recreated and recorded on gramophone records, but this was exceptional.

⁹² British Library Sound Archive, *The Princes of this World*, Dorothy L. Sayers, Val Gielgud, 1941, T9397W.

meeting'.⁹³ Eight years after she wrote her book, the natural style she developed for talks and poetry readings had still failed to permeate radio drama.

In his chapter 'The Revolution in Diction' Ian Rodger explains that 'in Britain [the] revolution in diction and presentation was to take many years to overcome certain social and artistic prejudices and it was not finally achieved until the fifties.'⁹⁴ It could be one of the reasons for the delay in adopting the now familiar natural style of radio acting was due to a combination of theatre managers' militancy and Gielgud's short-sightedness. When radio drama first began in the early 1920s theatres were pleased to have their plays broadcast by the means of 'eavesdropping' by 'placing microphones about the stage of a theatre while a play was in progress', but this proved unsatisfactory in terms of production quality.⁹⁵ As a result relations between the BBC and the theatres became strained. 'Both actors and managements regarded BBC work as amateurish, ill-paid and unimportant.'⁹⁶ Theatre managers 'refused to allow any broadcasting from their productions, and began – especially with regard to Variety – to ban their artists from appearing.'⁹⁷ By the time Gielgud took over as Productions Director relations were still 'bad' and he made things worse to begin with when he refused to allow the publication of cast lists and photographs of actors in the *Radio Times*, because he believed that part of the appeal of radio drama was that voices were anonymous, so the listener only heard the character not the actor.⁹⁸ He was forced to back down on this issue when actors boycotted the BBC. The ensuing press coverage in which he was 'pilloried' and 'misrepresented' caused 'a certain attitude of obstinate intransigence in the face of newspaper comment.'⁹⁹ Perhaps a combination of ignoring press comment on acting performance and broadcasting style, along with his attempts to establish 'agreeable personal relationships' with West End managers, led him to postpone the formation of a specialist company of radio actors.¹⁰⁰

In 1930 a memo was circulated detailing the minutes of a meeting at which the formation of a radio repertory company was discussed by Gielgud and his colleagues. It was decided that while all the producers agreed that specialist radio actors made their job much

⁹³ Matheson, p. 75.

⁹⁴ Ian Rodger, *Radio Drama* (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press LTD, 1982), p. 39.

⁹⁵ Gielgud, 'Considerations Relevant', p. 5.

⁹⁶ Gielgud, 'Considerations Relevant', p. 5.

⁹⁷ 'Dramatic Broadcasts', p. 2.

⁹⁸ Gielgud, *British Radio Drama*, p. 40.

⁹⁹ Gielgud, *British Radio Drama*, pp. 40-41.

¹⁰⁰ Gielgud, 'Considerations Relevant', p. 5.

easier the formation of such a company (which would ideally be of around 100 actors) would be ‘unpracticable [*sic*] because [the BBC] should never be able to give [enough] work to artists to keep them away from the stage.’¹⁰¹ This would explain why there was still such a shortage of good radio actors by the time *Broadcasting* was written. Matheson identified the problem of using actors who had only trained for theatre and suggested that:

Ideally broadcasting should develop its own players, special repertory companies have been tried and schools of dramatic art are turning their attention to microphone training. Until a greater range of first-class microphone actors is available, the full appeal of dramatic programmes to critical ears will not be made.¹⁰²

But her wisdom was ignored until the Radio Drama Company (RDC) ‘originally known as the BBC Repertory Company - or “The Rep”, as it is still often called’ was finally formed in 1940, more as a result of the War than for artistic purposes:

Rather than risk the danger of traversing London during a time of frequent air raids, the group of actors that made up the Rep could camp out in the stronghold that was Broadcasting House’s Concert Hall – now the Radio Theatre - and be on call show after show. With Radio Drama’s output transmitting live it was extremely advantageous to have an ensemble of actors ongoingly available and on the spot.¹⁰³

There has never been any public acknowledgement on the part of the BBC that Matheson was right. When Gielgud wrote his ‘Considerations Relevant to Broadcasting Drama’ in 1948 he made no references to any external ideas concerning radio acting; he merely admitted that he was ‘originally opposed to [the] company because [he] feared that it would establish too much of a “closed shop”’, and he also ‘feared that the listening audience might resent the inevitable reiteration of a comparatively small number of names.’¹⁰⁴ He then goes on to explain that these fears proved groundless. *British Radio Drama* was published 9 years later and in it Gielgud claims that the Second World War was what brought about the real shift in the style of radio drama. Production processes were simplified because radio producers were ‘deprived of much of the machinery’ that went into making complex programs and they were only allowed one studio.¹⁰⁵ This and the formation of the Rep

¹⁰¹ Gielgud, ‘Considerations Relevant’, p. 5.

¹⁰² Matheson, p. 119.

¹⁰³ BBC ‘Soundstart’ < <http://www.bbc.co.uk/soundstart/rdc.shtmmail> > [accessed 29 April 2013].

¹⁰⁴ Gielgud, ‘Considerations Relevant’, p. 5.

¹⁰⁵ Gielgud, *British Radio Drama*, p. 84.

brought about ‘a return to simplicity of method, and an overdue reconsideration of “first things first”’.¹⁰⁶

‘Simplicity of method’ was something Matheson advocated, but of course ‘simplicity’ in performance is one of the hardest things to achieve, which is why Stanislavsky wrote so many volumes in an attempt to address acting process. It is incredibly difficult for an actor to do absolutely nothing, whether it is with the body or the voice, in portraying a character. But that is really what Matheson was trying to achieve. She devised ‘Method’ for radio in the way that Stanislavsky devised ‘Method’ for the visual media. But Matheson did not come from a background in theatre and so her ideas were probably dismissed by colleagues who were from that background and thought they knew better, even though they seem obvious to us now.

Matheson began by assessing the difference between the formality of the written word and the informality of the spoken word, pointing out that the former uses mostly Latin words, while the latter mostly Anglo-Saxon words.¹⁰⁷ She firmly believed that it was wrong to use a formal voice for broadcasting and that language should be loose and informal when being read from a script because ‘few people speak as they write’, and if radio was to appeal to everyone it should ‘rediscover the spoken language, the impermanent but living tongue’ and it should ‘redress [...] the balance in favour of the vernacular.’¹⁰⁸ She came to the conclusion that:

It is important [...] that the training and rehearsing of speakers should never attempt to impose a uniform standard, and that, within the limits of intelligibility, speakers’ idiosyncrasies of voice should be left to speak for themselves.¹⁰⁹

Had the men who were responsible for producing radio drama at the BBC between 1926 and the Second World War paid attention to Matheson’s ideas for producing natural sounding speakers it might have taken them less time to find methods of performance and styles of production that were better suited to the medium. Their obstinacy may not have been deliberate, but it must have been difficult for Matheson to feel so strongly that she was right and have no way of improving the situation. The next section describes her life and work at the BBC and offers possible explanations for her difficulties.

¹⁰⁶ Gielgud, *British Radio Drama*, p. 85.

¹⁰⁷ Matheson, pp. 72-75.

¹⁰⁸ Matheson, pp. 72-75.

¹⁰⁹ Matheson, p. 82.

Matheson's life and work at the BBC

Gielgud and Sieveking were capable of disagreeing vehemently and remaining friends, but sadly the same could not be said of Reith and Matheson. By understanding Matheson's life and working relationships we might come to an understanding of why her ideas were not given enough weight at the time, and why she has faded from public memory. Carney believes she was a victim of sexism and underhand professional practice. His main source of information on Matheson's life is the collection of letters she sent to the woman who was her lover from 1929 to 1931, Vita Sackville-West. There is no reason to doubt the accuracy of Carney's text and he has provided a valuable document cataloguing the events of Matheson's life. 'At a time when few women had a working life outside the home, she had six successful careers.'¹¹⁰ Yet 'almost immediately after her death she dropped out of public memory'.¹¹¹ Matheson's letters to Sackville-West give a graphic account of her battles with the BBC and their content gives an unflattering portrayal of Reith and other powerful men she worked with. This might go some way to explaining why it is so difficult to obtain information about Matheson from the BBC. A cryptic comment from the diplomatic Asa Briggs also gives a clue to the conflict within the BBC in those early years:

Fortunately I got to know [Reith] well and have my own private archive relating to him. Nonetheless, there was much to broadcasting besides Reith, and the Reithian BBC of the 1930s was never a monolithic institution: it had its critics from within as well as outside.¹¹²

To begin with Matheson and Reith shared a vision of making the BBC 'an instrument of public improvement' (p. 26). But Matheson found Reith's dictatorial nature very stressful. Her relationships with other male colleagues were 'tense from the start', and she particularly hated Filson Young. He is the 'FY who appears so often in her letters accompanied by a curse' (p.39). Carney points out that he had an enormous ego, which he demonstrated with an entry which was double the size of everyone else's in the contemporary *Who's Who in Broadcasting* (p. 29). Young was completely anti talks and a thorn in Matheson's side at the regular programme boards, She also hated Commander V.H. Goldsmith, who was assistant controller, and she described George Grossman of light entertainment as having 'the wits of a mentally deficient hen' (p. 27).

¹¹⁰ Carney, p. 1.

¹¹¹ Carney, p. 1. Further references to this edition are given within the text.

¹¹² Asa Briggs, *The BBC: The First Fifty Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. ix.

Matheson was inclined to be outspoken and was often intolerant of colleagues who she felt had a lower intellectual capacity. This is in sharp contrast with her approach to the listening audience and it may be that her personality led to her making enemies of many of those she worked with who might have helped her. While Gielgud was equally direct in many ways (take his exchanges with Sieveking as an example) he was generally more tactful in public. He praises many of his early colleagues in *British Radio Drama* and makes a telling reference to Goldsmith, who was so despised by Matheson:

Val Goldsmith, then Assistant Controller, to Sir John Reith, showed his sympathy with all branches of artistic endeavour by pressing upon the Director-General the desirability of saving programmes from confinement within the bounds of cast-iron and utterly conventional schedules and formulae. [...] It was largely due to [his] liking and belief [in Sieveking] that the original Research Section was formed in 1928.¹¹³

BBC employees who were liked by their superiors had far more success in getting what they wanted artistically, no matter how experimental their ideas were.

Matheson set about changing the broadcasting format. 'At the beginning of 1927 [...] the broadcasting day was still only seven hours long.' (p. 27). Programmes did not begin until 10.15 in the morning; first there was a religious service, followed by a lunchtime concert; then there was nothing until late afternoon; on Sundays there were very long periods of silence; music took up more than 60% of the airtime.¹¹⁴ The BBC were prohibited from broadcasting news before 7pm and then it had to be in the form of a bulletin from a news agency, 'which [they] were permitted to read, but not to edit' (p. 27). A surprising amount of the current format of Radio 4 is owed to her skill and understanding. Matheson programmed a weekly talk on international affairs, *The Day's Work*, in which ordinary people described their jobs (like postmen and policemen), and she introduced poetry readings, which became so popular that eventually there were four a week. Matheson sowed the seeds of *Woman's Hour*, *In Our Time*, *Any Questions*, *Our Own Correspondent*, *The Week in Westminster* and *Poetry Please*.¹¹⁵

By 1931, when the popularity of Matheson's talks was at its height, 'the optimism of the 20s gave way to the pessimism of the 30's' and she came under increasing pressure to lighten or "dumb down" her talks (p. 68). This was not a new thing to Matheson, and a letter

¹¹³ Gielgud, *British Radio Drama*, p. 27.

¹¹⁴ Statistics taken from copies of the *Radio Times* (1926/7).

¹¹⁵ 'The Female Pioneers', *Getting on Air: The Female Pioneers*, BBC Radio 4, 28 October, 2013.

to Sackville-West from 1929, after a typical meeting of the programme board, shows her difficulties with Reith:

It was awfully difficult, partly because it was two to one – that seems to be the usual proportion in which one fights at the BBC – partly because the DG, though trying to be nice and friendly and full of compliments, made it difficult for me to keep my end up, by regarding every difference of opinion as truculence and by finding it impossible to realise his own hopelessly illogical and inconsiderate and ill-informed point of view. [All our talks, including] yours, are [...] in a sense controversial, if by that the DG means that they express individual opinions and preferences in literature and drama which some people may not hold. Only the DG reads very little and probably seldom if ever listens to the talks. (pp. 69-70).

And so began what the *New Statesman and Nation* dubbed ‘The Battle of Savoy Hill’. The final straw came for Matheson when it was decided that there was to be a fundamental review of talks. The department was to be split with Matheson as Director of General Talks and Charles Siepmann as Director of Adult Education. Significantly both departments were to be placed under another person, who was to be Talks Executive; in short, Matheson would no longer be her own boss (pp. 70-75). Briggs gives an insight into the difference between Matheson and Siepmann:

Siepmann was an Oxford graduate and, like Matheson, an “intellectual” – at a time when intellectuals were suspect – who had as high a conception of the broadcaster’s role as Reith. Miss Matheson was described by Vita Sackville-West as a “sturdy pony”: Siepmann by contrast was a well-bred racehorse.¹¹⁶

Harold Nicolson (Sackville-West’s husband, who positively encouraged his wife’s affair with Matheson) was almost certainly the deciding factor; he and Reith ‘clearly disliked each other’ (p. 71). Both men’s diaries record a lunch at which Reith took Nicolson to task about the content of his talks. Reith writes that ““Nicolson [...] was glad to be told this””¹¹⁷ whilst ‘Nicolson’s record of the same occasion was caustic’:

The man’s head is made entirely from bone and it is impossible to talk to him as an intelligent being. He believes firmly in the eternal mission of the BBC and tries to induce me to modify my talks in such a way as to induce illiterate members of the population to read Milton instead of going on bicycle excursions. I tell him that as my talk series centres upon literature of the last ten years it would be a little difficult to say anything about Milton. He misses this argument and remains wistfully hopeful that I will introduce a Miltonic flavour into my reference to D H Lawrence.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Briggs, *The BBC: The First Fifty Years*, p. 117.

¹¹⁷ Cited by Carney from *The Reith Diaries*, WAC, p. 72

¹¹⁸ Cited by Carney from *Harold Nicolson Diaries*, Balliol College Library, Oxford, p. 72.

Lady Chatterley's Lover and *Ulysses* proved too much for Reith, who was determined to prevent Nicolson from mentioning the books and other unsuitable writers; he brought in a change of policy, which was widely reported in the press and induced the resignation of his Head of Talks:

A month ago [...] the *Morning Post* inserted a paragraph to the effect that the Director-General was to exercise more control over the Talks in consequence of *Morning Post* criticism of them, that the chairman of the Board of Governors (Mr. Whitely) was exercising his authority over book criticisms, that there would be "far more stringent censorship" for theatre and film criticisms as well as for books. The truth of these statements has now been confirmed by Miss Matheson's resignation.¹¹⁹

Nicolson had told her that 'all mention of novels was to be suppressed and that political views of speakers were to be examined so as to exclude all left wing thought' (p. 72). She responded to Reith's actions with this remark in *Broadcasting*, just over a year later:

The most difficult task for publicly controlled broadcasting [...] is the handling of minority and unorthodox opinions, of political and free speech and its limitations.¹²⁰

Many of the people who failed to support Matheson at the time recognized the brilliance of her ideas. Filson Young's biography, states that:

The Reith Lectures of today have developed from the BBC's National Lectures of the thirties which owed their existence to an idea of Filson's and to his conviction, often forcibly expressed in the Radio Times column he wrote every week from 1930 to 1936, that broadcasting should educate as well as entertain, a view shared by Reith.¹²¹

There is no mention of Matheson. The author implies that the *Reith Lectures* should have been called the *Filson Young Lectures*, but surely Matheson has the greater claim. Unfortunately her most hated colleague, who was so anti-talks, has been the one to adopt her ideas most publicly. Carney agrees with an article in *The News Chronicle*, which claimed that 'men ran the BBC and the chief officers of the corporation gave women a hard time.' (p. 79). Perhaps Reith would have coped better with Matheson had she been more inclined to indulge his opinions; 'he knew what was best, which was what he liked, and insisted that listeners must have it' (p. 80). Gielgud was clearly prepared to indulge Reith in a way that Matheson was not:

¹¹⁹ WAC, p.293 Press Cuttings: Talks, Box 1 1931, 'The Battle of Savoy Hill', *New Statesman and Nation*, 12 December 1931.

¹²⁰ Matheson, p. 37.

¹²¹ Silvester Mazzerella, 'Filson Young: Introduction to his forthcoming biography', in *Elders and Betters* < http://www.richarddnorth.com/elders_bettters/fy_bio.htm > [accessed 24 April 2007].

It is a great mistake to forget the vast size of the target aimed at, and to ignore its implications; and this particular point may perhaps be summed up in the axiom that on the one hand the subject of a broadcast play should be as broad as possible; on the other that such subjects must be limited by considerations of taste and commonsense, from the point of view of what can desirably be broadcast for one and all to hear.¹²²

Gielgud's judicious handling of this powerful man must have furthered his career enormously and he acknowledges 'the consistent support of the Director-General during the years when his personal influence upon programme items was a very real and compelling factor in their inclusion or survival'.¹²³ Sieveking was even more effusive in his praise for Reith in this dedication at the beginning of *The Stuff of Radio*:

This book, the outcome of nine years on his staff, I dedicate with personal warmth to SIR JOHN REITH who, like a patron in the Middle Ages, has made it possible for art to flourish, by enabling artists and craftsmen to devote their lives to its practice and development in freedom from any limitations save those which have seemed, to an ever modifying degree, inherent in it.¹²⁴

This is particularly ironic given Matheson's difficulties, but she was incapable of paying lip-service to anyone, and unfortunately her talent was not enough to keep her in office; the opposition was just too strong. Carney surmises that 'with Matheson at the helm the BBC would have been more adventurous and less timid' (p. 81). But a memo from Reith dated 30 April 1926, to all of his Station Directors, copied to Goldsmith and Eckersley, concerning 'Women Assistants' shows that a woman leader at that time would have been unthinkable.¹²⁵ The memo states that the attitude to women on the BBC staff had been wrong and that there was to be a re-think on women's roles and responsibilities. Reith wished 'all such titles as Woman Organiser, Chief Aunt, and so on, to be completely abandoned.' The fact that these titles ever existed at all explains a lot about the environment Matheson found herself in. Reith goes on to explain that all women in these kinds of positions should now simply be referred to as 'Assistants'. The next part of the memo would seem to be quite progressive in thinking for the time:

Women Assistants should bear a due part of the general responsibility for programmes, and be taken into consultation wherever possible. They should be as eligible as men for promotion. There is no reason actually why a woman should not be a Station Director.

¹²² Gielgud, *How to Write Broadcast Plays*, p. 27.

¹²³ Gielgud, *British Radio Drama*, p. 19.

¹²⁴ Sieveking, Frontispiece.

¹²⁵ WAC, R49/940, *Staff Policy*, 'Memo' from John Reith, 30 April 1926.

However Reith gives away his real feelings regarding the likely abilities of women in finishing the sentence with ‘of course, I realise that it would be extraordinarily difficult to find one suitable.’ Although Reith was determined to allow women to have considerable standing at the BBC in comparison with other organizations he did not really believe that any woman had the ability of a man. The memo adds weight to Carney’s conclusion that ‘[Matheson] left the BBC because of fundamental differences with Reith about policy which were exacerbated by prejudice against women in employment.’ (p. 78)

The evidence certainly points towards Matheson having been a victim of sexism within the BBC, but even if this is the case it has never been publicly acknowledged and Matheson remains almost invisible to all but those with a particular interest in radio theories, while Reith continues to be respected within the organization and is publicly revered. It is sad that a woman with so much talent did not receive the credit that was due either at the time or posthumously. Earlier sections in this chapter demonstrate that many of Matheson’s ideas about radio are as relevant today as they were then; she had as much ability as her male colleagues, but the fact that she was a woman meant that this ability was always regarded with suspicion by those same colleagues.

However there is another possible reason for her being marginalized. She was a very intense personality and she took herself very seriously. Even though she never stood on ceremony I think perhaps she was not inclined to respond to jokes or join in with laughter. Virginia Woolf described her unkindly as a ‘drab’, ‘dreary’, ‘earnest’ ‘middle-class intellectual’ with an ‘earnest aspiring competent wooden face’.¹²⁶ Reith was not renowned for having a sense of humour either, but perhaps he did not need one because he was a man, and he was in control. ‘But for a woman ‘humourlessness is a double burden, rather like barrenness in the Old Testament, a failure both social and personal. And like barrenness it’s assumed to be primarily a woman’s problem.’¹²⁷ Reith’s dour demeanour would have been taken as gravitas while in Matheson it may have been seen as a serious personality flaw.

Matheson’s ideas on radio production and performance are still relevant, as are many of her thoughts on radio drama, but she had little time for comedy and dismissed ‘comic turns’ as ‘base metal’, along with ‘tea time music’.¹²⁸ For Matheson only the ‘precious stones’ of

¹²⁶ Cited by Carney, p. 54.

¹²⁷ Frances Gray, *Women and Laughter* (Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1994), p. 5.

¹²⁸ Matheson, p. 125.

literature, poetry and serious debate were truly worthy of the BBC.¹²⁹ In other words, only “good” writing [was to be taught] to involuntary [listeners]’; popular writing, like comedy, was automatically assumed to be inferior.¹³⁰ It could be that this intense worthiness led to her being marginalized further by colleagues who were less impassioned. Gielgud, on the other hand, recognized the importance of comedy with this comment at the end of his ‘Introduction’ to *How to Write Broadcast Plays* in 1932:

It has occasionally been made a reproach to the Productions Department of the BBC that their tendency has been to produce plays either morbid or sensational. Unfortunately, it is impossible to manufacture humour synthetically or by formula, and make a good job of it. A Wireless Wodehouse, a Broadcasting Barry Pain would be beyond price, could they be found. Miss Constanduros [...] [has] proved [...] that it is perfectly possible to write humour indigenous to the microphone, but so far no one has emulated [her] in the field of the Broadcast Play. This field of Broadcast Comedy lies practically virgin before all aspirants to honours in writing plays for broadcasting.¹³¹

It makes one wonder whether Matheson’s life would have been different at the BBC if she had managed to relax and find more humour in life. She would perhaps have found more in common with her enemy, Filson Young, had she adopted his view that ‘beneath all the activities of man, in the depths of his exertions and suffering, there is a fundamental humanity that is the basis of all humour.’¹³² It is true that comedy has often been considered inferior to other forms of drama. Aristotle could be blamed for never delivering his promised assessment of comedy in *Poetics*, thus relegating comedy to be considered ‘base metal’ by many critics who have never tried to be funny.¹³³ The rest of this thesis supports the case for radio comedy by demonstrating the complexity of the process by which it is written and produced. That which seems light and frothy on the surface is often hiding a very serious and bitter core, and just serving it up to the audience wrapped in something palatable. It is called “sugaring the pill”. The next chapter considers the life and work of Mabel Constanduros, who, actually became more than Gielgud’s longed for ‘Wireless Wodehouse’, in that she developed entirely her own voice as a radio practitioner. She was hugely successful, but like Matheson, is rather forgotten today. What follows seeks to rediscover her.

¹²⁹ Matheson, p. 125.

¹³⁰ Harriett Hawkins, *Classics and Trash: Traditions and Taboos in High Literature and Popular Modern Genres* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), 12.

¹³¹ Gielgud, *How to Write Broadcast Plays*, p. 35.

¹³² Young, p. 242.

¹³³ Umberto Eco’s novel, *The Name of the Rose* (1980) takes the idea that this text has been discovered as the premise for a murder mystery. It is set in a community of Mediaeval Benedictine monks and comedy is seen as a huge threat to the status quo.

4. MABEL CONSTANDUROS: COMEDY AND EARLY RADIO PRACTICE

Introduction to Mabel Constanduros 1880-1957

The previous chapter demonstrated that story takes precedence over technical production in the best radio drama, and that simplicity of performance style is the most effective for the medium, so voices have emerged as being the most important thing in all types of storytelling for wireless. One of the most instinctive and natural performers in early radio was Mabel Constanduros. She focused mainly on comedy, but also branched out into drama as her career progressed.

Contemporary theorists often attempt to differentiate between humour and comedy, believing that humour encompasses the more intellectual type of material, such as ‘satire, sarcasm, irony and parody.’¹³⁴ Mel Helitzer defines comedy as ‘the performance of humour’ and explains that ‘the perception is that clever writers write humour while glib comedians do jokes.’¹³⁵ Constanduros did both of these; she was a humorist who performed her own work. But at the time she was writing and performing, funny material was largely considered less worthy than dramatic material. In this chapter I will show that this idea was wrong in the case of Constanduros and that by examining her work in the light of contemporary ideas we can reach an understanding of just how innovative she was in terms practice in writing comedy and use of the voice.

Another of the main reasons for Constanduros’s achievements in radio is almost certainly the sheer volume of her output. Not only did she have original and hilarious ideas, she had lots of them, and recognized the importance of producing copious amounts of material in order to succeed.¹³⁶ She pointed out that, ‘broadcasting is different from any other kind of performance in that you have constantly to supply fresh material’.¹³⁷ Constanduros was able to do this, which gave her an advantage over more established comedians of the period; ‘the music-hall stars, who were Britain’s chief laughter-makers, were not having any truck with this broadcasting nonsense’.¹³⁸ Constanduros believed this was for economic

¹³⁴ Mel Helitzer with Mark Shatz, *Comedy Writing Secrets* (Cincinnati: Writer’s Digest Books, 2005), p. 4.

¹³⁵ Helitzer, p. 4.

¹³⁶ The British Library has 103 listings of works by her or in collaboration.

¹³⁷ Mabel Constanduros, *Shreds and Patches* (London: Lawson and Dunn, 1946), p. 43

¹³⁸ Constanduros, *Shreds and Patches*, p. 41.

reasons; ‘they could not afford to throw away [...] expensive material on one broadcast’.¹³⁹ And she also notes that material had to be ‘suitable for broadcasting’ and not depend on visual images’.¹⁴⁰ It is probably the case that the majority of these music-hall stars simply could not imagine how to write for a medium in which their usual brand of visual humour had no effect.

The simplicity of Constanduros’s storytelling style, which needed very few sound effects in order to convey meaning, was ideally suited to radio when sound design was in its infancy, but it has lost little of its funniness today. Focussing on story is equally important when writing comedy as it is when writing drama. Mamet believes that ‘the model of the perfect play is the dirty joke’ in which only the most essential information is conveyed to the listener:

“Two guys go into a farmhouse. An old woman is stirring a pot of soup”
What does the woman look like? What state is the house in? It is absolutely not important.¹⁴¹

He explains that this is because ‘the joke-teller is tending towards a punch line and we know that he or she is only going to tell us the elements which direct our attention towards the punch line.’¹⁴² This has the effect of holding the listener’s attention because the essence of the story is not diluted by unnecessary details. Constanduros concentrated on telling her stories in the most straightforward manner. This chapter attempts to analyze her practice and show that even though she wrote and performed comedy this did not make her any less brilliant than writers who specialized in material with a more serious tone.

Natural performance and *The Bugginses*

The Buggins Family (often called *The Bugginses*) was Constanduros’s most enduring creation. In her autobiography she explains modestly that she ‘had wonderful luck in that [her] work was unlike anyone else’s.’¹⁴³ This is a modest understatement; she was completely original. The program was ‘extremely popular with audiences as a result of its skilful characterization and gentle humour combined with sheer appreciation of Constanduros’s

¹³⁹ Constanduros, *Shreds and Patches*, p.41.

¹⁴⁰ Constanduros, *Shreds and Patches*, p.41.

¹⁴¹ David Mamet, ‘Radio Drama’, in *Writing in Restaurants* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), p. 14.

¹⁴² Mamet, p. 14.

¹⁴³ Constanduros, *Shreds and Patches*, p. 43.

acting skills.’¹⁴⁴ She invented a cockney family because she felt that ‘one voice [was] apt to become tiresome on the air if it [went] on for a long time.’¹⁴⁵ There were over 250 *Buggins* episodes broadcast between 1928 and 1948.¹⁴⁶ The most characters she ever played in one broadcast was seven and Constanduros developed this style of performance because ‘being several people at once enabled [her] to do sketches’, which she believed were ‘more entertaining than monologues.’¹⁴⁷ Matheson’s idea of ‘broadcasting developing its own players’ was certainly successful in the shape of Constanduros, who became one of the first members of the Radio Rep due to her consummate voice skills.¹⁴⁸

Constanduros was already in her forties by the time she did her first solo broadcast for the BBC. Although the work was broadcast in the days of live performance, before recording became the norm, some sketches were recreated as gramophone recordings, and extracts from her grandson’s collection of these can be heard on the BBC radio programme *The Late Mrs. Buggins*, which celebrates her life and work.¹⁴⁹ These *Buggins* episodes were digitised in 2009 and are available in CD form. This has proved invaluable in understanding Constanduros’s performance style.¹⁵⁰ She has an extraordinary naturalness lacking in many of the actors of the period. She had established her technique with Miss Fogerty at the Central School of Speech and Drama before any of the courses aimed specifically at radio began.¹⁵¹ Her style was extremely unusual for the time even though radio acting had improved since ‘Our Wireless Correspondent’ bemoaned the state of radio drama in 1926, echoing both Matheson and Reith on the subject:

Either we get an isolated half-hour of some stage success [...] relayed from the theatre and frequently interrupted by aggravating bursts of applause or laughter at action we cannot see. Or we get mild melodramas, “specially written for broadcasting” played in the studio by somewhat unconvincing artists.¹⁵²

It could be that no one paid enough attention to the style of comedy performance to grasp the fact that the naturalness they were so craving was being delivered by the BBC, just not in

¹⁴⁴ DNB.

¹⁴⁵ Constanduros, *Shreds and Patches*, p. 43.

¹⁴⁶ DNB.

¹⁴⁷ Constanduros, *Shreds and Patches*, p. 43.

¹⁴⁸ BLSA, *The Late Mrs Buggins*, Sunday 5 March 2006 20:30-21:00 (Radio 4 FM).

¹⁴⁹ BLSA *The Late Mrs Buggins*.

¹⁵⁰ Mabel Constanduros, *The Buggins Family*, Windyridge ‘Variety’ Series (William/Clark, WINDYVAR46, 2009).

¹⁵¹ Constanduros, *Shreds and Patches*, p. 38.

¹⁵² WAC, 3127 Programmes 1926: ‘Broadcast Plays: What Type do Listeners Want – BBC’s Dramatic Expert on the Strain of Hearing Long Works – Unconvincing Excerpts’, *Evening News*, 15 Feb 1926.

drama. The fault possibly lay with the serious intention of the BBC to educate its listeners. As Matheson and Reith did not care for funniness they probably never really listened to Constanduros, and even if they had they would almost certainly have thought her material too low brow to take seriously.¹⁵³ Filson Young, on the other hand, like Gielgud, was a great admirer of Constanduros's *Bugginses*, and he attempted to analyse why the show was so funny, describing it as a 'shining example in which the humour has been retained in spite of the hideous foundations on which it is built'.¹⁵⁴ He makes no secret of his hatred for 'Cockney humour' in *Shall I Listen*, but lists the reasons why *The Buggins Family* is an exception, and I will consider his views throughout this chapter.¹⁵⁵

Constanduros made her BBC debut 'in the spring of 1925'.¹⁵⁶ In her autobiography she describes the nerve wracking circumstances of her first broadcast; she performed 'at ten o'clock at night, and before [her] a well-known philanthropic lady [gave] a talk.' She couldn't imagine 'a worse prelude for a comedy broadcast'.¹⁵⁷ If Matheson had been in charge of talks at the time Constanduros might have been given more help with her technique, but Matheson did not take over until the following year. As it was Constanduros had to rely on her instinct, which she did with varying degrees of success:

Nobody told me how near the microphone to stand, and I know, from subsequent experience, that I was much too far away. Nowadays [in 1946] nobody would be asked to broadcast without a rehearsal and a test. The balancers would tell you where to stand and how much voice to use. I might have been a complete failure and I wonder that I was not. Some latent microphone sense which, I believe, I always unconsciously possessed must have helped me through.¹⁵⁸

This vindicates Matheson's rigorous rehearsal process; Constanduros would have been grateful for her insight. Fortunately the natural talent of Constanduros gained her 'a record number of appreciations from listeners' despite her technical errors.¹⁵⁹ This 'latent microphone sense' contributed to her being successful despite the prejudice against radio comedy within the BBC. A report by Ivor Brown on work broadcast up to 1942 indicates that Reith and Matheson were not alone in their views on comedy:

¹⁵³ NB There is a possibility that Matheson and Constanduros collaborated on a series called *Conversations in the Train*, which is discussed later in this chapter. The series was a drama not a comedy.

¹⁵⁴ Filson Young, *Shall I Listen: Studies in the Adventure of Broadcasting* (London: Constable and Co Ltd, 1933), p. 244-45.

¹⁵⁵ Young, pp. 242-49.

¹⁵⁶ Constanduros, *Shreds and Patches*, p. 42.

¹⁵⁷ Constanduros, *Shreds and Patches*, p. 42.

¹⁵⁸ Constanduros, *Shreds and Patches*, p. 43.

¹⁵⁹ Constanduros, *Shreds and Patches*, p. 43.

It seems to me a complete waste of time and trouble to transmit on an invisible medium comedy which depends on such essentially visible things as character-acting, foreign atmosphere, decorative or curious costume, period effects and so on.¹⁶⁰

Given that comedy was considered to be such an inferior genre it might seem surprising that Constanduros managed to achieve so much success, but perhaps A. Corbett-Smith hit upon the reason in his article 'Do Women Want Wireless?':

[Women] want personality [...] Personality is the one big thing which counts in radio. And personality is the very thing that is so seldom found among the radio speakers and artists. You could count those with really vivid carrying power almost on the fingers of a hand.¹⁶¹

Whilst the tone of the article was just as patronising as many of the comments made about women by men of the period, Corbett-Smith surely identified the main factor responsible for Constanduros's achievements in the medium. The exaggerated yet recognisable personalities of her creations appealed to listeners, and in addition, despite the fact that Constanduros was playing characters, her own personality was also audible. As Susan Bennett points out in her work on reception theory, which examines the way in which theatre audiences receive productions, 'performance encourages audiences to appreciate the actors' skill. Brecht stressed in his *Verfremdungseffekt* that the actor should "show" a character with the effect that the audience would appreciate the tools of acting used in this demonstration.' Bennett goes on to state that 'audience members might be attracted to the voice of a certain actor or to specific physical abilities.'¹⁶² This is also applicable to radio. Constanduros was able to use her vocal ability to 'show' her characters. The closest performer we have to her style today is probably TV performer Catherine Tate, whose own personality shines through her comic creations.¹⁶³ The audience derive as much pleasure from the personality that is performing as they do from the material that is performed; 'it is the tension between the real actor on the one hand, and the fictional character for who he functions as an iconic sign on the other, that creates one of the main attractions of [...] performance.'¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁰ WAC, R19/276 Entertainment: Drama Department 1924 -1948.

¹⁶¹ WAC, 3127: A Corbett-Smith, 'Do Women Want Wireless?', *Daily Express*, 28 Feb 1928.

¹⁶² Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 162.

¹⁶³ For more information on Catherine Tate, with a full description of her style and video clips, see <<http://www.catherinetateshow.co.uk>> [accessed 25 July 2013]. There are also many clips available on YouTube. See also 'The Making of Family Guy' <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I7T1lhda4k4>> [accessed 3 December 2013] for the way in which actors still play multiple characters during recording.

¹⁶⁴ Martin Esslin, *The Field of Drama* (London, Methuen, 1988), p. 39.

Recreating the scripts

I have been unable to find a hard copy of an original *Buggins* radio script because sadly none have survived, but there are a few short sketches available in small pamphlets published by Samuel French.¹⁶⁵ They were created for use by amateur theatre performers and adapted for the stage by Constanduros after they were broadcast on the radio or vice versa. Constanduros was adept at writing comedy for the ear and for the eyes and was able to convert one into the other with great skill. These stage play scripts provide a valuable record of the characters and dialogue, along with demonstrating the tone of the work, so I have used some of them in order to create what I think the *Buggins* scripts might have been like. They contain some directions that are not relevant to radio, so I have attempted to put them back into a format suitable for the microphone. Original directions that are only appropriate for the stage are in bold print; directions in underlined italics are in the stage script, but also work on radio; directions in italics with no underline are what I have added to make the piece suitable for radio. I have also transcribed some examples from the recorded work on CD. In the transcriptions I have added my own directions in italics in order to indicate movement, sound effects, volume and intonation, as in the example below, which is from *The Buggins Family at the Zoo* (1928):

MRS BUGGINS. Never did know such a child for serpents as Emma. Did you Father? (*slight pause*) What? Oh you are a caution. (*loudly*) Did you hear what he said Gran'ma? (*even louder*) He said if Emma 'ad seen snakes as 'orfen as wot 'e 'ad she wouldn't be so partial to 'em.
GRANDMA. Eh?
MRS BUGGINS. I'll tell 'er Father, she's got one of 'er deaf fits on this mornin'. (*shouting*) It was a joke Gran'ma. (*slight pause*) I say it was a joke.
GRANDMA. I don't see no ghost.¹⁶⁶

The *Buggins Family* CD and *The Late Mrs Buggins*, demonstrate how the original broadcasts might have sounded.¹⁶⁷ In the early days the character of Father was silent, which was probably because Constanduros performed solo and presumably felt she would be less convincing playing a man. It would certainly have been difficult for her to include a man's voice amongst her female characters, so swiftly did she leap from role to role.¹⁶⁸ Most of the pieces use Emily as the main character with short interjections from the others. She is the

¹⁶⁵ The earliest scripts were handwritten, but Constanduros bought a typewriter 'quite early on in [her] career ... and soon learned to type her articles and radio material very badly.' *Shreds and Patches*, pp. 64-5.

¹⁶⁶ Constanduros, *The Buggins Family at the Zoo*, (1928), transcribed from CD.

¹⁶⁷ BLSA, *The Late Mrs Buggins*.

¹⁶⁸ Catherine Tate includes male characters in her repertoire, but she only plays one character at a time in a sketch.

relentlessly cheerful mother, who is a ‘good-natured, much tried housewife’, 30 years old.¹⁶⁹ In the sketches where Father is silent, Constanduros compensates for this by having Emily repeat what Father has supposedly said to Grandma, who is deaf. This works remarkably well, as in the example above. In later years the character of Father was played by Michael Hogan, who Constanduros met when she was working on the Radio Rep.¹⁷⁰ He created the role of Father and collaborated on some of the *Buggins* scripts.¹⁷¹ Constanduros also adapted the radio sketches into stories, which were published as books and in newspapers. These have proved useful in looking at how Constanduros developed her characters. By using a mixture of the hard copies I have managed to find, along with the recording at the BLSA and the digitised recordings on CD, I have analysed some of the key things in Constanduros’s methods of writing and performing that I believe led to her appeal.

The earliest situation comedy

Although the pieces are described as sketches they are actually what we would now call situation comedy (sitcom) in embryo form; ‘the comedy [...] come[s] from the way [...] characters react to a situation and the way they react to each other.’¹⁷² Even though Constanduros performed all of the characters herself like Tate, which is common in sketch shows, *The Buggins Family* still has more in common with sitcom. A sketch explores a comic moment where a sitcom tells a much bigger comic story.¹⁷³ The complexity of *The Buggins Family* goes beyond the normal framework of sketch writing, which suggests that Constanduros wrote the forerunner of the ‘domestic sitcom’ with the ‘husband, wife and kids’, which has spawned so many permutations ever since.¹⁷⁴ These include the work of Carla Lane in *Butterflies* and *Bread*, along with the more recent *The Royle Family* by Caroline Aherne and Craig Cash.¹⁷⁵ *The Royle Family* began life on BBC2 in 1998 and then transferred to BBC1, running for two more series and several Christmas specials, the last being in 2006. It is described on the BBC website as being humdrum and low on incident on

¹⁶⁹ Constanduros, *Shreds and Patches*, p. 43.

¹⁷⁰ Constanduros, *Shreds and Patches*, p. 41

¹⁷¹ DNB.

¹⁷² Ronald Wolfe, *Writing Comedy* (London: Robert Hale Ltd, 2003), p. 55.

¹⁷³ John Vorhaus, *The Comic Toolbox* (Los Angeles: Silman-James Press, 1994), p. 155.

¹⁷⁴ Wolfe, p. 58.

¹⁷⁵ *Butterflies* ran from 1978-1983 on BBC2 *Bread* from 1986-1991 on BBC1. For detailed analysis of Lane’s work see Frances Gray, *Women and Laughter* (Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press LTD, 1994), pp. 89-98.

the surface, ‘but such ordinary appearances belie the fact that it was a groundbreaking work of exceptional comedy invention.’¹⁷⁶ There is considerable evidence to support Constanduros as the originator of this type of comedy on the BBC, but with the exception of a few of the works cited in this chapter it seems that no one recognises the contribution Constanduros made to this genre. According to the *The Guinness Book of Sitcoms* the first ever work of this type was *That Child* (1926) written by Florence Kilpatrick with Constanduros credited as an actor in the piece.¹⁷⁷ But more often it is believed that sitcom began in the 1950s with *Hancock’s Half Hour* by Alan Galton and Ray Simpson, which started life on the radio and then transferred to television.¹⁷⁸ This oversight is possibly due to the ephemeral nature of the medium in which Constanduros worked. Until the recent digitising of some *Buggins* episodes almost all of her early work had simply disappeared from public view. Also *The Buggins Family* did not make the transition from radio to TV; sitcoms that manage to make this leap tend to be more widely recognised.¹⁷⁹ To begin with *Buggins Family* episodes were short (about 3 minutes), in keeping with Jeffrey’s view that radio audiences could not cope with long works, but as the series progressed episodes increased in length until some were almost 9 minutes.¹⁸⁰ Sitcoms are ‘typically half an hour long’, so the brevity of Constanduros’s work has perhaps been a factor in its lack of recognition in this category.¹⁸¹ However, *The Buggins Family* ‘involves a continuing cast of characters in a succession of episodes’, so its case for being a sitcom, rather than a series of sketches, is strong.¹⁸²

There is also a more sinister possibility for Constanduros’s lack of recognition in the genre of sitcom, which echoes the sexism to which Matheson was subjected at the BBC. In *Women and Laughter* Frances Gray argues that sitcom is traditionally the preserve of men and cites Mandie Fletcher’s *No Frills* (1988), which was referred to as a “‘feminist pilot’” instead of a sitcom by the BBC because of the reluctance of BBC executives to accept women sitcom writers.¹⁸³ Gray makes the point that, until very recently, sitcom has been thought of as something that is written only by men, which could explain the reluctance to

¹⁷⁶ < <http://www.bbc.co.uk/comedy/theroylefamily/> > [accessed 10 September 2013].

¹⁷⁷ Rod Taylor, *The Guinness Book of Sitcoms* (London: Guinness Publishing Ltd, 1994), p. 250.

¹⁷⁸ Andrew Crisell, *Understanding Radio – Second Edition* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 168.

¹⁷⁹ BLSA, *The Late Mrs Buggins*.

¹⁸⁰ *The Buggins Family* [on CD].

¹⁸¹ EB.

¹⁸² EB.

¹⁸³ Frances Gray, *Women and Laughter* (Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press LTD, 1994), p. 81.

give Constanduros her true recognition.¹⁸⁴ Ironically Gray cites *Hancock's Half Hour* as the first sitcom too, so invisible has Constanduros become.

Further evidence to support Constanduros as a writer of sitcom exists in the style of her work. Her scripts are not just a series of 'one-liners and gags strung together'; *The Buggins Family* is funny because her invented Bugginses are funny.¹⁸⁵ A normal family going to the zoo, having a picnic or catching the train is not particularly funny (although they may have their moments), but when the Bugginses attempt to do anything normal hilarity ensues.¹⁸⁶ The situations created by Constanduros are real and normal, but the characters are not.¹⁸⁷ In addition,

Each [...] episode can be regarded as something like the last two acts of a traditional three-act play in that the characters and settings are already known to the audience. Not only are the characters known, but also their relationships and attitudes to each other.¹⁸⁸

Therefore I will analyze *The Buggins Family* according to comedy theory associated with the genre of sitcom.

Structure and comic devices

Constanduros's *Buggins* scripts are, in keeping with most definitions of sitcom, character-driven, in that 'the exploration of character is central, with the plot arising out of this.'¹⁸⁹ The series is based on a strong comic premise, which is the gap between Emily's desire for happiness through improvement of her family and social position and the reality of the fact that this can never happen because her family have no desire to be happy or improve, socially or personally.¹⁹⁰

While each episode of *The Buggins Family* is different, there is a strict format that never changes. This is what sustained the series through 250 episodes. The *Bugginses* had a robust framework holding it together. If *The Buggins Family* were a contemporary sitcom the format would be something like this:

¹⁸⁴ Gray, p. 81.

¹⁸⁵ Wolfe, pp. 29-31.

¹⁸⁶ Wolfe, pp. 29-31.

¹⁸⁷ Wolfe, pp. 29-31. NB. In keeping with the period.

¹⁸⁸ Wolfe, p. 31.

¹⁸⁹ Rib Davis, *Developing Characters for Script Writing* (London: A&C Black, 2001), p. 69.

¹⁹⁰ Vorhaus defines the comic premise as 'the gap between comic reality and real reality', pp. 19-21.

1. The Buggins family are working class cockneys
2. They live in a small house, which is cramped because there are so many of them, causing overcrowding and conflict.
3. The mainstay of the family is young mother Emily Buggins, who is old before her time.
4. She is kind and dutiful and wants to make everyone happy.
5. She has a strong desire for self-improvement, but doesn't really know how to go about this.
6. Her problems are those associated with looking after her 3 children: a baby, a naughty little boy and a whiny little girl.
7. She also has to keep house on a shoestring budget, for which she receives no thanks or recognition.
8. She has to care for her cantankerous, deaf, elderly mother in law, who adds to her problems and causes a lot of conflict.
9. Her husband is lazy, bad tempered and unhelpful, which causes even more conflict.
10. No family members get on with each other, unless siding with someone against another, causing even more conflict.¹⁹¹

It is the conflict that prevents the piece from ever becoming flat. Not only are the Bugginses in conflict with each other, they are also always in conflict with their living conditions and, more importantly, the world outside, which is vital in a successful sitcom.¹⁹²

In *The Bugginses' Picnic*, which is available in script form published by Samuel French (1930) not on CD, the family attempt an afternoon in the country. It may be based on Constanduros's first radio sketch, *The Buggins Family Out for a Day*, which was broadcast in 1925.¹⁹³ In this extract the family have just climbed a very steep hill to look at the view and have a picnic, which Emily believes will be good for them. This opening shows Constanduros's ability to create funny situations and truthful dialogue. It also demonstrates how the comic premise and format work; All except for Emily are utterly difficult and argumentative. There is a reminder of the system I have used in adapting the script in the footnotes.¹⁹⁴

(MRS. BUGGINS enters R. carrying several parcels and looking very hot. She is wearing a tight-fitting velvet dress, a rather moth-eaten fur, and white canvas shoes.)

MRS BUGGINS. (*very brightly*) Coo! That was a climb! Come on, Father – come on, Gran'ma! It's lovely up 'ere.

(FATHER enters R. very slowly and very despondently and carrying a large bottle of beer in one hand and his collar and tie in the other. His bowler hat is pushed well back on his head, and he looks very hot.)

(Pointing up stage.) Isn't it lovely Father? Look at the beautiful trees and flowers and all the view!

(FATHER, apparently too disgusted to speak, makes no reply. He moves slowly across L., taking off his hat and wiping his forehead, whilst GRANDMA enters R. very slowly, carrying a basket. Her bonnet has slipped to one side and her long, heavy black skirt looks very dusty; the neck of her old-fashioned boned bodice is undone, and her feather boa thrown back.)

¹⁹¹ Wolfe, pp. 61-62.

¹⁹² Wolfe, pp. 61-62.

¹⁹³ DNB.

¹⁹⁴ **Original directions** that are only appropriate for the stage are in **bold print**; directions in *underlined italics* are in the *stage script, but also work on radio*; directions in *italics with no underline* are what I have added to make the piece suitable for radio.

(FATHER remains silent) Isn't it lovely Gran'ma? (*slight pause*) I say, look at the view! (GRANDMA remains silent)

(GRANDMA gives MRS BUGGINS a sour look and, ignoring the view, she drops the basket and wipes her forehead with her sleeve.)

Father, you might say *some think*!

FATHER. (Staring disgustedly in front of him.) D'you mean to say we got to spend the whole day up 'ere?

MRS BUGGINS. (*rather nervously*). Yes - of course. It's "Nature's Paradise for Pleasure Seekers." It says so on the Toobs. Don't you like the view Gran'ma?

GRANDMA.. (Without looking round.) Eh?

MRS BUGGINS. The *view*!

GRANDMA. Moo? 'Oo?

MRS BUGGINS. I said the view. It's simply lovely! And ain't that pond pretty at the bottom of the 'ill, there?

GRANDMA. Yes - swarmin' with mosquitos and mi-asma, I lay!

MRS BUGGINS. Don't be silly Gran'ma! - I expect it's full o' salmon! I call it lovely!

(Enter EMMA and ALFIE very weary, and carrying an enormous string bag overflowing with food. EMMA is wearing a white frock, much too short for her, black stockings and heavy boots, and a red tam-o'-shanter. ALFIE is in a sailor suit, and a large tweed cap of FATHER'S which nearly covers his eyes. His boots seem enormous for him.)

There children! Isn't the view lovely? What was it your teacher called it Emma?

EMMA. She said it was a u-nique panorama and a feast fer sore eyes.

FATHER. Yes - and a beast fer sore feet! (Glancing over his shoulder.) Look at it!

MRS BUGGINS. Well, wot's the matter with it?

FATHER. Wot *ain't* the matter with it? It's up a ridicklous 'ighth ter start with.

MRS BUGGINS. Well, you can't ave a view without an 'ighth can yer? Where would you like to sit, Gran'ma?

GRANDMA. I'm goin' to set ere! (*She sits down R. determinedly.*) That 'ills started me breakfast floatin', and I ain't goin' another step till it's perched.

MRS BUGGINS. Well, that's yer own fault fer eatin' so earty.

FATHER. Now, now, now! I don't come out fer the day to 'ear you two spite at one another - I can 'ear that at 'ome! (He turns up stage for the first time and looks down the hill.) Oh my goodness! Look at that beastly view! Not even a tram-line to cheer it up! - 'Ere, I can't look at it no more. It's turnin' me. You know it always turns me to look down an ighth!¹⁹⁵

This piece is much more successful in radio form than for the stage and demonstrates how well Constanduros understood what was effective for the ear alone as well as for the stage. Going back to Jeffrey's points from Chapter 2, in radio the listener supplies the view and the height of the hill in his or her imagination; on the stage the limitations of set and the indoor venue can never hope to be as effective. Constanduros almost certainly conceived the idea for radio and only adapted it later because there was so much demand.

Constanduros has used classic comic devices that work in any medium to great effect in this piece. The first and most noticeable device is called 'switching'; she has taken 'stereotyped, well-defined character[s] and switch[ed them] from their usual and familiar setting to a different one to see how they behave.'¹⁹⁶ This is sometimes known as 'clash of

¹⁹⁵ Mabel Constanduros and Michael Hogan, *The Bugginses' Picnic* (London: Samuel French Ltd, 1930), pp. 6-7.

¹⁹⁶ Wolfe, p. 19.

context’ or ‘the forced union of incompatibles’.¹⁹⁷ Filson Young noted this in 1933; he points out that, ‘we generally encounter this family when they are bent on some kind of pleasure – a picnic, a party or some other entertainment’, but he did not really understand why this should be funny, although he admits that it is.¹⁹⁸ The explanation is this: the comedy stems from the reactions of the family, particularly Grandma and Father, to their strange surroundings and each other. This is a device that is also used in episodes like *At the Station* (1927), which is set at a railway station; *The Buggins Family at the Zoo* (1928) and *A Trip to Brighton* (1932), the settings of which are in the titles.¹⁹⁹ By taking the family away from home Constanduros sets up more conflict with the world outside. Alternatively she brings the outside world to the Buggins family, as in the party scenario Young mentions; in *Grandma’s Birthday Party* (1927), the quarrel that develops between Grandma and a wealthy visitor who was her ‘girl’ood friend’ is the cause of the conflict.²⁰⁰

Secondly Constanduros uses ‘things going wrong’, which create ‘conflict, problems and complications’ and the ‘comedy [...] spring[s] from the reaction of [her] characters to these circumstances.’²⁰¹ As Young puts it, ‘pleasure does not manifest itself in any way in any of the Buggins’s entertainments; they generally consist of a series of sordid catastrophes.’²⁰² The family become locked in battle with the outside world. Beginning with Father’s vertigo and Grandma’s indigestion, the piece progresses from the characters’ mild discomfort to farcical disaster as the bored children become glued together with flypapers:²⁰³

(EMMA and ALFIE have been struggling with fly-papers and are now completely gummed to each other. One end of a streamer of sticky paper has twined itself round ALFIE’S neck, and the other is round EMMA’S, and they are standing back to back. The children approach struggling)

EMMA. Oww... Stop pulling Alfie.

ALFIE. Oww...

(They begin to cry)

MRS BUGGINS. Oh, my goodness, what ‘ave you done now?

FATHER. Ullo! Ullo! What’s up now?

EMMA. A-Alfie and m-me s-s-stuck together with f-f-flypapers.

FATHER. (yelling with laughter). Look at ‘em, Gran-ma! Stuck together like a couple o’ blue-bottles.

(GRANDMA chuckles)

MRS BUGGINS. Don’t be so in’uman, both of yer!- great murderin’ things.

EMMA: Get orff Alfie!

¹⁹⁷ Vorhaus, p. 48.

¹⁹⁸ Young, pp. 247-48.

¹⁹⁹ *The Buggins Family* [on CD].

²⁰⁰ *The Buggins Family* [on CD].

²⁰¹ Vorhaus, p. 37.

²⁰² Young, p. 248.

²⁰³ **Original directions** that are only appropriate for the stage are in **bold print**; directions in underlined italics are in the stage script, but also work on radio; directions and dialogue in *italics with no underline* are *what I have added* to make the piece suitable for radio.

(*ALFIE screams*)

MRS BUGGINS. No, don't move, Emma! You'll tear Alfie's skin orf. You'll 'ave to stay stuck now till it wears orf, or I get you both into a 'ot bath. Oh, sit down back to back, and stop owlin', do!²⁰⁴

As the family try to have their picnic Constanduros skilfully uses 'things going wrong' to put more and more pressure on her characters: the butter melts, the ham is off, the salmon can't be eaten because they have forgotten the tin opener and Father injures his hand trying to open it with a stone, then the fried fish gets covered in paraffin. Eventually they are left with only bananas and a few shrimps, which are Grandma's. Father is determined to eat the salmon and sets about getting it open. Like the hill and the flypapers this visual gag works remarkably well on radio because Constanduros supplies enough dialogue to indicate the situation and the listener's imagination does the rest:²⁰⁵

MRS BUGGINS. Try stampin' on it, Father.

(FATHER **puts the tin behind the tree-trunk and, with his back to the audience *batters it with the heel of his boot***)

Go on, Father!- It's dentin'

(*sound of battering tin*)

EMMA/ALFIE. Go on, Daddy!

(*more sounds of battering tin and groans of exertion from FATHER*)

EVERYONE. Go on – go on!

FATHER. (*in great excitement*) It's goin' – it's goin'! It's – Oh! (*he claps his hand to his eye in agony*) *Argghh...*

MRS BUGGINS. Whatever's the matter, Father?

FATHER. Me foot's gorn through the tin, and the juice's as squirted in me eye!

GRANDMA. (*complacently*) Oh, that's nice! Now we can 'ave a dob o' salmon!

FATHER. Oh – oh – oh! – it's cut right through me boot.

(**When FATHER holds up his foot, a battered tin is seen on the heel of it, which has been concealed behind the tree-trunk and substituted at this point for the original tin.**)

MRS BUGGINS. Oh, do stop 'owlin', Father, and take that tin orf the endo of yer foot. The salmon'll be ruined!

FATHER. (*hopping*) It won't come orf, I tell yer, - it won't come orf! It's cut right through the boot inter me flesh!

MRS BUGGINS. Oh, good gracious, Father, what are we to do! For goodness sake don't put it to the ground – the salmon'll eat in.

GRANDMA. (*enjoying it*) Let's 'ope it ain't the gangrenious sort, that's all.

MRS BUGGINS. Oh, good 'eavens! We'll 'ave to find a doctor. – Don't put it to the ground, Father – you'll 'ave to 'op.

FATHER. 'Op! All down that great 'ill? What d'yer take me for? – a kangaroo?

MRS BUGGINS. Oh, don't wait to argue, Father. It may be turnin' gangrenious this very minute, and 'eating inter yer cistern. Come on – you 'op, and I'll give you me arm.

(**MRS BUGGINS puts FATHER'S arm around her neck, and he leans heavily upon her, *groaning hollowly***)

GRANDMA. Oh, stop groanin', fer goodness sake! Ere's me rusted up ter the gullet, and never a sound outer me.

²⁰⁴ Constanduros and Hogan, *The Bugginses' Picnic*, p. 12.

²⁰⁵ **Original directions** that are only appropriate for the stage are in **bold print**; directions in *underlined italics* are in the *stage script, but also work on radio*; directions and dialogue in *italics with no underline* are what I have added to make the piece suitable for radio.

FATHER. Well, you never 'ad a ingrowin' salmon on yer foot! ²⁰⁶

This is another situation that is actually better-suited to radio than theatre. On radio there is no need for the clumsy and unconvincing substitution of the tin. Filson Young was perplexed by this kind of humour in the 1930s, believing that the comedy simply came from the listener's 'dislike' of the characters, so that s/he 'is glad of what they suffer'.²⁰⁷ But Constanduros's humour is more complex and sophisticated than that. From the previous two extracts we can see that she was also adept with the 'wildly inappropriate response'.²⁰⁸ In the first one Father and Grandma laugh at the distress of the children. In the second one Grandma remains unsympathetic and is unmoved by Father's agony. She then adds to his woes by exaggerating the possible consequences of the situation, suggesting he might get gangrene. Emily's response swings from an inappropriate concern for the condition of the salmon over that of her husband to over-anxiety about his health, fuelled by Grandma's pessimism. It is the overlapping of all these devices that contributes to the hilarity of the piece. The following sections examine some further techniques that explain why *The Bugginses* is so funny.

Characters: the running gags and the underlying sadness

Much of the humour in *The Bugginses* rests on Emily's determination to improve them all and create happiness. This is a well-worn theme in contemporary sitcom writing; Emily existed before Ria in *Butterflies*, Margo in *The Good Life* and Ma Boswell in *Bread*.²⁰⁹ She, like Emily is 'the lynchpin [...] of a family surviving in a hard economic climate.'²¹⁰ Contemporary comedy theorist John Vorhaus believes that fundamentally 'comedy is about truth and pain.'²¹¹ This was something Constanduros had a particular understanding of. The character of Emily can never accept the truth that her family simply do not share her enthusiasm for life or want to improve; they refuse to be happy, which causes her endless pain of disappointment. This simple comic device is at the heart of *The Bugginses* and is used to fuel the plots. Emily's desire to make her family appreciate a day out in the open is a

²⁰⁶ Constanduros and Michael Hogan, *The Bugginses' Picnic*, p. 16.

²⁰⁷ Young, p. 248.

²⁰⁸ Vorhaus, p. 50.

²⁰⁹ For analysis of these famous sitcom characters see Gray's chapter, 'British Sitcom: a Rather Sad Story', pp. 80-111.

²¹⁰ Gray, p. 97.

²¹¹ Vorhaus, pp. 1-8.

running gag throughout *The Bugginses' Picnic*. Even when the situation is resolved by the family leaving the scene of misery and heading for familiar surroundings Emily's desire for better things remains unresolved and carries the sitcom forward into the next episode. The conflict that is crucial to the success of *The Buggins Family* is never entirely resolved.

The futility of Emily's attempts at improvement creates real pathos, which is evident in Grandma and Father too. When 'a character [...] is both funny and at the same time pathetic, the combination [is] very moving.'²¹² Grandma is at once hilarious and sad; she is bewildered by the changing times and is desperately trying to control her tiny world. She is genuinely fearful concerning her health because of her age, and this fear creates her negative approach to everyone else's health, along with a tendency to be spiteful. She is a prophet of doom who takes advantage of Emily's anxiety and lack of education to constantly cause trouble. This is most evident in *Baby and the Silk Worm*, an episode from 1927 in which Father is silent; the directions in italics are mine:

ALFIE. But Baby's swallowed one.
 MRS BUGGINS. Swallowed what?
 ALFIE. A silk worm Mother.
 MRS BUGGINS. You naughty little boy! Why didn't you tell me before? (*coaxing*) Come here Baby. Come to Mother. Cough it up Ducky. Cough up the nasty silk worm like a good girl.
 GRANDMA. What's the matter?
 MRS BUGGINS. Baby's swallowed a worm.
 GRANDMA. A germ? What germ?
 MRS BUGGINS. A worm! A silk worm!
 GRANDMA. (*thrilled*) Oh-oh.
 MRS BUGGINS. Oh go on Gran'ma – can't you say somethink besides 'oh'? What shall I do about it?
 GRANDMA. You'd better do somethink. I 'new a child that swallowed a worm and it twined round its 'eart and stifled it.
 MRS BUGGINS. (*panicking*) Well what shall I do?
 GRANDMA. I should 'old 'er up by the 'eels if she was mine until the worm dropped out.²¹³

Grandma's inflexible personality provides an effective block for all of Emily's attempts to find joy. This is not dissimilar to the relationship between Harold and his father, Albert, in *Steptoe and Son*, the 1960s sitcom about two rag-and-bone men, by Alan Simpson and Ray Galton.²¹⁴ Harold's attempts to improve are always thwarted by his father, but they remain locked together because ultimately they only have each other.²¹⁵ The sad truth in *The Bugginses* is that Grandma only has her family and is entirely dependent on them. The difference between *The Bugginses* and *Steptoe* is that Emily has acquired this relationship

²¹² Davis, p. 141.

²¹³ Transcript from *The Buggins Family* [on CD].

²¹⁴ Davis, p. 141.

²¹⁵ Davis, p. 141.

with Grandma through marriage.²¹⁶ Father (‘Arold’) is Grandma’s son and it would seem that Emily remains in the marriage entirely out of duty. Father is content in his relentless misery and takes the pleasure out of everything that Emily does. He and Grandma form a double obstacle that Emily’s optimistic personality has to overcome on a daily basis. The following transcripts from *The Bugginses’ Family Group* (1929) are a good illustration of how they do this. The directions in italics are mine:²¹⁷

MRS BUGGINS. Ooo Father. Father! Look wot Alfie’s won.
 FATHER. Well – what is it?
 MRS BUGGINS. He’s won a pocket camera wiv a noomatic shutter.
 FATHER. Won? You mean he pinched it?
 MRS BUGGINS. Ooo Father he’s won it I tell yer, wiv all them cigarette coupons wot’s bin collected.
 FATHER. Wot I’ve bin collectin’ yer mean. If anythin’ comes out o’ those coupons it’s mine!
 MRS BUGGINS. Of Father, don’t be so raspacious.
 FATHER. Well ‘oo paid fer ‘em? Oo ‘ad ter smoke the blummin things? Why the inner wall o’ me gullet’s like a dried ‘erring.
 GRANDMA. Yes, and it ain’t done yer face much good neither. It looks like a map ‘o the underground.
 [...]
 FATHER. Now Emily, put yer ‘and on the back of Gran’ma’s chair and look carin’
 GRANDMA. ‘Er ain’t done that since the day yoo got married!
 [...]
 FATHER. Now look at my ‘and everybody and try to imagine it’s a bird.
 GRANDMA. A blackbird.
 EMMA. (*giggling*) Ooo don’t Gran’ma! (*subsides into fits of giggles*)
 FATHER. Shut up Emma!
 EMMA. I can’t. I can’t ‘elp it.
 FATHER. What did I tell yer! I’ve ‘ad enough of ‘er grinnin’ like a codfish.
 MRS BUGGINS. Oh Father, don’t be so sarcastic – now you’ve made ‘er cry.
 GRANDMA. I’d give ‘er somethin’ to cry for if she was mine.

Father is certainly cruel, but he is also desperately sad due to his lack of education and mundane job in a warehouse; his pigeons provide his only comfort. Without Emily he would be unable to function.²¹⁸ Like *Steptoe and Son*, ‘if it weren’t so funny it would be tragic’.²¹⁹

The distinct and easily identifiable character traits lead to a number of successful running gags throughout *The Bugginses*. Vorhaus explains the importance of the running gag to some audiences:

Everyone knows it’s coming. They can’t wait to [hear] it again. It turns out that a certain fixed percentage of a certain type of audience seeks not the new thing but the familiar thing. They want the same “buzz”, the same triggering of their laugh reflexes that they enjoyed last week and the week before that and the week before that.²²⁰

²¹⁶ Mabel Constanduros, *Mrs Buggins Calls* (London: George Routledge & Sons Ltd, 1936).

²¹⁷ *The Buggins Family* [on CD].

²¹⁸ Mabel Constanduros and Michael Hogan, *The Bugginses* (London: Hutchinson and Co Ltd, [n.d.]).

²¹⁹ Davis, p. 141.

²²⁰ Vorhaus, p. 113.

Constanduros knew her audience and people who love/d *The Bugginses* seem to fall into that percentage that 'seek [...] the familiar thing'. The running gags are sometimes based on a visual image of a thing, but they are somehow funnier because the audience cannot actually see them. The listeners provide their own version of the thing. The main running visual gags I have identified are as follows:

- GRANDMA'S TEETH: She is always losing them and someone has to search for them (*Getting ready for the Holidays*, *Grandma's Birthday Party*). If the teeth haven't been lost then Grandma refers to how uncomfortable they are or thinks they might fall out (*The Bugginses' Family Group*). They are sometimes used as a delaying tactic (*Grandma's Birthday Party*). The teeth are equally funny when they are not found and Grandma has to manage without them, especially if she is talking to someone Emily thinks is posh (*Grandma's Birthday Party*).
- EMILY'S BLUE VELVET: This is Mrs Buggins' only smart dress and she wears it whenever there is a special occasion (*Grandma's Birthday Party*) or the family are going out (*Getting Ready for the Holidays*, *At the Station*, *A Trip to Brighton*). She is usually too hot in it and it is much too tight.
- FATHER'S COLLAR: As part of her constant attempts at improvement Mrs Buggins often asks Father to wear a collar and he always refuses (*Getting ready for the Holidays*).²²¹

Some of the running gags are based on ideas rather than things. Alfie is always running off and getting into trouble (*The Bugginses' Picnic*, *At the Station*, *the Bugginses at the Seaside*, *A trip to Brighton*). He is also made to lie about his age whenever taking public transport (*Baby and the Silkworm*, *A Trip to Brighton*). His mother makes him pretend to be under 5, so that he can travel free. Emma has an obsession with snakes, which is used to propel the plot of *The Buggins Family at the Zoo* because she wants to see them. This obsession is also used to good effect in *Baby and the Silkworm* when Emma suggests charming the silkworm like a snake to get it out of Baby. Constanduros's ability to use the familiar to tap into her audience's desire for repeated 'triggering of laugh reflexes' is probably one of the reasons for the success of *The Buggins Family*.

²²¹ In the days before washing machines men's shirts were often worn for days without washing. Collars and cuffs were detachable, so that they could be to be washed more frequently because they got the dirtiest. As a consequence working men usually relaxed at home in a shirt without a collar. Emily's desire for 'Arold to always wear a collar reflected her wish to improve her social standing. See <http://scheong.wordpress.com/2011/11/25/the-history-of-the-collared-shirt/> [accessed 05 June 2013].

Class, language and the malapropism

The running gags of Father's collar and Emily's blue velvet dress are reflective of the class the Buggins family fit into and Emily's desire to transcend that class. Rib Davis explains that 'class is hugely important in terms of how characters are perceived and how they perceive themselves.'²²² At the time Constanduros was writing class structures were more rigid and the Buggins family fitted into the working class because Father, the main breadwinner, earned a living in a low-skilled, low paid job.²²³ In creating the *Bugginses*, Constanduros managed to poke fun at everything the BBC was attempting to do. It may have been deliberate satire or simply accurate observation, but Emily was the personification of the housewives that Matheson so desperately wanted to educate, and Constanduros demonstrated with kindness and humanity what was likely to happen to a woman from a working class background who tried to acquire an education and advance her social position. She knew the effects of a hard life on a woman, as this poignant extract from a spin-off book she wrote with Hogan indicates:

[Emily Buggins] hastily smoothed her hair in front of the tiny looking-glass on the chest of drawers. If she noticed that the woman whose face looked back at her from the discoloured mirror was a very different creature from the fresh-faced girl who had looked at herself in her wedding dress in that very mirror eleven years ago, she wasted no time in useless regrets. Women age quickly in Halcyon Row.²²⁴

Constanduros's comic creations reflected the period in which they lived exactly. The character of Emily could have been a woman trying to improve her situation as a result of listening to Matheson's talks, as encouraged by 'Joan' in 1931:

We are now to be given every encouragement to make a quarter of an hour's break in the middle of the morning's work with the talks which the BBC arrange for us. [...] Those who have to get up early to get a man off to work and children off to school certainly need "elevenses" and I think it is an excellent idea to arrange matters so that one sits down to enjoy the mid-morning cup of chocolate, or whatever it is, just as the announcer introduces the speaker for the 10.45am talk.²²⁵

Davis points out that 'while a particular class is something we are born into, it is also something we may move away from, either in fact or in our own perceptions.'²²⁶ This is 'one

²²² Davis, p. 14.

²²³ Martin Pugh, *We Danced All Night: A Social History of Britain Between the Wars* (London: Vintage, 2009), pp. 76-101.

²²⁴ Constanduros and Hogan, *The Bugginses*, p. 10.

²²⁵ WAC, P.293, Joan, 'From a Woman's Stand Point', *The New Chronicle of Christian Education*, 16 Apr 1931.

²²⁶ Davis, p. 15.

of the most fertile areas for the creator of character' and it is certainly exploited by Constanduros, who uses the discrepancy between what Emily wishes to become and what she actually is to great comic effect.²²⁷ The Buggins family's lower class status is 'defined through income, lifestyle, [Father's] occupation' and, of course, education.²²⁸ This affects the way that all of the characters speak and act, which brings us to the way Constanduros uses language to create humour in *The Bugginses*. Wolfe makes the point that 'in England especially, you learn a great deal about a person the moment they start speaking.'²²⁹ Constanduros uses 'accent, grammar, articulation, manner of speech [as] a giveaway to background, education and status.'²³⁰

The comic device of the malapropism is a favourite of Constanduros.²³¹ This type of comedy of language is particularly radio friendly. This was recognised by critics even in the earliest days of radio comedy; 'A wireless sketch cannot rely upon gestures. There must be wit in every line.'²³² Helitzer defines the 'malaprop' as 'the use of twisted language that is innocently spoken by an ignorant person.'²³³ The following extract demonstrates how Constanduros uses mistakes in language for Grandma (70 years old), and the inverted snobbery and lack of education of Father (35 years old), to equal comic effect:

FATHER. [To the children] 'Ere the pair of yer can take and carry the dinner over to them gorze bushes, where I can't see this beastly panamara. I'm turnin' that giddy, I shall get an attack of the verdigrease and precipitate meself down it in a minute.

GRANDMA. I ain't settin' by no gorze bushes!

MRS BUGGINS. Why not Grandma?

GRANDMA. Swarmin' with snakes and evvets, they are. I knoo a girl wot sat under a gorze bush and a evvet popped out and bit 'er, and she was never the same again.

FATHER. Ah-two-legged evvet I expect that one was!

GRANDMA. No, it wasn't, then! It was a ordinary gastronomic evvet.²³⁴

These extracts, from *The Buggins Family at the Zoo*, use a similar device in a slightly different way, Constanduros uses accent to create the malapropisms:

²²⁷ Davis, p. 14.

²²⁸ Davis, p. 14.

²²⁹ Wolfe, p. 33.

²³⁰ Wolfe, p. 33.

²³¹ From the name of the character Mrs Malaprop in Sheridan's play *The Rivals* (1775), *OED*. See also my 'Prelude to Part One'.

²³² WAC, P129 Press Cuttings Programmes 1928: Albert De Courville, 'What Wireless Might Be', *Sunday Graphic*, 25 Nov 1928.

²³³ Helitzer, p. 333.

²³⁴ *The Bugginses' Picnic*, p. 7. NB Constanduros never explained her malapropisms, but I think that 'evvet' was almost certainly a ferret and 'gastronomic' was Grandma's attempt at quadruped, which isn't really a word, but indicates going on four legs, so creating a double error for Grandma.

MRS BUGGINS. Oo! Yes it's a neagle

GRANDMA. That it's not. It's a nork.

MRS BUGGINS. It's a neagle I tell you. Emma, ask that man. Ask nicely mind. Say, please Mister, can you tell me if that's a nork or a neagle?²³⁵

[...]

MRS BUGGINS. What is it Emma? Keep pullin' my sleeve like that! You'll 'ave it orf in a minute.

EMMA. The man says it isn't a neagle nor a nork, it's a nowl.

GRANDMA. Ah! I knoo it was a nowl all along.²³⁶

The humour stems from Emily's attempt to make the children behave in a polite way like middle class children, while making the errors of language ascribed to their own class. The misplaced 'n' is a common Cockney pronunciation.

Andrew Crisell attributes this kind of witty language to what he calls the 'newer, radiogenic form of comedy' in which words themselves are used to create humour, citing *The Goon Show* as a prime example.²³⁷ Constanduros was ahead of her time in her use of language on the radio and the following section will show that she also exploited the blindness of the medium, even though she began working in the era that Crisell categorises as 'the older genre of' radio comedy, which has its roots in theatre and music hall. Martin Shingler comments that she did not come from the vulgar music hall tradition, 'she was respectable', which is one of the things that endeared her to the BBC.²³⁸ Crisell believes the older genre 'is almost invariably characterized by the presence of a studio audience'.²³⁹ But there is no evidence of an audience in any of the recordings I have listened to and Constanduros makes no reference to having one for the *Bugginses*, so we could assume that she was original in this respect and a forerunner of Crisell's 'newer radiogenic' genre. In the early days of her career a studio audience would have been a disadvantage. Constanduros wanted listeners to think several actors were performing her characters; it was only as people became familiar with whom she was that they became as enamoured with her performance as they were with her characters.

²³⁵ Mabel Constanduros, *The Buggins Family at the Zoo* (London: Samuel French Ltd, [n.d.]), p. 4. A 'nork' was almost certainly a hawk and a 'neagle' an eagle.

²³⁶ Constanduros, *The Buggins Family at the Zoo*, p. 5. A 'nowl' is surely an owl. These excerpts are not on CD.

²³⁷ Crisell, p. 167. *The Goon Show* was broadcast by the BBC 1952-1960. It used surreal humour, ridiculous plots and comedy of language.

See < <http://www.bbc.co.uk/comedy/thegoonshow/> > for more information.

²³⁸ BLSA, *The Late Mrs Buggins*.

²³⁹ Crisell, p. 167.

Voice, personality and Grandma

Constanduros understood what was required to make things funny on radio and saw ‘comedy in terms of radio itself, regarding the blindness of the medium as a positive quality in its ability to liberate the listener’s imagination’.²⁴⁰ She was aware of the advantages invisibility gave her:

Behind the blessed shelter of a microphone you can be whatever character you choose, since your appearance can neither help nor hinder. You can play anything from a child of six to an old woman of eighty, if your voice is flexible enough.²⁴¹

But the characters she wrote and played to such comic effect still create a visual image of their physical appearance in the mind of the listener, whether that image is of a small child or an old woman. ‘Funny clothes and grimaces are of no use to a radio comedian’ because they cannot be seen, but Constanduros was able to convey her characters by using her ‘flexible’ voice and dialogue.²⁴² Matheson points out that ‘the relation of voice and personality’ is the ‘elusive puzzle of broadcast speech’.²⁴³ A study by Edward Sapir, published in 1927 supports her view:

The voice is a complicated bundle of reactions and, so far as the writer knows, no one has succeeded in giving a comprehensive account of what the voice is and what changes it may undergo. There seems to be no book or essay that classifies the many different types of voice, nor is there a nomenclature that is capable of doing justice to the bewildering range of voice phenomena. And yet it is by delicate nuances of voice quality that we are so often confirmed in our judgment of people. From a more general point of view, voice may be considered a form of gesture.²⁴⁴

According to Sapir audiences of early radio broadcasts would have been able to judge character traits from the voices they heard on the wireless as if they were characteristics that they could actually see, and this is still true today.

All of Constanduros’s characters have a distinct way of speaking and are easily identifiable once they have been introduced, which is usually by another character calling him or her by name. This was particularly important at the time the series was originally broadcast because of ‘imperfect reproduction’ distorting the sound.²⁴⁵ Constanduros’s vocal technique was so precise that a gramophone recording of a *Buggins* episode was used as an

²⁴⁰ Crisell, p. 167.

²⁴¹ Constanduros, *Shreds and Patches*, p. 39.

²⁴² Constanduros, *Shreds and Patches*, p. 41.

²⁴³ Matheson, p. 78.

²⁴⁴ Edward Sapir ‘Speech as a Personality Trait’, *American Journal of Sociology*, 32 (1927): 892-905 (p. 894). www.brocku.ca/MeadProject/Sapir/Sapir_1927_b.html [accessed 9 September 2013].

²⁴⁵ T. H. Pear, *Voice and Personality* (London: Chapman & Hall Ltd, 1931), p. 107.

experiment to test audience comprehension by T. H. Pear in 1931, and he describes what it was like listening to her voices: 'It is difficult or impossible to mistake one character for another, and it is no strain to hold them apart mentally.'²⁴⁶ However, Grandma is probably the most recognizable and funny of all the characters, so I will give her special attention in order to illustrate my points. Filson Young describes her as 'an embodiment of complete selfishness and malice, and so mean and squalid in her habits as to be physically revolting.'²⁴⁷ The important words here are 'embodiment' and 'physically' because they indicate that Grandma's success is partly because of the image she creates in the mind. There is something about the creaking voice and sigmatic (whistling) s (which developed over time) that effectively conjures the image of a '[bonneted old woman wearing a] heavy black skirt, [...] old-fashioned boned bodice [...] and feather boa'.²⁴⁸ Of course the image created will differ from listener to listener, but as in previous examples, the imagination will supply an old lady significant to the listener and relevant to the story.²⁴⁹ The comedic physicality of this personality is brought into existence by the invention of the mind. Therefore Constanduros contradicts Crisell's idea that 'the nearest [radio] comes to comic business or physical humour is in its use of SFX'.²⁵⁰ This is not really so surprising; voice is recognised in stand up comedy as 'the most important physical instrument for conveying character'.²⁵¹ It would seem obvious that this 'physical instrument' if used with sufficient skill, should be the best tool for creating character on radio because 'voice inflection, from malicious cackling to nasal whines, indicates personal characteristics not physically evident.'²⁵²

This unique ability to her use voice to flesh out things that can usually only be created through a visual image or detailed description contributed to the clarity of Constanduros's characters. Wolfe explains that:

If comedy is based on character, then the stronger the character the stronger the comedy. [...] Not only do you want strong characters, but [the] characters should be in sharp contrast to each other. [...] In an ideal script each character should have a point of view from which to speak. Lines should not be interchangeable.'²⁵³

²⁴⁶ Pear, p. 7.

²⁴⁷ Young, p. 245.

²⁴⁸ There is no whistle in the voice on any of the material from the 1920s and 30s, which is available on CD, but this sigmatic s is clearly evident on the BL *Buggins Family* episode, which was recorded in 1942. The stage direction describing Grandma is from *The Bugginses' Picnic*, p. 6.

²⁴⁹ See Chapter 3 of this thesis.

²⁵⁰ Crisell, p. 164.

²⁵¹ Helitzer, p. 242.

²⁵² Helitzer, p. 242.

²⁵³ Wolfe, p. 53.

And Grandma not only spoke with a distinctive voice that gave clues to her personality, she also said things that only Grandma would say like, ‘When you’ve got a ‘usband you lose yer tase fer ‘em.’²⁵⁴ In creating Grandma Buggins Constanduros was employing what Frances Gray calls the ‘Mrs Grundy’ technique, which is often used by male comics as a way of defending sexist jokes. Grandma Buggins is the epitome of ‘a thin-lipped and humourless prude averse to any form of spontaneity, life or joy.’²⁵⁵ But Constanduros does not use this character in a way that is cruel, as Gray believes some male writers might:

The nagging mother-wife, reducing male energy to domestic tidiness, sexually rapacious or coldly puritanical – both equally frightening, since they imply a sexuality under her own control – is of course a familiar figure, from literature, from comic postcards, cartoons and jokes. She is a comic stereotype as well known as the bragging coward, the trickster, the stereotypes on which comedy of eccentricity largely depends.²⁵⁶

Instead Grandma Buggins is used to highlight the differences between the generations in a similar way to the contemporary mothers and grandmothers in *Absolutely Fabulous* and *The Royle Family*.²⁵⁷ Filson Young was mistaken in thinking that the ‘humour is of an essentially unlovely and ill-natured kind, springing not from the well of love in our hearts, but from the well of bitterness.’²⁵⁸ The extraordinary respect and affection granted to Grandma by her daughter-in-law, Emily Buggins, and the rest of the family, is sincere and reflective of the period. It was a time when many families were living under the same roof as at least one elderly relation.²⁵⁹ As Barry Cryer comments, ‘Mabel got the generation clash; she had an astonishing ear for subtle nuances of speech’.²⁶⁰ Catherine Tate uses the same type of ‘generation clash’ in her sketches involving Nan, which also exploit Vorhaus’s ‘wildly inappropriate response’. Both Nan and Grandma speak and behave in ways we do not expect from old ladies; a type of humour analysed by Pirandello in 1912.²⁶¹ Young, who probably had not read Pirandello, attempted to understand this in his 1932 analysis, explaining that

²⁵⁴ BLSA, *The Late Mrs Buggins*.

²⁵⁵ Frances Gray, *Women and Laughter* (Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press LTD, 1994), p. 8.

²⁵⁶ Gray, p. 85.

²⁵⁷ See <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00jm3ms>> for further information on *Absolutely Fabulous* by Jennifer Saunders from an original idea with Dawn French. For *The Royle Family* by Craig Cash and Caroline Aherne see <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/comedy/theroylefamily/>> [accessed 2 September 2013].

²⁵⁸ Young, pp. 248-49.

²⁵⁹ Maggie B. Gale, *West End Women: Women and the London Stage 1918-1962* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 21-37.

²⁶⁰ BLSA, *The Late Mrs Buggins*.

²⁶¹ This type of comedy stems from Pirandello’s ‘theory of opposites’ or ‘juxtaposition of contraries’ as Carlson describes it in his *Theories of the Theatre* (p. 370.) Pirandello detailed his theory in the essay *L’Umoreismo* (1908), which I haven’t space to discuss here, but for a translation of this seminal work see Antonio Illiano and Daniel P. Testa, *On Humor* (Chapel Hill : University of North Carolina Press, 1974).

‘[Grandma] always goes one step further [...] than one could have imagined [...]; she always turns out to be more horrible than one could have believed; and for some reason one laughs at that.’²⁶² In Nan’s case this often takes the form of her using obscene language. Nan reflects the isolation of the elderly in contemporary society and therefore differs from Grandma because she lives alone; her family only visit, but just like Grandma she is given undeserved love and respect by her relations.²⁶³

Perhaps there is a clue to the origins of Grandma in Constanduros’s autobiography, in which she describes the nanny she had as a child:

An old, old woman [...] with a sunken mouth – I believe she had no teeth – a face which was a network of wrinkle and sparse grey hair surmounted with a black net cap with lappets over the ears. [...] We resented her presence because she used to keep us away from Mother, but Mother loved her.

Constanduros uses the stereotypical Grandma to great advantage and the audiences of the time almost certainly concurred with Gray’s opinion that ‘there is an undeniable pleasure [...] in the comic skill with which these comic stereotypes are portrayed; [...] they offer a vehicle for the vitality of an authoritative performer.’²⁶⁴ Earlier in this chapter I discussed an article written in 1928 by A. Corbett Smith in which he states that the most important thing in radio is ‘personality’. Replace Gray’s ‘vitality’ with Corbett Smith’s ‘personality’ to explain the success of the series with that particular audience. The OED definition of personality is, ‘the combination of characteristics or qualities that form an individual’s distinctive character’. Both Constanduros and the people she created had some of the most distinctive characteristics on radio, but it was probably her own personality that led to her stardom; Esslin asserts that ‘a far greater proportion of audiences [want] particular actors rather than the characters they signify.’²⁶⁵ Constanduros was giving listeners what they wanted in the form of *The Buggins Family*, which provided the perfect vehicle for her unique ability.

Early soap opera

There is some disagreement amongst researchers as to which was the prototype BBC radio soap, some think it began with *The Bugginses*.²⁶⁶ Others cite *The Huggetts*, which was also

²⁶² Young, p. 247.

²⁶³ See <www.youtube.com> for innumerable sketches involving Tate’s Nan.

²⁶⁴ Gray, p. 86.

²⁶⁵ Esslin, p. 59.

²⁶⁶ I have already stated the case for *The Buggins Family* as early sitcom. It fits more comfortably into the genre of sitcom because it is so funny.

created by Constanduros.²⁶⁷ No one seems to have noticed a series called *Conversations in the Train*. This oversight is almost certainly due to the old problem of the impermanence of radio; sadly I have been unable to find any scripts or recordings of this series, so I cannot entirely support its case as the forerunner of soap at the time of writing this, but I will continue to search for further evidence. However, there is certainly sufficient evidence to support Constanduros as the original writer of what we now think of as BBC Continuing Drama.²⁶⁸

The series *Conversations in the Train* was an original idea of Hilda Matheson's, and 'had associated conversation with "appropriate sound effects" [...], but whereas [Matheson] wanted to use first class speakers [...] by 1935 professional actors – of the calibre of [...] Mabel Constanduros were "performing" in scripts written by outsiders'.²⁶⁹ It is intriguing to think that Matheson and Constanduros may have at some time collaborated; it is quite possible that the women discussed the series face to face before Matheson left the BBC. Given Matheson's views on elocuted voices, as documented in the previous chapter, Briggs' could be wrong on the matter of first class speakers. Constanduros not only performed in these pieces, she wrote them too, as evidenced by a letter she wrote in 1937 (one of many) refusing to accept £12 for a *Conversations in the Train* script. She was eventually paid 15 guineas.²⁷⁰

With its attempted naturalism, *Conversations in the Train* was perhaps the forerunner of the modern soap opera, or 'family drama', as Gielgud calls them, and whilst it is well documented that he was not enamoured of this kind of popular program, he had to acknowledge its success in terms of the listening public. He believed that the 'family drama' began with *The English Family Robinson*:

It was with the *English Family Robinson* in 1938 that this type of programme-item was introduced by Mabel and Denis Constanduros, almost immediately establishing a clamant demand, which was met in

²⁶⁷ BLSA, *The Late Mrs Buggins*.

²⁶⁸ The series most like the work of Constanduros is probably *EastEnders* <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006m86d>>. See the BBC Writersroom <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom/about/continuing-drama>> for more information on continuing drama. See also <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006qpgr/faq>> for information on *The Archers*, which began in 1950 and is the most well known BBC radio drama series. It is less like the work of Constanduros in that it takes place in a rural setting. Her work was mostly urban in setting. [all sites accessed 10 September 2013].

²⁶⁹ Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom Volume II: The Golden Age of Wireless* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 149.

²⁷⁰ Copyright File 1A.

turn by *Front-line Family*, by *Mrs. Dale*, and by *The Archers*, to say nothing -or little- of *Dick Barton*, pitched in a slightly different key.²⁷¹

The English Family Robinson was a huge success for Mabel and Denis Constanduros, so Gielgud was crediting the correct writers, if not, perhaps, the right series, as being the first. No matter which series has the greater claim to being the prototype, there seems to be little doubt that the modern soap opera is based on the work of Constanduros. This extract from *The Cruising Family Robinson* demonstrates how Constanduros wrote about the everyday life of a middle class family. The Robinsons are leaving for their first holiday abroad the next day and their daughter Joan announces that she can't go because she has just got engaged:

MR ROBINSON. Joan, this is your mother's first real holiday – you know she's always wanted to go abroad. You're not going to disappoint her, dear, are you?

JOAN. (*almost in tears*) Isn't anybody going to think about me? I've just got engaged to be married! You take no notice of that. All you can think of is this silly cruise. You can go cruising any time. This is my life, don't you understand?

MRS ROBINSON. Oh, darling, we're not unsympathetic, but it was the *time* you chose. Couldn't you have waited till *after* the cruise? Daddy had set his heart on having you with us.

JOAN. Oh Mother! These things *happen*!

MR ROBINSON. (*his one moment of bitterness*) Funny sort of chap, surely, Joan, if he won't wait seventeen days till you come back.

JOAN. (*her voice shaking*) Oh why do people grow old and un-understanding? Here's the most wonderful thing in my life and you're not even being happy about it, nor letting me – you're not even interested.²⁷²

Joan is a typical soap teenager in conflict with her parents. The emotional content is familiar today.

The soap often cited as being the first is *Frontline Family*.²⁷³ No particular individual writer has been credited with this series, but the saga surrounding its commissioning, as recorded in correspondence at the BBC Written Archives Centre, is probably as interesting as the series itself.²⁷⁴ In 1937 Constanduros formed a hugely successful writing partnership with Howard Agg, and in 1942 it was decided that a series about a family coping with the war was needed. The BBC sought to commission *Frontline Family*, which was to be a daily series

²⁷¹ Gielgud, *British Radio Drama*, p. 70. *Mrs Dale's Diary* was a series about a suburban doctor and his wife. It began in 1948 and ran until 1969. *Dick Barton* was a popular crime series of the period. *Radio Listings Database*

< <http://www.radiolistings.co.uk/index.html> > [accessed 4 September 2013].

²⁷² Mabel Constanduros, *The Cruising Family Robinson* (London: Samuel French Ltd, 1939), pp. 15-16.

²⁷³ Anthony McNicholas, 'Soaps on the BBC: From the Frontline to the Queen Vic' in *The BBC Story* <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/historyofthebbc/resources/in-depth/soaps.shtml>> [accessed 7 August 2013].

²⁷⁴ I have done my best to piece together the story from personal letters, which are kept in a file at the BBC Written Archive Centre. Unfortunately they cannot be quoted without permission. See next footnote for WAC file reference.

with 5-6 programmes a week. Constanduros and Agg were approached to write the series, but by this time Constanduros had a thriving theatre and film career, and perhaps radio was becoming less important to her as a means of deriving an income. Agg was on the staff at the BBC, while she was freelance. The BBC commissioners failed to take the success of the partnership into account when they approached Agg and Constanduros, who demanded the high fee of £1,800 jointly for a pilot sequence. The commissioners were horrified and attempted to negotiate a cheaper rate, but in the end the deal fell through.²⁷⁵ If she had written it she might have received the recognition she deserved for creating the first soap.

Radio drama and Constanduros's legacy

Much of the work of Agg and Constanduros is forgotten today, but there is one particular play that attempted to be more than entertaining, and apparently achieved the writers' aims. In the words of Constanduros:

The Man from the Sea elicited a strange response from listeners. Several wrote to thank us, declaring that it had been the means of patching up long and difficult quarrels. [...] One thanked me for being the means of mending a broken marriage.²⁷⁶

This play might be an example of how Constanduros used her own life experiences in creating her work. She was married to Athanasius Constanduros, but 'the marriage clearly failed long before 1937 [because her] autobiography mentions her husband hardly at all and never favourably by name.'²⁷⁷ Broken relationships remained of interest to Constanduros throughout her career, but her ideas for plays on the subject were not always well received, so she wrote fewer of them than she would have liked, as this response to a synopsis of a play called *Jack of Diamonds* shows. The script reader, Cynthia Pughe found Constanduros's treatment of this serious subject simplistic and her response was angry:

This attempt to show the effect of broken marriage on children is forced, improbable and quite deplorable in every way. Such a serious subject needs much better writing and presentation than this, if it is not to sound simply novelettish. No, no and no!²⁷⁸

²⁷⁵ WAC, Mabel Constanduros, *Copyright File 2A* 1941 – 1942.

²⁷⁶ Constanduros, *Shreds and Patches*, p. 130.

²⁷⁷ *DNB*.

²⁷⁸ WAC, *Mabel Constanduros*, File 5, 1954-1962.

In *The Man from the Sea* two young newlyweds are in a stressful situation; their car has run out of petrol somewhere in the Scottish Highlands and they are forced to spend the night in a dilapidated cottage. The ensuing row, in which all their doubts and anxieties about their marriage are exacerbated by their circumstances, forms the backbone of the play. Self-help books were virtually unheard of and women were often naïve.²⁷⁹ Any literature that was available on the subject of sex and marriage was far more likely to be aimed at men than women.²⁸⁰ With its realistic dialogue and credible setting *The Man from the Sea* may have acted as a mirror to many couples, reflecting their inability to see their partner's point of view. It is an excellent example of the argument play, so admired by Matheson. It is rather like *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* in dramatic form.²⁸¹

SALLY: Don't you dare leave me. John I don't like this place. It's creepy.

JOHN: Yes, I'm afraid I don't much care for it myself, but I'm afraid we'll have to put up with it for tonight. Look...I've put the cushion on the floor for you, and I can roll my coat up for a pillow.

SALLY: Everything you touch is filthy. My dress will be ruined.

JOHN: Never, mind dear; you've got at least a dozen in your case.

SALLY: This happens to be the nicest one I've got.

JOHN: Now – try that.

SALLY: If you think I'm going to sleep a wink jacked up on a hard motor cushion on a stone floor in the middle of all this dirt, you must be mad.

JOHN: Not mad, darling; only trying to make the best of things. You might be on the floor like me.

SALLY: I hate all this. I hate Scotland. I hate honeymoons. I hate you.

JOHN: If I thought you meant that I'd get up and drive straight home.²⁸²

The argument progresses to such a pitch that John abandons Sally to spend the night in the car. The domestic situation then becomes a more traditional ghost story, as a stranger (who may or may not be real) arrives and proceeds to give Sally the benefit of his wisdom:

THE MAN: [...] I don't live here now. But I come here sometimes. Tell me... why were you crying just now? You're young and you're very pretty; you oughtn't to have anything to cry about. You should be very happy.

SALLY: So I was – until – tonight. I suppose I was too happy; it couldn't last. Happiness never does, I suppose.

THE MAN: Not unless we're clever about it and make it last. People are silly about happiness, you know. Some drink it all up in great gulps when they're young and have nothing left. Others are too cautious to drink at all till it's too late for them to appreciate it. The wisest ones drink a little every day; they neither waste it nor hoard it, so that it lasts them all their lives.²⁸³

²⁷⁹ Pugh, pp. 150.

²⁸⁰ Advertisements in issues of *The Radio Times* from the period show this.

²⁸¹ John Gray, *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* (London: Thorsons, 1992) NB. This book is a guide on how couples can improve their relationship. For a more academic view see also Laurie A. Rudman and Peter Glick, *The Social Psychology of Gender: How Power and Intimacy Shape Gender Relations* (New York & London: Guilford, 2008).

²⁸² Mabel Constanduros and Howard Agg, *The Man from the Sea* (WAC, 1941), p. 4.

²⁸³ Constanduros and Agg, *The Man from the Sea*, p. 8.

We might forgive The Man's view that every pretty woman should be happy as being a product of its time. Constanduros and Agg chose to use this play as more than just a form of entertainment. Constanduros was trying to use radio to change people, like Matheson before her. The young couple forgive each other the following morning when it becomes apparent that The Man had left his wife after a silly quarrel and then met an untimely end. This was a brave piece of writing for its time. Constanduros was genuinely trying to make the world a better place through the words and actions of her characters:

THE MAN: I always thought that [dignity] was a stupid word. It's been the cause of so much misery in the world. Don't add to it. Some of us are silly and find it very difficult to say we're sorry. We're like little sulky boys sometimes. Women are so much more sensible. They don't mind saying they're sorry. Do they?²⁸⁴

Whilst Constanduros is remembered for her comedy, it would be unfair to dismiss her dramatic writing as irrelevant just because its values now seem dated.

Constanduros has left a legacy that is still felt in radio drama today. She may not have been conscious of standing up to men in the way that Matheson was, but she was still a pioneer. She created the first characters and situations with radio in mind. Emily Buggins might have been created by and for radio. Like Matheson, Constanduros had a desire to educate and help people to understand their lives. Her comedy has stood the test of time, and is still funny today, yet she remains overlooked. She lived in an unequal world, but she recognised that she was writing about 'a nation of individuals'.²⁸⁵ Her characters have been re-incarnated for soap operas and sitcoms; we can see and hear their descendants all the time. She wrote about class and gender using 'jokes [as] the bridge.'²⁸⁶ It may be that much of her work has been forgotten because:

Domestic [...] pieces are regularly assumed to be the place where the "trivial" concerns of women's lives, of interest to a "minority", are played out. Thus many of the plays by women, because they take "domestic life" as a starting point, have been considered unworthy of critical analysis.²⁸⁷

This chapter has attempted to redress the balance, and show Constanduros as the consummate writer and observer of human nature that she truly was.

²⁸⁴ Constanduros and Agg, *The Man from the Sea*, p. 9.

²⁸⁵ Constanduros, *Shreds and Patches*, p. 27.

²⁸⁶ Gray, p. 15.

²⁸⁷ Gale, p. 7.

PART TWO

5. PROLOGUE

The relevance of the past to today's writers

In their different ways Hilda Matheson and Mabel Constanduros were innovators and things we now associate with contemporary radio can be identified in their work. Constanduros's prototype sitcom, *The Buggins Family* series, was her most significant work for radio, but she also wrote what we now think of as soap opera in *The English Family Robinson* and *The Huggetts* along with controversial argument plays like *The Man from the Sea*. Her distinctive radio personality and simplicity of style, along with superlative acting skills and an uncanny understanding of people led to her being one of the most popular performers of her era. Ideas posited by contemporary cultural theorists indicate that analysis of her work is long overdue; it should no longer be considered the case that popular writing is synonymous with 'bad writing'.¹ Matheson's ideas are also overdue for consideration; she contradicted the early technical wizards and lent towards simple production methods that have stood the test of time. Even though production methods have become more sophisticated her ideas are still relevant. Matheson's text, *Broadcasting*, may not have been given the respect it deserved at the time, but it should be acknowledged as containing some of the clearest theories concerning radio production, voice and the precise nature of the blind medium.

But the methods of producing radio plays have changed considerably since Constanduros, Gielgud, Sieveking and Matheson were broadcasting live, largely because everything is now recorded first. Tim Crook has provided a complete description and analysis of the process of actually making a radio play and the director's role within that process, so I will not repeat it here. Crook also gives a comprehensive account of how productions should be managed, which accurately reflects what happened during the making of all of the plays in this thesis.² Sound quality is certainly better than it has ever been and the advances in sound design would allow Lance Sieveking to create any sound he wished. But that would not

¹ Harriett Hawkins, *Classics and Trash: Traditions and Taboos in High Literature and Popular Modern Genres* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), p. 12.

² Tim Crook, *Radio Drama – Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 235-50.

ensure that his programs would seem more real to the listener because, ‘however carefully selected and “realistic” the sounds may be, the listener may still be unclear as to what aspect of reality they are meant to signify.’³ Reader-response and reception theorists have been examining meaning since the 1960s. Robert C. Holub discusses the work of Wolfgang Iser (1970) and explains that Iser ‘wants to see meaning as the result of an interaction between text and reader.’⁴ We could equally apply Iser’s ideas to radio drama because in radio, just as in processing of text ‘of central importance are the mental images formed when attempting to construct a consistent and cohesive aesthetic object.’⁵ A radio play is ‘an effect to be experienced’ not ‘an object to be defined’.⁶ The intentions of the author, performers or producer are irrelevant if the listener has a different interpretation. Esslin points out that meaning in drama will always be ‘the product of the interaction between the content of the signs it emits [...] and the [audience’s] competence to decode them.’⁷ It is therefore important that the radio writer allows for the listener’s individual circumstances and accepts that the radio play is particularly susceptible to diverse interpretations, not only because of differing ‘social, ideological and historical context’, but also simply because sounds are sometimes so difficult to identify.⁸

Writing for radio is the same as writing for other storytelling media except for the fact that the actors are invisible to the audience, who must be thought of as listeners. The nature of radio has not changed. It is still a medium in which actors are hidden from the audience and rely on their voices to convey their performance. Constanduros’s work demonstrates how this blindness was exploited, even when radio was very much an unknown quantity. This is still relevant today and anyone who wishes to write for radio must understand this distinctive quality in order to be successful. In the past some radio producers attempted to compensate for radio’s blindness with excessive use of sound effects, which Matheson believed was a huge mistake. She agreed with Gielgud that technical innovations must serve the play, not the other way around. The popularity of Constanduros’s simple style, during a period of complex technical sound experiments, proves Mamet’s contemporary theory that radio is best served

³ Andrew Crisell, *Understanding Radio – Second Edition* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 47.

⁴ Robert C. Holub, *Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 83.

⁵ Holub, p. 84.

⁶ Holub, p. 83.

⁷ Martin Esslin, *The Field of Drama* (London, Methuen, 1988), p. 67.

⁸ Esslin, p. 68.

by concentrating on the essential elements of story.⁹ Craftsmanship is more important than nebulous ideas. In other words the radio writer must always ask questions like ‘What is the story?’ and ‘Who are the characters?’ before thinking about sound effects. While music can be used to establish things like period, place, atmosphere and, sometimes, character; content is more important than ingenuity with noises. Dialogue is the most important storytelling device available to the radio writer, which means that plays focusing on discussion can be hugely successful. So, with this in mind, Part 2 of my thesis is concerned with the practice of writing contemporary radio plays for Radio 4’s Afternoon Drama and the plays represent two different methods of storytelling for radio. *21 Conversations with a Hairdresser* and *15 Ways to Leave Your Lover* are examples of the argument plays advocated by Matheson and Gielgud and are more old-fashioned in concept because they are more like stage plays in that they examine ideas rather than being driven by plot. *Jesus, The Devil and a Kid Called Death* is similar to TV or cinema because it is more confined by its genre and plot. Nevertheless, all the plays in this thesis demonstrate the effectiveness of simplicity.

The most up-to-date resource available to the aspiring radio writer is BBC Writersroom, a website full of helpful tips for writing TV and radio scripts.¹⁰ The site is keen to play down the difficulties associated with writing for the ear, describing ‘the medium of radio for drama [as] liberating, not restrictive - it can mean more variety, more locations, more action, more imagination, and more originality.’¹¹ This is true, but it is still essential that the writer keeps in mind the fact that the audience cannot see what is happening, so many of the early ideas, which concerned themselves with this, are still relevant to today’s writer. *The Writersroom* has replaced the how-to-do-it books of the early days of radio. It tries to compensate for any possible perception of radio’s shortcomings by extolling its virtues and reiterating the findings of Jeffrey, Gielgud and Matheson in a few lines:

Radio drama is the most intimate relationship a scriptwriter can have with their audience, and yet it can also cheaply create anything that you can imagine.

The pictures are better on radio. There's nothing you can't do, nowhere you can't go, and nothing that looks 'cheap'. Nobody will say that they can't afford to build that set, or the lighting's not quite right, or that the bad weather is going to delay production for days. The true 'budget' is that spent between you and the listener - the cost of two imaginations combined.¹²

⁹ David Mamet, ‘Radio Drama’, in *Writing in Restaurants* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), p. 12-18.

¹⁰ ‘Writing radio drama’ in *Scriptwriting Tips* <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom/write-a-script/writing-radio-drama>> [accessed 07 October 2013].

¹¹ ‘Writing radio drama’ in *Scriptwriting Tips* <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom/write-a-script/writing-radio-drama>> [accessed 07 October 2013].

¹² ‘Writing radio drama’ in *Scriptwriting Tips* <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom/write-a-script/writing-radio-drama>> [accessed 07 October 2013].

These encouraging words are certainly true, but before attempting to write a play for radio the writer should decide what s/he considers is the essence of the medium.

The nature of radio drama

The debate over the precise nature of radio drama is far from over. Gielgud referred to the ‘theatre of the air’ or ‘broadcast play’ in all of his work; he never saw it as being like film. Matheson thought radio was more like cinema, but was never fixed in her thinking on this. Although I refer to my own works and those of others as plays throughout, this is simply reflective of my background in theatre and does not in any way indicate that I agree with Gielgud rather than Matheson. The debate is more nuanced than that. Ian Rodger discusses the conflict between theatre and radio, which was so polarizing in the late nineteen twenties and early nineteen thirties, and devotes a whole chapter to the issue.¹³ He quotes Tyrone Guthrie, who wrote in the BBC Handbook of 1931 that ‘writers for broadcasting have up to the present concentrated most of their energies on conveying to the audience a series of mind pictures; but it is doubtful whether the future of broadcast drama lies in this direction.’¹⁴ Guthrie apparently predicted that the cinema-in-the-mind would soon become outmoded. Rodger, who was writing over twenty years ago, does not offer any conclusions on which type of radio works best and this issue still seems to be unresolved.

Whether a writer is best to consider radio drama as more like theatre or cinema is unclear because radio drama shares elements of both these media. The most important thing to note is that at its heart it is drama and therefore must be assessed in terms of drama or ‘storytelling art’ as McKee would call it. The ordinary member of the public often makes no distinctions between the forms of storytelling: when Albert Einstein was taken to the theatre by a friend he refused to give an opinion on the performance, stating that he knew too little about the finer points because he hardly ever went to the cinema.¹⁵ Radio dramas are still referred to as plays by almost everyone connected with the medium. The BBC changed the title of its afternoon slot from the ‘Afternoon Play’ to the ‘Afternoon Drama’ in 2011, but BBC Writersroom still lists this particular slot as ‘Monday-Friday 2:15-3pm Radio 4 The

¹³ Ian Rodger, *Radio Drama* (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press LTD, 1982), pp. 11-26.

¹⁴ Rodger, p. 22.

¹⁵ Esslin, p. 10.

Afternoon Play. Daily narrative drama strand. A complete story that is imaginative, accessible and entertaining.’¹⁶ Old habits are seemingly hard to break.

So, while maintaining a grasp of radio’s cinematic ability to create pictures in the head, the radio dramatist must surely be respectful of its past that is so rooted in the theatre. Gielgud used radio as a national theatre during World War Two, when the actual theatres were all closed due to the Blitz, and it was hugely successful.¹⁷ Mamet points out that ‘Martin Esslin helped to reinvent the British drama as head of BBC Radio Drama after World War II by commissioning Pinter, Joe Orton and others. He helped re-create a national theatre by *enfranchising creative talent*’ (Mamet’s italics).¹⁸ Paul Ashton states that ‘cinema of the airwaves’ is ‘much closer to what [the] writer should be thinking’ when creating a piece for radio, which of course, replicates Matheson’s view, but it seems wrong to only think of radio in terms of cinema. Ashton does admit that this definition is not perfect, but he also opines that ‘if you ever hear anyone suggest that radio drama is the ‘theatre of the airwaves’, strike it from your memory and consign it to the dustbin of poor understanding in which it deserves to remain.’¹⁹ He is the Development Producer at BBC Writersroom and is very well respected. I aim to demonstrate that many of the storytelling methods that apply to theatre still apply to radio, just as they always have. After all, Esslin contends that ‘division has become somewhat of an anachronism and inhibits clear critical thinking about the very considerable number of essential and fundamental aspects that the dramatic media have in common.’²⁰

The elements of radio plays

The advice given by BBC development producers, though well-intended, could be seen as confusing to the radio playwright, so what follows is an attempt to demystify the process. We should perhaps look to the past for clarity. Gielgud wrote *How to Write Broadcast Plays* in 1932 and it is still remarkably useful in the twenty-first century. While Matheson did not involve herself with the actual procedure of writing plays, she was an advocate of structure concerning talks and always insisted on using scripts. Gielgud and Matheson shared a view that items intended for broadcast should be written with great attention to detail. *How to*

¹⁶ ‘Writing radio drama’ in *Scriptwriting Tips* <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom/write-a-script/writing-radio-drama>> [accessed 07 October 2013].

¹⁷ Roger, pp. 54-68.

¹⁸ Mamet. p. 17.

¹⁹ Paul Ashton, *The Calling Card Script* (London: A&C Black, 2011), pp. 21-22.

²⁰ Esslin, p. 31.

Write Broadcast Plays was criticized at the time by the advocates of using sounds not words to tell stories on the radio, but ideas contained within it can still be used by a contemporary writer. At the point *How to Write Broadcast Plays* was published, radio drama had only been in existence for 8 or 9 years, but its popularity had grown to the extent that 40 plays a week were being submitted to the BBC.²¹ However ‘only about one percent compl[ied] sufficiently with the requirements of broadcasting to be seriously considered.’²² While Gielgud and Matheson both believed that radio plays should be specially written for broadcast and not adapted stage plays, and Matheson’s *Broadcasting* offers a great deal in terms of philosophizing and understanding radio in general, it is *How to Write Broadcast Plays* that details the specifics in playwriting terms. Gielgud suggests that the radio dramatist conceives of a play ‘in terms of separate ingredients of music, sound effects, narrator, cast and so forth.’²³ He is, in effect, referring to an early method of what Robert McKee calls ‘story design’.²⁴ In this respect Gielgud is following on from the Russian Formalists of the 1920s, who sought to define a written work of art as the sum of its ‘devices’ and ‘by directing attention to the process of interpretation itself [contributed] to a novel manner of exegesis’.²⁵ Playwright, Steve Waters, asserts in his book *The Secret Life of Plays*, that ‘all too often writing about playwriting and drama boils down to offering an inventory of conventions, as if plays were no more than the sum of their parts.’²⁶ But by examining plays as ‘the sum of their parts’ I have created a method of analysis suitable for radio.²⁷ After many years of experimentation Gielgud recognized that:

The audience was interested in what plays had to say rather than in the methods of their production; and that after all the radio play is only one more method of storytelling, and the whole business of production must be subservient to the effective telling of the story.²⁸

By taking a mixture of ideas from early radio theorists and combining them with some of the writing methods of Edgar, McKee and other screen, radio and playwriting theorists I have devised categories in order to show how my plays are constructed. While I do not wish to

²¹ Val Gielgud, *How to Write Broadcast Plays* (London: Hurst & Blackett, Ltd, 1932), pp.11-12.

²² Gielgud, *How to Write Broadcast Plays*, p. 12.

²³ Gielgud, *How to Write Broadcast Plays*, p. 25.

²⁴ Robert McKee, *Story* (London: Methuen, 1998), pp. 181-85.

²⁵ Holub, p. 16.

²⁶ Steve Waters, *The Secret Life of Plays*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 2010), pp. 1-2.

²⁷ Holub, p.16.

²⁸ WAC, R19/276, Val Gielgud, ‘Considerations Relevant to Broadcast Drama Based Upon Experience in the Years 1929 to 1948’, p. 1.

suggest that anyone can write a play just by following certain rules, I do think it is important for a writer to understand how s/he designs a story for the medium that it is intended. Every good writer will take a different approach to story design, and it is this singularity of approach that creates the writer's own voice. There may be similarities, but individual story design creates the differences. Below are the categories I have selected as the elements that make up my own story design with the reasons for their inclusion:

- **Early ideas:** *Without an idea there is no play.* The relationship between creative and critical thought must be understood. Creative thought must come first or there will be nothing to criticize. The early theorists rather took the creative process for granted.
- **Subject matter and genre:** *Without genre there will be no commission.* The idea of subject matter was important to the early theorists, so I have taken their original categories and updated them in order to give them contemporary values. McKee provides a comprehensive list of film genres.²⁹ These are useful when getting plays commissioned because 'radio nods toward the essential film story types rather than eras or movements.'³⁰ McKee would define my plays as 'domestic drama' because they 'examine problems within the family'; he does not recognize domestic comedy as a genre.³¹ I never use the word 'domestic' in play treatments for reasons that will become apparent on reading the next section.³²
- **Structure:** *Without structure the play will be unintelligible.* Playwriting theorists often refer to structure and assume the reader will have an innate understanding of what that means. It is important to define what structure is as part of a story design.
- **Plot and action:** *Without a plot the play will harder to understand and less accessible.* The analysis of plot and action exposes the true meaning. The Afternoon Drama should be accessible to a wide audience and on the whole listeners prefer plays that 'show [...] what is on offer' as early as possible. And if it seems interesting [...] there is every chance a listener will stay with [the] dramatic development.'³³
- **Characters:** *Without characters there is no means of telling the story.* Even in work that is character driven the writer should 'never include a character with no real

²⁹ McKee, pp. 80-86.

³⁰ Ashton, p. 62.

³¹ McKee, p. 82.

³² See the play treatments that precede the plays.

³³ Vincent McInerney, *Writing for Radio* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2001), p. 106.

function.’³⁴ It is important to understand why each character is there. This is perhaps what Gielgud meant by ‘cast’.

- **Language and dialogue:** *Without dialogue there is no way for the characters to tell the story.* Mirroring Matheson’s ideas on ‘plays of great poetry’ Ashton writes that in radio ‘language is everything; [a writer] ‘can interplay between any and every different form if that is the most effective way to tell [the] story and voice [the] characters.’³⁵ Gielgud refers to the ‘narrator’, which is included here and also in ‘characters’.
- **Setting, sound effects and music** *Without sound there will be no atmosphere.* Both Gielgud and Matheson saw SFX and music as separate to other categories. I don’t use the term sound design because it implies a knowledge I do not have. Tim Crook asserts that ‘a sound dramatist’ (another word for playwright) must have ‘an assured understanding of the philosophical source and practical application of sound’.³⁶ While this may be a marvellous thing to aspire to it is most definitely untrue of me.
- **Comic business and running gags** *Without these there is no icing on the cake.* These should not be the mainstay of an Afternoon Drama, but they allow writers to express ‘their idiosyncratic and unique take on the world.’³⁷ The plays in this thesis examine dark subject matter; the human misery caused by broken relationships; the inequality that still exists in society; bullying, gang culture and disaffected youth. They require a coating of something light in order to make them palatable.

These categories will be more clearly defined and discussed with reference to my plays in the chapter that follows. In addition the writer should always consider whether an idea ‘would only really work on radio – or would work best and most powerfully on radio.’³⁸ While it is perfectly possible to make one story span several modes of telling it is worth remembering that Gielgud and Matheson recommended using material written specifically for radio. But before moving on to this I wish to discuss briefly my position on plays that take domestic life as their subject matter.

³⁴ Ayckbourn, p. 37.

³⁵ Aston, p. 25.

³⁶ Crook, p. 53.

³⁷ Ashton, p. 56.

³⁸ Ashton, p. 23.

Defending the domestic comedy

The first definition of ‘domestic’ in the *Collins English Dictionary* is, ‘of or involving the home or family’. Traditionally material ‘involving the home or family’ is rarely considered worthy of analysis unless written by a man. I use the plays of Ibsen and Shaw as examples of this. Both playwrights concerned themselves with human behaviour in and around the home, but there are many critical texts available relating to their work.³⁹ In my prelude to Part 1 I detailed my reasons for assessing the work of Constanduros and Matheson without the restrictions associated with a feminist lens. Gale uses the example of a collection of plays edited by F. Morgan, *The Years Between: Plays by Women on the London Stage 1900-1950* (1994), in which ‘the search for a masterpiece [was] a working criterion’. She then goes on to make the point that this is ‘short-sighted and in many ways irrelevant’ because this ‘search depends on such outmoded agendas that it is hardly worthwhile.’ Morgan has fallen into what Gale believes is the ‘trap of censoring’ and she, like Davis in her essay ‘Questions for a feminist methodology in theatre history’, advocates that feminist historians should address the censoring impulse and validate the experience, connecting ‘the women with the work and the work with the world.’⁴⁰ Gale criticises Morgan for giving ‘too much credibility to the comments which male historians have made about women writing for the period under discussion’.⁴¹ Trewin describes plays by Clemence Dane and Dodie Smith as ‘Women’s Hour [*sic*] upon the stage’, which is ‘sparsely filled’; he considers their preoccupations to be ‘storms-in-a-teacup’.⁴² The reference to Woman’s Hour indicates that Trewin is equally dismissive of the concerns of women, whether for stage or radio. This has parallels with the situation at the BBC in the 1920s and 30s. There is considerable evidence to support the case for Matheson being a victim of sexism, which means that her ideas have not received the credit they deserve. Gray’s findings on female comedy writers go some way to building an argument for Constanduros suffering a lack of recognition because of her sex too.⁴³ In addition both women concerned themselves with domestic issues; Matheson desperately wanted to help women in society and expose them to new ideas, while recognising that these women were holding family life together, so she programmed features that appealed to them;

³⁹ The British Library Main Catalogue holds 2,729 works relating to Ibsen and 1, 264 to George Bernard Shaw.

⁴⁰ Maggie, B. Gale, *West End Women: Women and the London Stage 1918-1962* (London: Routledge, 1996), p.2.

⁴¹ Gale, p. 2.

⁴² Cited by Gale p. 2.

⁴³ See Chapter 4 of this thesis.

Constanduros wrote about family life with all of its difficulties, recognising that women were at the heart of it. She specialised in domestic comedy, which was seen as a ‘feminised form’ and ‘has been denigrated by both critics and historians then and now’.⁴⁴ She wrote the first soap opera, ‘which presents idealised and fantasy versions of “real life”’.⁴⁵ Constanduros was perhaps ‘marginalised because the social and ideological basis of [her] artistic expression was derived from [her] experience as a woman.’⁴⁶ Although Matheson’s creative framework was much wider than her ‘experience as a woman’ she had sympathy with this experience, which gave her male colleagues an excuse for disliking her ideas and contributed to her being marginalised further. It was never my intention to search for a masterpiece as defined by the male critics of the past, which is why I was able to consider the work of Constanduros and Matheson on its own merits, without the assumptions associated with domestic subject matter. I hope that I have gone some way to reinstating them into radio history and might perhaps inspire further investigation by future researchers into the work done by other women in radio who may have been similarly forgotten.

It has never been my intention to write a ‘masterpiece’ either and it will be obvious on listening to and reading the plays I have included as part of this thesis that they are of a domestic nature. Even worse, like much of Constanduros’s work, they are domestic comedies. Throughout this thesis I have demonstrated that writing comedy is as rigorous a process as writing material with a serious tone. Early radio theorists did not differentiate between techniques for writing drama and techniques for writing comedy; both Jeffrey and Gielgud acknowledged comedy’s importance, but they did not offer much analysis of how humour actually worked. Gielgud believed that comedy was instinctive and couldn’t be taught. Matheson did not recognise the importance of comedy at all, which was one of the only ways in which she agreed with Reith. Young attempted some analysis of comedy, but remained mystified by the process; he admitted that Constanduros was very funny, but could not really understand why. The answer lies in one of Alan Ayckbourn’s comments; his ‘obvious rule number 33’ states that ‘the best comedy springs from the utterly serious.’⁴⁷ It is possible for a writer to tackle weighty issues through comedy, particularly through the use of character exploration, pathos and conflict. Constanduros experimented with all of these

⁴⁴ Gale, p.17.

⁴⁵ Gale, p. 17.

⁴⁶ Gale, p. 17.

⁴⁷ Alan Ayckbourn, *The Crafty Art of Playmaking* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 2002), p. 80.

techniques in her prototype sitcom, *The Buggins Family*.⁴⁸ Conflict is at the heart of comedy, just as it is in drama. Constanduros sets an example of how characters in a comic story should be in conflict with the outside world as well as each other. Emily Buggins is funny because she is sad, and exactly the kind of woman Matheson was trying to help through education.⁴⁹ But with the exception of Gielgud and Jeffrey, early radio theorists considered comedy to be an inferior genre. Fortunately this has changed and Gray argues convincingly that since the 1950s the genre of sitcom, which has been mainly written by men until recently, has gained in status. She is also persuasive in her discussions on how negatively women are viewed if they don't find things funny.⁵⁰ Helitzer points out that some academics still consider jokes to be secondary to other types of performance.⁵¹ So comedy is both inferior and superior at the same time, depending on which perspective one adopts. It would seem that women are damned if they do and damned if they do not have a sense of humour. There is a certain irony when considering the lack of recognition afforded to Matheson and Constanduros; the first was perhaps too humourless and the second too humorous to be taken seriously.

Robert McKee defends the writing of comedy by pointing out that 'a love of humour [is] a joy in the saving grace that restores the balance of life' and restoring the balance of life is also the aim of people who concern themselves with the study of home economics, which is once again being considered vital to well-being.⁵² Recent studies in what is now known as family and consumer science have shown that life skills in communication, relationships, nutrition and home maintenance are vital for mental and physical health. The International Federation for Home Economics aims to 'provide opportunities through practice, research and professional sharing that lead to improving the quality of everyday life for individuals, families and households worldwide'.⁵³ I make this point in order to show that domestic issues are important and should be recognised as equally valid subjects for discussion as any other issues that are important to society, like politics, human rights and war. Unfortunately the women's movement has done little to raise the status of the domestic as a topic. The radical feminists of the 1960s and 1970s criticised home economics as a subject that restricted women to traditional female roles. Ann Oakley's seminal work, *Housewife*, is an impassioned

⁴⁸ See Chapter 4 of this thesis.

⁴⁹ See Chapter 4 of this thesis.

⁵⁰ Frances Gray, *Women and Laughter* (Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press LTD, 1994), Gray argues these points throughout.

⁵¹ Mel Helitzer with Mark Shatz, *Comedy Writing Secrets* (Cincinnati: Writer's Digest Books, 2005), p. 4.

⁵² McKee, p. 21.

⁵³ The International Federation for Home Economics < <http://www.ifhe.org.uk/> > [accessed 10 November 2013].

plea for women to look beyond the home for fulfilment, but in doing this she demeans all things domestic. Sadly Oakley's call for the abolition of the housewife role denigrates domesticity as 'requiring little aptitude of any kind.'⁵⁴ This attitude has perhaps served to lower the status of domestic issues even further. But day-to-day existence requires some effort and considering ways of living is a legitimate topic which deserves to be considered on its own merits. The Greek philosopher, Epicurus, realised this in the 4th century BC and founded schools that concerned themselves with lifestyles.⁵⁵ The plays in this thesis are considerations of how we should live and I make no apology for their domestic nature.

The rest of this thesis demonstrates the practicality of my story design method and what it actually means to put story first. My story design and play scripts reveal the similarities and differences between comedy and drama storytelling. They validate many theories of comedy discussed in Chapter 4 and illustrate how a contemporary writer can tackle serious issues through this genre, just as Constanduros did. The accompanying CDs confirm radio as a collaborative medium. The script is incomplete without the input from the producer and actors. Whilst Michelene Wandor's assertion that 'drama is not a collaborative art' is refuted through the analysis of the practitioners in this thesis, her opinion of the importance of the director in drama is accurate:

The dramatist is completely dependent on his/her director. A dramatic text will stand or fall on its first showing/production, depending on the director's achievement. Good direction and performance [...] can cover weaknesses in the writing. Bad direction [...] can destroy a brilliant text. Inadequate or uneven direction might blur or leave under-realised aspects of the written text.⁵⁶

The successful collaborative relationship I formed with Peter Leslie Wild, who directed all three plays in this thesis, has resulted in very few gaps in the transfer from the page to the ear. My confidence in Peter as a director allowed for the 'mode of imaginative thought' advocated by Wandor and ultimately I discovered my voice as a writer working in 'the intimate and imaginative conditions of the radio medium.'⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Oakley, p. 222.

⁵⁵ *EB*.

⁵⁶ Michelene Wandor, *The Art of Writing Drama* (London: Methuen Drama, 2008), p. 19.

⁵⁷ J. L. Styan, *The Elements of Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 65.

6. WRITING THE AFTERNOON DRAMA

Designing story for the radio

Paul Ashton identifies the ‘inherent contradiction in scriptwriting for radio’ in that you are ‘utterly reliant on the effect and power of words [...] but story and drama can quickly be weighed down by too many words’.¹ He does not understand how ‘the form, medium and experience of theatre might translate and transpose to audio broadcast’.² He would seem to subscribe only to the view of radio as Matheson’s ‘cinema in the mind’.³ He does however admit that ‘many (though not all) writers are able to write for both forms’, but then offers no explanation as to why this might be.⁴ The key to this conundrum is probably found in McKee’s idea that story should be the primary concern of the writer, which in turn reminds us of the points made by Mamet regarding the importance of simplicity and the writer focusing on only that which is essential to radio drama.⁵ Constanduros is an outstanding example. Writers who are able to work successfully in both media have a deep understanding of how to design a story, which means fundamentally an understanding of structure, but before moving on to this complex area I want to consider how the process of writing a story actually begins.

First I will define exactly what I mean by the term ‘story’. In short this refers to everything in the play. Every element considered in this chapter combines to make up a complete story. This is quite distinct from the plot, which is considered separately as a category in connection with action. Designing story is a huge and daunting task. The fear of this task drives many writers to begin with writing dialogue. McKee explains why even experienced scriptwriters persist in making this mistake:

Designing story tests the maturity and insight of the writer, his knowledge of society, nature and human heart. Story demands both vivid imagination and powerful analytical thought. Self-expression is never an issue, for, wittingly or unwittingly, all stories, honest and dishonest, wise and foolish, faithfully mirror their maker, exposing his humanity ... or lack of it. Compared to this terror, writing dialogue is a sweet diversion.⁶

¹ Paul Ashton, *The Calling Card Script* (London: A&C Black, 2011), p. 22.

² Ashton, p. 21.

³ See Chapter 3 of this thesis.

⁴ Ashton, p. 21.

⁵ See Chapter 3 of this thesis.

⁶ Robert McKee, *Story* (London: Methuen, 1998), p. 19.

In an ideal world one would never begin with writing dialogue, but the truth is that sometimes a writer has to. Sometimes it is the first thing that inspires everything else. There is no real way of explaining exactly where ideas come from. Steve Gooch recognizes that anything can stimulate the writing of a play:

An exciting story (from a newspaper or an old play perhaps); a simple visual image, which sparks the imagination; a recurrent feeling one has about human relations or a social issue; a philosophical theme which seems to throw light on certain aspects of human conduct – any number of things.⁷

A play might be inspired by the tiniest and seemingly most trivial of things, like a snippet of conversation engaged in while sitting in the hairdresser's chair.⁸ I am reassured that this process is acceptable by the words of Jimmy McGovern; 'You should never mistake typing for writing.'⁹ The creative process is as important as the rigorous critical process involved in writing plays, so 'First Ideas' are considered first.

First ideas

In my overall introduction to this thesis I explained how the tension between creative and critical writing is an issue when it comes to writing any kind of play. Wandor points out that the process of writing is invisible; it is 'an imaginative mode of thought until organized in and through written language'.¹⁰ The mystery involved has led to a 'traditional creative/critical hierarchy [that] still privileges the first over the second'.¹¹ This can result in a belief that writing is an ethereal journey, as advocated by Julia Cameron in *The Artist's Way*; she describes her book as 'a spiritual path, initiated and practiced through creativity'.¹² In reality a playwright has to rationalize the uneasy mixture of creative and critical thought if s/he is to be successful. Edgar explains how these two conflicting imperatives must exist side-by-side. He illustrates this with a Schiller quotation from 'a letter to a friend whose inspiration had been smothered by his intellect' and goes on to point out that 'while the good is ineffective without the right, the right will not exist without the good'.¹³ Using Schiller's

⁷ Steve Gooch, *Writing a Play* (London, A&C Black, 2001), p. 6.

⁸ The inspiration for *21 Conversations with a Hairdresser*.

⁹ Jimmy McGovern in conversation with Kate Rowland, 'BBC TV Drama Festival', 2011.

¹⁰ Michelene Wandor, *The Author is not Dead, Merely Somewhere Else* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) p. 116.

¹¹ Wandor, p. 225.

¹² Julia Cameron, *The Artist's Way* (London: Pan Books, 1995), p. xi. See also her website <juliacameronlive.com> [accessed 18 October 2013].

¹³ David Edgar, *How Plays Work* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2009), p. xv.

words, Edgar recognises the fragility of the writer's subconscious and the damage that can be inflicted on the creative process if the writer censors his apparently random thoughts too early:

It seems a bad thing and detrimental to the creative mind if Reason makes too close an examination of the ideas as they come pouring in. [...] Looked at in isolation, a thought may seem very trivial or very fantastic; but it may be made important by another thought that comes after it, and, in conjunction with other thoughts that may seem equally absurd, it may turn out to form a most effective link. Reason cannot form any opinion upon all this unless it retains the thought long enough to look at it in connection with the others. On the other hand, where there is a creative mind, Reason [...] relaxes its watch upon the gates, and the ideas rush in pell-mell, and only then does it look them through and examine them in a mass.¹⁴

There would be no text to work with if I did not allow this brief, but vital, act of undisciplined imagination to take place. Waters believes that 'reflection can interrupt creation to disastrous effect, as if one were to start pondering the mechanics of the four-stroke engine whilst in the fast lane of the M11.'¹⁵ Vorhaus agrees with this and calls the reflective mechanism the 'ferocious editor'; a voice that exists inside the writer's head that 'wants its fears to be [the writer's] fears.'¹⁶ He advocates using 'the rule of nine' as a 'weapon' against these fears.¹⁷ Out of ten ideas nine will have to be discarded, but as long as the writer sees this as necessity not failure s/he will still succeed in writing. This 1/10 ratio seems to be considered the norm. Ayckbourn gives an example of commissioning ten plays when he was Professor of Contemporary Theatre at Oxford and finding that only one made it into production.¹⁸ He confirms that a writer needs to have many ideas; 'the knack is to recognise them when they do occur, for very often, they don't come ready formed.'¹⁹ All of these findings have been verified by my own experience of writing for the BBC. For every ten ideas I submit I expect nine to be rejected. The three treatments I have included before each play represent the ideas submitted by Peter to the commissioning editor; they were designed to give an impression of what the finished piece would be like and represent considerable amounts of writing time.²⁰

¹⁴ Edgar, p. xv.

¹⁵ Steve Waters, *The Secret Life of Plays*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 2010), p. 7.

¹⁶ John Vorhaus, *The Comic Toolbox* (Los Angeles: Silman-James Press, 1994), p. 12.

¹⁷ Vorhaus, p.12.

¹⁸ Alan Ayckbourn, *The Crafty Art of Playmaking* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 2002). p. 7.

¹⁹ Ayckbourn, p. 6.

²⁰ See Treatment before each play.

Subject matter and genre

The initial ideas then create the subject matter of the play. I have many ideas; the ones that I choose to keep and work up into treatments are, quite simply, the ones that I think I can sell. While writers are probably no longer expected to imagine what R. E. Jeffrey called the ‘average mind’, whatever that may be; it is certainly prudent to consider who will be listening to a play before submitting an idea.²¹ According to the most recent figures the Afternoon Drama has a listening audience of ‘almost a million people’; 75% are over the age of 45 and almost equally men and women.²² On the whole the audience is affluent and educated.²³ The aim of the commissioning editors is to offer as wide a brief as possible to writers and producers:

The key to the slot is breadth and variety of style and subject matter. Your drama can be contemporary, period, comedy, tragedy, crime, thriller, domestic, drama doc, biographical, fantasy, horror, original writing, dramatisation, fiction, nonfiction, poetry, etc., etc.²⁴

The Afternoon Drama listener is ‘smart, sussed, knowledgeable and curious.’²⁵ This means that challenging plays full of ideas are often commissioned. The idea dictates the subject matter, which in turn dictates the genre.

While it is ‘splendid [...] not to identify the hero and the villain in the first five minutes’ and escaping from the ‘confines of genre’ is a liberating thing, audiences often like to be able to categorise a play.²⁶ Commissioning editors certainly expect to be able to do this and give the instruction to ‘be obvious not obscure in your choice of subject’ in the commissioning guidelines for producers.²⁷ So it is always important to be able to identify the genre that radio plays fit into. Before doing this I will define what I mean by genre. Some playwriting theorists, like Steve Waters, avoid defining exactly what they mean by ‘genre’, although they often use the word; others, like Tim Fountain, think that genre ‘limits the scope of [the] imagination’.²⁸ Edgar points out that ‘there are two traditional ways of looking at genre’; one is an ‘Aristotelian definition of genre in terms of the enunciation’ in that it

²¹ See Chapter 3 of this thesis.

²² Radio 4 Drama, ‘Commissioning Guidelines Spring 2013’ in <downloads.bbc.co.uk/.../site/R4_drama_guidelines_spring_2013v1.doc> [accessed 26 October 2013] There is also a significant number of people who access the Afternoon Drama online, but the precise figures are not available. It is over a million per week for all Radio 4 programs.

²³ Radio 4 Drama, ‘Commissioning Guidelines Spring 2013’.

²⁴ Radio 4 Drama, ‘Commissioning Guidelines Spring 2013’.

²⁵ Radio 4 Drama, ‘Commissioning Guidelines Spring 2013’.

²⁶ Edgar, p. 92.

²⁷ Radio 4 Drama, ‘Commissioning Guidelines Spring 2013’.

²⁸ Tim Fountain, *So You Want to Be a Playwright?* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2007), p. 23.

distinguishes between talking through characters and author's voice. The other 'sees genre as a function of the status of character'.²⁹ He points out that neither is particularly helpful for today's playwright and suggests instead that it is more useful to look at genre 'as a set of expectations of storyline, character, locale and outcome', which is what I mean when I use the word 'genre'.³⁰ McKee acknowledges that 'scholars dispute definitions and systems' but 'the audience is a genre expert'.³¹ Radio audiences are as familiar with different genres as TV, theatre and cinema audiences, so it is important not to disappoint them by failing to fulfil their expectations, but there must be some 'unexpected' happenings or they will be bored.³²

In the early days of radio there was less emphasis on genre, but Jeffrey and then Matheson still attempted to put plays into groups. Before moving on to discussions on more contemporary genre matters I will explain how my plays fit into their original categories.³³ Jeffrey simply categorised his plays by where they were set: *21 Conversations with a Hairdresser* is set mostly in one place as described in category 1 'Plays with action Set in One Scene'; *15 Ways to Leave your Lover* has many elements of category 2, 'Plays with Action Set in One Scene but Introducing Imaginative Pictures', and some of 3, 'Plays with Action which Move from Place to Place Following the Characters' Adventures', in that it is a series of locations with an event taking place in each, but it has some ways of introducing the characters' thoughts; *Jesus, The Devil and a Kid Called Death* largely falls into category 3 because we follow the characters from place to place, but again it has some of 2 in the way that I use narration. This method of classifying plays is still useful for the radio dramatist when considering setting and structure, but does not really help when it comes to expressing the type of play for an audience. Matheson is more useful here in that she describes 'plays of discussion', 'plays of great poetry' like Shakespeare's, 'action plays' and 'incident plays'.³⁴ Her listing of stage plays, with 'microphones in theatre wings' would still be a possibility for Radio 3, but it would be more likely to record the play in a studio than the actual theatre, although plays are sometimes recorded on location.³⁵ Matheson's headings are more in line with those now listed by the commissioners for the Afternoon Drama when it comes to assessing play type. So I have used one of her listings and a more contemporary genre

²⁹ Edgar, p. 65.

³⁰ Edgar, p. 65.

³¹ McKee, p. 80.

³² McKee, p. 80.

³³ See Chapter 3 of this thesis.

³⁴ See Chapter 3 of this thesis.

³⁵ 'Drama on 3' <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006tnwj>> [accessed 28 October 2013].

description in order to categorise my own work. The plays analysed here are both plays of discussion and romantic comedies, which are of course very old, but have only been expressed as a specific genre since analysis of screenwriting became popular in the 1970s.³⁶ George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* (1914) is probably the most well-known example of this particular combination, but he just classified it as a 'romance'.³⁷ I will now discuss some specifics of these categories and consider my plays within them.

So far in this work I have provided evidence to support discussion plays as an excellent genre for radio, but not everyone feels that they are worthy of production, so it is worth considering the main argument against them, which is explained most lucidly by David Mamet in *Three Uses of the Knife*. He calls this type of play the 'problem play' and describes it as asking a question, 'How do we cure [a problem in society]?'³⁸ He objects to 'the problem play' on the grounds that the writer 'suggest[s] solutions to a problem in which [s/he is] not only uninvolved but to which [s/he] feels superior' and therefore patronizes the audience.³⁹ His position in this respect seems perverse given that one of his most successful and famous stage plays is *Oleanna*, a play that asks the same question as my *21 Conversations with a Hairdresser*, which is 'What shall we do about misogyny?'⁴⁰ He and I answer this in the same way with the response, 'We become feminists and stand up to chauvinists.'⁴¹ His play goes on to pose a further question, because it is presented as drama, not comedy, which is, 'What do we do when feminists become too powerful and use that power to get revenge on men?' His reply is 'We become misogynists and crush feminists.' which prevents it from having a happy ending.⁴² If I were to write a second act to *21 Conversations with a Hairdresser* I could examine the same question, which might mean Laura accepting David's offer of a trip to Bali and my charting the disintegration of their relationship due to Laura's inability to accept his masculine responses to things and David's

³⁶ Syd Field, *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting* (New York: Delta Books, 2005), p. 1.

³⁷ George Bernard Shaw, *Pygmalion: A Romance in Five Acts* (London: Penguin Books, 2003). The original is more discussion than romantic comedy, but the musical adaptation, *My Fair Lady* by Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe (1956), puts more emphasis on romantic comedy than discussion.

³⁸ David Mamet, *Three Uses of the Knife: On the Nature and Purpose of Drama* (London: Methuen, 2007), pp 13-19.

³⁹ Mamet, *Three Uses of the Knife*, p. 15.

⁴⁰ Steve Waters argues convincingly that this play is about the 'stultifying codes of political correctness' within the academy. I do not disagree with him; *Oleanna* certainly uses misunderstandings of language to drive the plot. See *The Secret Life of Plays*, p. 25.

⁴¹ This is also the central question in *Pygmalion*.

⁴² David Mamet, *Oleanna* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003).

inability to accept her feminine responses to things.⁴³ This could be drama, melodrama or comedy depending on how I chose to tackle it.⁴⁴ If drama, the characters would argue in a very serious way that was real and believable and it would probably end with them splitting up, but it would remain within the bounds of probability. If I wrote it as melodrama the arguments might be more violent, and they would escalate more quickly. The play might end with one of them killing the other. It would be more exaggerated (like soap opera) and less grounded in reality. To maintain the piece as comedy, which would be the sensible thing to do, so that the first half matched the second, I would apply the same tool of exaggeration.⁴⁵ But the difference would be that I would have to make the outcome happy and ensure that neither character was really hurt.⁴⁶

The plays in this thesis could all be described as ‘problem plays’ in that they all ask questions. The question in *21 Conversations with a Hairdresser* is partially described above, but actually it is more complicated than that because Laura finds that some of the issues associated with being a woman, like hair styles, can only be solved by accepting who she really is. This type of subject matter is potentially problematic because ‘it depends on a type of narrative, which corresponds to existing ways of defining women through their sexual personhood’, but *21 Conversations with a Hairdresser* attempts to ‘explore the question of how female identity has been constructed’ in a lighthearted manner, so hopefully manages to avoid the usual cliché.⁴⁷

15 Ways to Leave Your Lover asks the same question explored by Constanduros and Agg in *The Man from the Sea*, ‘How do we cure the problems associated with marriage?’ To which my answer is slightly different to theirs. The answer in *15 Ways to Leave Your Lover* is ‘By listening to what our partner says and trying to speak the same language.’, whereas *The Man from the Sea* responds with, ‘By listening to what our husband says and accepting he is right’.⁴⁸ This merely reflects the difference in the thinking of the period; the basic idea is the same. Because *15 Ways to Leave Your Lover* is comedy not melodrama there is no

⁴³ For a detailed explanation of these two perspectives see, John Gray, *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* (London: Thorsons, 1992). For a more academic view see also Laurie A. Rudman and Peter Glick, *The Social Psychology of Gender: How Power and Intimacy Shape Gender Relations* (New York & London: Guilford, 2008).

⁴⁴ Melodrama is sometimes defined as a genre and sometimes used in a disparaging way to describe a kind of ‘overexpression’; I have used it here to mean a type of ‘high drama’ (McKee, p. 370.).

⁴⁵ Mamet, *Three Uses of the Knife*, p. 4.

⁴⁶ McKee, pp. 87-88.

⁴⁷ Rosalind Coward, *Female Desires: How they are Sought, Bought and Packaged* (New York: Grove Press Inc, 1985), p. 186.

⁴⁸ See Chapter 4 of this thesis.

overwrought off-microphone story of a hideous death at sea. Samantha and Rob are both going to be fine, but of course they will only stay together if he learns to speak her language too, which by the end of the play he has failed to do. He thinks it will be enough to make the relationship work if she speaks his language, so that he does not have to make the effort. Samantha realizes that he cannot change and says she is leaving, so the ending is slightly downbeat, but also happy because we know that Sam will now possibly find happiness because she has stopped searching for it in the wrong places. I could write a second act, which would turn this into a more traditional romantic comedy, in which the man and woman stay together, by examining the way in which Rob learns to speak Samantha's language. Again this would be too big for a 45 minute play and much better suited to a feature film or 90 minute play for stage or radio. There are rarely any 90 minute slots available on Radio 4, so my decision to examine only half of the story is purely economic.⁴⁹

The central question in *Jesus, The Devil and a Kid Called Death* is, 'How do we cure the problem of disaffected youth?', and the play answers with the rather over-simplistic solution of 'By giving young people self-belief.' The issue is, of course, far more complex than this, and the play could be accused of taking a naïve and idealistic view. My reason for this is again one of genre. Of the three plays *Jesus, The Devil and a Kid Called Death* is the most traditional romantic comedy and required a happy ending.⁵⁰

My intention with all three plays is not to assert superiority over the listener; I merely wish to pose a question and invite him or her to agree or disagree with the answer supplied by the play. In this respect I have followed on from Shaw and Brecht.⁵¹ The plays are all romantic comedies, a genre defined by McKee as 'satirizing the institution of courtship'.⁵² He maintains that this can then be segregated further by 'the degree of ridicule' that being 'gentle, caustic [or] lethal'.⁵³ Like Constanduros I write fairly 'gentle' comedy in that I poke fun at, rather than deriding or ridiculing, my characters.⁵⁴ The style of comedy is demonstrated by the treatments that precede each of my plays. These treatments have a comic tone, but are unlikely to create laughter in themselves. This is what really sets them apart from true comedy according to McKee. In pure comedy the story itself should be funny not

⁴⁹ Radio 4 Drama, 'Commissioning Guidelines Spring 2013'.

⁵⁰ The reason for this is examined in 'Plot and action'; the action of *JTD&KCD* is different to the other two plays.

⁵¹ See 'Theories from the theatre' in Prelude to Part 1.

⁵² McKee, p. 360.

⁵³ McKee, p. 82.

⁵⁴ See Chapter 4 of this thesis.

just the things the writer puts into it to make it funny, like dialogue and jokes. These merely lighten the telling. The romantic comedy is a hybrid.⁵⁵

It is the combination of the two genres, the play of discussion and the romantic comedy, that makes the plays stand out as unusual. This probably explains why they were commissioned originally, because ‘distinctiveness is the key’ and ‘a single drama needs to be singular’ and ‘grab the audience’ for the commissioners of the Afternoon Drama to want it.⁵⁶ This juxtaposition of two types of storytelling dictated the structure of the plays in this thesis, which is what I am going to examine next.

Structure

I will start by establishing a definition of ‘structure’. McKee defines structure as ‘a selection of events [...] composed into a strategic sequence to arouse specific emotions and to express a specific view of life.’⁵⁷ Waters, declines to define exactly what he means by structure, but acknowledges that it is about ordering events in time.⁵⁸ Edgar explains that ‘the plot is expressed through a structure in which the narrative is organized into segments of space and time.’⁵⁹ Alan Ayckbourn, who has written extensively for all story media, talks about ‘construction’ instead of structure, and says that ‘a dramatist needs to make certain key decisions [about] how, when, where and with whom you are going to choose to tell your story [which means] narrative, time, location [and] characters’.⁶⁰ So, with all of these thoughts in mind, I use this term to explain the way in which the story is told, which means considering the narrative, time frame, style and form of the piece, along with the number of characters. Some of these words can have several meanings, so I will define the potentially ambiguous ones before continuing:

- Narrative – the connected events that make up the telling
- Time frame – the length of time from the beginning to the end of the play from the perspective of the characters.
- Style – the method of expression
- Form – the arrangement of the various elements

⁵⁵ McKee, p. 362.

⁵⁶ Radio 4 Drama, ‘Commissioning Guidelines Spring 2013’.

⁵⁷ McKee, p. 33.

⁵⁸ Waters, pp. 29-36.

⁵⁹ Edgar, p. 99.

⁶⁰ Alan Ayckbourn, *The Crafty Art of Playmaking* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 2002), p. 12.

Edgar explains that plays, which are on the surface as different as can be, can share an underlying architecture, which is invisible, like a skeleton.⁶¹ What lies underneath has much in common with other work. At the time Matheson and Constanduros were working in early radio ‘sound drama offered sound but no pictures, silent cinema pictures but no sound’ and the two media seemed very different from each other.⁶² But now we know that all stories need structure, no matter which medium they are written for, so theatre plays, feature films, TV dramas and radio plays all have things in common. Even the most abstract and experimental work has to be held together by something. The absurdist writers may have created work that was ‘devoid of plot or narrative content’, but they still used a degree of structure.⁶³ These plays had a time-frame, style and form. Even the Absurdist writers were still using rules. Audiences, who have seen and heard many stories, instinctively know the rules. The playwright ‘won’t be thanked for sticking so closely to the rules that the play will be predictable from start to finish. But nor will audiences readily accept their expectations being willfully ignored’.⁶⁴

I will begin this consideration of structure in my plays with the simplest decision to understand, that being the number of characters. Jeffrey believed that too many characters were a cause of confusion in plays, and this is still a concern.⁶⁵ Constanduros avoided this confusion by making the voices of her characters quite distinct from each other in performance.⁶⁶ But Constanduros performed her own characters and was not relying on casting choices made by the producer.⁶⁷ It is still sensible to avoid having too many characters because actors can sound remarkably alike on radio; the term for this is ‘clustering’.⁶⁸ It is inadvisable to try to differentiate them by giving the characters different accents because it is very obvious when a writer has done this deliberately.⁶⁹ It was Matheson who first noted that ‘faults in casting’ are exacerbated by radio’s intimacy.⁷⁰ The other reason for limiting character numbers is purely economic; ‘In modern theatre there is a direct inverse

⁶¹ David Edgar, *How Plays Work* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2009), p. 5.

⁶² Tim Crook, *Radio Drama – Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 10.

⁶³ Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (London: Methuen, 1991), p. 327.

⁶⁴ Edgar, p. 7.

⁶⁵ See Chapter 3 of this thesis.

⁶⁶ See Chapter 4 of this thesis.

⁶⁷ Crook, pp. 238-39.

⁶⁸ Crook, p. 239. It is called ‘clustering’ when voices sound alike on radio.

⁶⁹ Peter Leslie Wilde advised against this in order to avoid plays becoming a series of ‘silly voices.’

⁷⁰ Matheson, p. 111. See also Chapter 3 of this thesis, ‘The origins of radio voice technique’.

relationship between the size of the cast and the likelihood and frequency of production.⁷¹ Likewise radio commissioners are always looking for plays with small casts and simple production values that can be made very cheaply.⁷² Once a decision has been made concerning character numbers things become more complicated, so I will begin with what the plays have in common.

Style dictated by type All the plays are argument plays, as advocated by Matheson, which have their roots in theatre, as discussed in my ‘Prelude to Part 1’ and ‘Subject matter and genre’ above. This would seem to show Ashton’s theory of radio and theatre being completely dissimilar as rather short-sighted. Matheson believed in both the power of ideas and the power of the cinema-in-the-mind technique. They were not necessarily mutually exclusive. All three plays share a narrative based on the fight for power that exists between men and women. Edgar calls this the ‘axis’.⁷³ *21 Conversations with a Hairdresser*, *15 Ways to Leave Your Lover* and *Jesus, The Devil and a Kid Called Death* (hereafter known as *21C*, *15 Ways* and *JTD&KCD*) all use the conflict between the values of men and the values of women to tell the story. The first two are obviously argument plays because the characters clearly dispute their differing positions in every scene. *JTD&KCD* does this too, but it also goes beyond the battle-of-the-sexes narrative in that it argues the case for the redemptive power of drama.

The axis of *21C* is best illustrated by the department store gag, which is at its heart.

DAVID I’ve got a joke for you: a woman hears that there’s a new husband shop in town; she wants a husband, so she goes along to buy one. The shop has six floors. She is told that she can keep going up the floors, but can’t return to a previous floor once she’s rejected the men on it. The first floor has a sign which says “All these men have jobs”. She thinks that sounds very good, but maybe the next floor will have even better men. The second floor has a sign saying “All these men have hundred-thousand-pound-a-year jobs and are skilled in bed”. Even better, but she still goes up a floor. The next floor has a sign reading “All these men have hundred-thousand-pound-a-year jobs, are skilled in bed and love DIY”. The woman is tempted, but thinks there might be even better men on offer higher up, so she continues to the fourth floor, where there’s a sign saying “All these men are millionaires, are world-class in bed, love DIY and adore children”. At this point the woman almost stops to buy a man, but decides the next floor might be even better, so up she goes. On the fifth floor there’s a sign saying “All these men are multi-millionaires, are world-class in bed, love DIY, adore children and have a strong romantic streak”. The woman is really excited now, but thinks that if the men on this floor are so fantastic they must be astonishing on the top floor. When she gets to

⁷¹ Ayckbourn, p. 13.

⁷² There is nothing written regarding this in any commissioning documents. It was told to me very early in my career by my producer, Peter Leslie Wild and he has been proven right on the whole. But I accept that the reason for my success in getting commissions for small cast plays could be that I have to be more inventive when using fewer characters to tell the story and therefore write more interesting treatments.

⁷³ Edgar, pp. 26-27, 28, 35.

the sixth floor she finds a sign saying “There are no men on this floor; it only exists to prove that women are never satisfied”

There is an ominous silence

LAURA (*Very cool*) You didn’t finish it.

DAVID Go on laugh – it’s funny

LAURA (*Really getting her own back*) You missed the bit about the wife shop. On the first floor there are women who love sex. On the next floor there are women who love sex and can cook. There are many more floors with many many women offering a plethora of different skills and attributes; but sadly no man has ever got beyond the second floor.⁷⁴

This also serves to demonstrate Vorhaus’s point about comedy being ‘truth and pain’.⁷⁵ The department store gag sums up the meaning of the play by taking ‘equal shots at both men and women’.⁷⁶ Underneath it all there is a shared experience: ‘We are all human, we all have gender, and we’re all in this ridiculous soup together. That’s pain, that’s truth, and that’s what makes a [play] jump.’⁷⁷ This in turn supports Mamet’s theory that the ‘model of the perfect play’ is the ‘dirty joke’; *21C* is the simplest of plays encapsulated in a slightly risqué tale.⁷⁸

The axis of *JTD&KCD* is expressed in a speech towards the end of the piece:

MRS W [LOUDLY ADDRESSING THE HARROWING CAST] Okay everyone, we’re nearly there. Remember that this is your show and you’re a part of something important. This historic cathedral is going to be home for the next few days. I’m so proud of you for achieving what you have with this play. It’s been all about community. Our Harrowing of Hell is just a small cog in the huge machine that is the Mysteries Cycle. This week you will be mixing with people of all age from all walks of life. This is about a community expressing itself. You will see people walking around the town in costume and talking to complete strangers. Old age pensioners will perform in plays with primary school children. Bankers will work with the unemployed. Prisoners and ladies from the Women’s Institute will all play their part. No one is excluded from this great event. (OVERWHELMED) Good luck everyone!⁷⁹

This also shows the flaws in the argument of theorists like Ashton who believe radio has nothing in common with theatre.⁸⁰ Radio plays are as reliant on their axis as stage plays.

Narrative drive dictated by currency, the super-objective and the comic premise All 3 plays share the same ‘currency’, which is ‘what the plays deal in’.⁸¹ They share the currency of identity, which again has its roots in early twentieth century theatre, particularly in the work

⁷⁴ See Chapter 7 of this thesis – Conversation 10.

⁷⁵ See Chapter 4 of this thesis.

⁷⁶ John Vorhaus, *The Comic Toolbox* (Los Angeles: Silman-James Press, 1994), p. 3.

⁷⁷ Vorhaus, p. 3.

⁷⁸ David Mamet, ‘Radio Drama’, in *Writing in Restaurants* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), p. 14. See Chapter 4 this thesis.

⁷⁹ See Chapter 9 this thesis – extra Scene 51.

⁸⁰ Ashton contradicts himself when he talks about the use of head voice or ‘close’ voice in radio, describing it as being ‘rather like a theatrical soliloquy’, p. 25.

⁸¹ Edgar, p. 27.

of Pirandello.⁸² The characters in my plays are always searching for who they really are and their constant search drives each of the plots, providing the means by which the story is conveyed. This is sometimes known as the McGuffin, which often takes the form of an actual object.⁸³ I use the characters' super-objectives to propel the plays instead of or as well as a thing.⁸⁴ In *21C* it is Laura's search for herself through changing her hair style, which creates the setting of the piece (her hair is the physical McGuffin). David too is wrestling with his own persona versus the one he has to adopt for his clients. In *15 Ways* the characters project their wishes on to each other and express their desires through communicating with their mentors, which provides the internal monologues that expose the subtext of the piece. In *JTD&KCD* the search for identity is in the play within the play and Daniel's creation of an alter-ego in his Death character. Chrissy and Nick take the roles of characters who they secretly wish they could be like, and in taking on these characteristics they become happier in allowing themselves to be who they really are. Chrissy adopts some of The Devil's badness and Nick some of Jesus's goodness, which again propels the plot.

There are also similarities in the way that I have used this search for identity with the way Constanduros uses Emily's desire for improvement to drive the narrative in *The Buggins Family*. The comic premise for all 3 of my plays is the gap between who the characters really are and who they wish to be. While the plays are not sitcom they are comic and like much of Constanduros's work they take the exploration of character as their central point, with the plot arising from this.⁸⁵ The comic premise is given an extra layer in *15 Ways* because like Emily's desire to improve her family as well as herself, Sam always wants Rob to be something he is not. Rob in turn wishes he could be a cricketer, which is the thing Sam least wants him to be. His lack of courage in pursuing his dream keeps him in the relationship with Sam, even though she is never satisfied with it. If he were to break free and pursue this dream he would also be able to break free of Samantha. Rob's refusal to change forms as much a part of the plot as does Sam's desire to change them both, and this is summed up in the final scene in which the comic premise is actually expressed by the characters:

⁸² See Luigi Pirandello, *Six Characters in Search of an Author and Other Plays*, Trans. Mark Musa (London: Penguin, 1995), particularly *Henry IV* (1922) and *So It Is (If You Think So)* (1917).

⁸³ The term McGuffin is usually credited to Alfred Hitchcock, although some theorists think it stems from earlier than that. It is the thing desired by the protagonist(s), which they pursue, thus triggering the plot, *OED*.

⁸⁴ The term super-objective was coined by Stanislavsky and is defined as, 'the goal towards which each character journeys throughout the play'. Bella Merlin, *Konstantin Stanislavsky* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 162.

⁸⁵ See Chapter 4 of this thesis on structure and devices in *The Buggins Family*, particularly concerning Vorhaus's comic premise and Davis's definition of sitcom.

SAM Women are brought up to be Cinderella. We're taught to believe that we deserve to be looked after. If we are perfect enough we will have all life's riches bestowed upon us. My life was one continual quest for perfection. I wanted to have it all.

ROB Along with Prince Charming!

SAM I certainly never found him. I finally realised that no matter how much nut roast I ate I was still going to die in the end.

ROB What do you think it was that changed you?

SAM It wasn't one thing, it was all of it.

ROB You certainly tried enough things.

SAM I think women start at the beginning and keep trying different things in the hope of finding who they are, while men decide who they are early on and then try to become that person.

ROB [UTTERLY MISERABLE] I wanted to make out it was you that stopped me from doing things, but all the time it was me. All these years I used you as an excuse for my lack of ambition. If I did what you told me I never had to admit that I just wasn't good enough to play professionally.⁸⁶

The currency of the plays dictates the desires of the characters and these desires shape the framework of the plays as shown in the examples above.

Form dictated by subtext In stage plays the wants of the characters are usually contained within the subtext of the piece. Subtext 'refers to the motivations which underlie the surface of the spoken text [...]; a character's subtext can be expressed through specific intonation, looks, gestures, pauses, or stillness'.⁸⁷ It is difficult to use subtext on the radio because out of these five methods of expression only two are available to the radio actor, those being intonation and pauses. However radio's intimacy makes it ideal for other means of conveying the character's thoughts. Stanislavsky reminds us that 'a person says only ten percent of what lies in his head, ninety percent remains unspoken'.⁸⁸ Unlike in a novel, in drama you cannot easily show what a character is thinking, but radio allows for this more easily in the form of different types of narration. Edgar believes that 'the whole point of the theatre is to make the invisible visible by finding ingenious ways to expose it'.⁸⁹ This can also be applied to radio. The techniques employed in expressing the inner thoughts of the characters create the framing devices used as the shape taken by the plays; therefore currency has dictated form. *21C* differs from my other two plays in that the environment in which I have placed the characters is confessional, so their inner thoughts about their lives outside are expressed directly to one another. They tell each other things they cannot tell anyone else, which would be subtext in the other two plays, as in this example:

⁸⁶ See Chapter 8 of this thesis – Scene 15c.

⁸⁷ Merlin, p. 161.

⁸⁸ Vasili Toporkov, *Stanislavski in Rehearsal* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 181.

⁸⁹ Edgar, p. 154.

LAURA Anyway I gave that up when I got married and since then I haven't really done anything except look after Jamie and try to cope with Graham, but since Jamie's been at school I've started reading books again; I always loved books when I was at school.

DAVID I didn't. Give me gossip over literature every time. Sometimes I'd wish I paid more attention though; I might be more confident about starting my own salon. It's just a dream at the moment.⁹⁰

21C has no need of the devices employed by *15 Ways* and *JTD&KCD* because what would be subtext in most plays actually creates the framing device of this one; the conversations between the hairdresser and his client. The subtext of this play is the attraction between the two characters, which is played by the actors through intonation and silence.⁹¹

The other two plays employ methods similar to each other in order to convey what is inside the heads of the characters, these being the devices of narration and 'interior monologue'.⁹² *JTD&KCD* uses traditional narration in Daniel's voiceovers, along with Chrissy's prayers to God, which always take place in a toilet, thus 'sharing [...] a convention with the audience' and creating a sense of place in addition to conveying subtext and exposition; the audible prayers act as code for the toilet, allowing the audience to visualise the space.⁹³

DANIEL I suppose Chrissy had her own problems. But even so, talking to God in the toilet was a weird thing to do. And it wasn't just the toilet at home; she'd talk to him in any old loo she could find, even at school.

SCHOOL TOILET

FX A GROUP OF GIRLS GIGGLING AND CHATting AS THEY LEAVE.

CHRISSY [WHISPERING, SO'S NOT TO BE OVERHEARD] Hello God! I think Daniel's told Mrs Woodhouse about Mom and Dad. I said it wasn't true, but I don't think she believed me. I thought if no one knew about it then it might not happen. That's not a lie is it? I mean they might stay together. I don't know what to do. And Mrs Woodhouse says I've got to be better in the play, but I know you can't help with that because of the part I'm playing, and I don't want anyone to know but I think Nick is a really great actor...⁹⁴

In *15 Ways* I have used one-sided letters and conversations with mentors to express the subtext. Sam writes to a series of agony aunts and people she finds inspiring in her attempts to improve herself and her relationship, which have the added function of giving away the time in which each scene is set:

⁹⁰ See Chapter 7 this thesis – Conversation 5.

⁹¹ *21 Conversation with a Hairdresser* on CD.

⁹² Vincent McNerney, *Writing for Radio* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2001), p. 113. There is some debate concerning whether narration has a place in drama because it is prose not dialogue, but opponents of this view refer to the Greek chorus. For more evidence to support the use of narration I refer to Edgar's point that ingenuity in 'making the invisible visible' is the whole point of theatre.

⁹³ Edgar, p. 154.

⁹⁴ See Chapter 9 of this thesis – Scene 14.

1973. VOICE OVER: SAM READS A LETTER SHE IS WRITING

SAM Dear Cathy and Claire, I've been asked to go to the school disco with a boy I've liked for ages, but I've never kissed a boy before and don't know what to do when we get to the slow dances at the end...⁹⁵

Rob speaks to the unlikely confidant, Henry Blofeld, whenever he wants to talk about a problem that he cannot share with Sam:

ROB[ALMOST LIKE HE'S PRAYING] Hello Henry, it's Rob here. I've been bowled a wobbler and I'm walking back to the pavilion with everyone booing. I'm out for a duck and I've let the whole team down. I can't go back... I just can't. Oh, by-the-way, I've just got married and I think I've made a terrible mistake, I'm not actually talking about cricket you understand. I really love Sam, but I don't know how I ended up married. Forever is longer than a Boycott innings. [PAUSE] I suppose I'd better go back; I've been gone half an hour. At least we've got plenty of cake at the reception.⁹⁶

This technique is particularly effective on radio and there are two complex scenes in *15 Ways* that demonstrate how the dialogue between two characters saying one thing to each other can be counterpointed by revealing their true thoughts, saying quite another, to someone in their heads. The first scene uses just one head voice, so that the listener can become accustomed to the convention before having to concentrate on two head voices. In effect there is an extra character in the scene; the real Sam:

Scene 6: Sam 39, Rob 40

ANNOUNCEMENT NUMBER SIX: 'OBSTRUCTING THE FIELD'

SEVEN YEARS LATER. VOICE OVER: SAM IS READING A LETTER SHE IS WRITING

SAM Dear Claire Rayner, my husband doesn't seem to care about me. I really love him, but the only thing he loves is cricket...

Scene 6a:

SUMMER 1998: A RESTAURANT.

IT'S SAM'S AND ROB'S 16TH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY. WE CAN HEAR THE LOW MURMURINGS OF OTHER DINERS, THE CLINK OF GLASSES AND CUTLERY, AND SOME DISCRETE CLASSICAL MUSIC. IT'S A VERY POSH RESTAURANT. SAM AND ROB CLINK GLASSES.

TOGETHER Happy anniversary.

ROB I can't believe it's been sixteen years. Where did that time go?

THEY SIT IN SILENCE FOR A LONG TIME. EVENTUALLY SAM BREAKS THE SILENCE

SAM This is very nice. [TO CLAIRE IN HER HEAD] *You see Claire he never helps me with the children or the housework.*

ROB Yes.

SAM How was the beef?

ROB Delicious.

SAM Good. [PAUSE] The lentil bake was nice too. [TO CLAIRE IN HER HEAD] *I have to do all the cooking as well as looking after elderly relatives.*

ROB Oh good. [PAUSE] How was your day?

SAM Fine... well busy actually. You?

ROB I had quite a good day for a change; Ms Laine was off sick.

SAM Aren't you getting on with her any better?

⁹⁵ See Chapter 8 of this work – Scene 1a.

⁹⁶ See Chapter 8 of this work – Scene 2.

ROB She's the Head from Hell, always bossing... (me around)

SAM [INTERRUPTING] You just don't like being told what to do by a woman.

ROB [CHANGING THE SUBJECT] Dave Hill has got a trial for Warwickshire.

SAM That must bring back memories.

ROB I think he's got the potential to play for England. I knew it as soon as I saw him bat against King Edward's in year 9.

SAM There is some reward for being a teacher then?

ROB I just wish Lewis was more interested, but all he cares about is football.

SAM That's probably because you've bored him with cricket ever since he was born, you should try listening to what he's got to say about football. That's your problem, you never listen. [TO CLAIRE IN HER HEAD] *I've tried getting involved with things like amateur dramatics to take my mind off it, but it just means I have even less time to get everything done.*

ROB [INDIGNANT] I do!

SAM [EARNESTLY, TAKING HER OPPORTUNITY] It's because you're a man. I've been reading this fantastic new book called 'Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus' and it explains that men and women are incompatible because men can't listen to women and they don't speak the same language. You're probably worse because you're a teacher. You're used to talking not listening. You should read the book, I'm sure it would improve our relationship.

THERE IS A LONG SILENCE.

ROB There's nothing wrong with our relationship.

SAM Of course there is. [TO CLAIRE IN HER HEAD] *Please help me I'm at my wits end.*

ROB What exactly?

SAM Well you're a man and I'm a woman for a start. We're incompatible.

ROB [JOKING AND TRYING TO DEFUSE HER] I wish you'd realised that before we got married.

SAM [DEADLY SERIOUS] The thing is, we don't actually talk to each other.

ROB I'm talking to you now.

SAM [TO CLAIRE IN HER HEAD] *Do you see what I mean Claire?* [TO HIM] You're saying words Rob; that's not the same as talking.

ROB [BECOMING ANNOYED] Well how else are we supposed to communicate?

SAM The problem is that you don't speak my language.

ROB Why do I have to speak your language? Why can't you learn to speak mine?

SAM [SUPERIOR] That's just typical of a man.

ROB [GETTING VERY HEATED] Did you know there was anything wrong with our relationship before you read that bloody book?

SAM If you read the book you'd understand.

ROB Is 'Men Are from Mars' your latest pet project?

SAM [FURIOUS] I knew you'd resort to that! Men have important missions while women have 'pet projects'! [TO CLAIRE IN HER HEAD] *So Claire, do you think it's time I got a job and tried to be more independent?*

FADE OUT OF RESTAURANT⁹⁷

This method allows for speedy exposition, thus saving 'vital development time' by dispensing with the tedium of having to have a whole scene in which the characters discuss the fact that Sam is feeling too dependent on Rob and dissatisfied with her caring duties and his treatment of her, so she is thinking of getting a job.⁹⁸ The head voice also allows the writer to express difficult subtext, like that of a sex scene, as in the way I have used it in the following extract, which is like having two extra characters:

⁹⁷ See Chapter 8 of this work – Scene 6 – 6a.

⁹⁸ McInerney, p. 113.

Scene 9: Sam 42, Rob 43THE MUSIC FADES.ANNOUNCEMENT NUMBER NINE: 'CAUGHT IN THE COVERS'AUTUMN 2001: A HOTEL ROOM A FEW MONTHS LATER. VOICEOVER: ROB IS TALKING TO HENRY WHILE PUTTING ON HIS PYJAMAS. SAM IS RUNNING THE TAPS IN THE ADJACENT BATHROOM, WHICH CAN BE HEARD IN THE BACKGROUND.

ROB Henry, she's in there having a bath. She's getting all ready. Any minute now she'll be here, expecting me to well... you know... get the ball in all the right areas, so to speak. But I don't feel ready. You see I'm so out of match practice, as it were... and... well... what if she doesn't like my pyjamas?

Scene 9aSAM AND ROB ARE IN BED HAVING SEX. SAM IS VERY CONFIDENT, BUT ROB IS NERVOUS. THERE IS RUSTLING OF SHEETS THROUGHOUT.

SAM [SEXILY WHISPERED] Are you glad you changed your mind?

ROB [MORE MATTER OF FACT] Of course.

SAM We are better together aren't we?

ROB My solicitor thought I was mad.

SAM So did mine, but I just explained to her that we were very young when we got married and that we were childhood sweethearts before that and that we'd just lost sight of what we had.

SAM GIGGLES AND THERE IS MUCH RUSTLING OF SHEETSROB [ALARMED] What are you doing? [TO HENRY IN HIS HEAD] *Henry I think I've got a problem.*

SAM Don't you like it?

ROB You've never done that before. [TO HENRY IN HIS HEAD] *Um... I'm bowling on a very flat pitch.*SAM There's a first time for everything [COMPOSING A LETTER TO DR RUTH IN HER HEAD] *Dear Dr Ruth, my husband and I have just got back together after a near divorce...*ROB You obviously had lots of practise while we were apart. [TO HENRY IN HIS HEAD] *You see I've lost my technique.*SAM [GIGGLING AND RUSTLING] What did you expect me to do Rob? [TO DR RUTH IN HER HEAD] *...but I think I've made a huge mistake.*ROB You were lovely and innocent when I first knew you. [TO HENRY IN HIS HEAD] *I can't seem to bowl a maiden over.*SAM I was 14 when you first knew me! [TO DR RUTH IN HER HEAD] *I'm becoming very frustrated...*ROB [BEGINNING TO REALLY PANIC] You're not the same person. [TO HENRY IN HIS HEAD] *I haven't got a full toss...*SAM Neither are you! [TO DR RUTH IN HER HEAD] *...with my husband's lack of enthusiasm in bed.*ROB [HIDING HIS ANXIETY WITH ANGER] I suppose you practise sex techniques along with business skills on that MA you're doing. [TO HENRY IN HIS HEAD] *...my zooter is non existent...*SAM You think people should only have sex in the dark while still wearing their pyjamas. [TO DR RUTH IN HER HEAD] *...I feel I'm doing well careerwise...*ROB Are you saying you don't like my pyjamas? [TO HENRY IN HIS HEAD] *...and my doosra is right up the swanny!*SAM [TO DR RUTH IN HER HEAD] *...but I want to be more fulfilled in my personal life.* [TO ROB] You know you could always try taking the blue pill.ROB [HORRIFIED] Are you saying what I think you're saying? [TO HENRY IN HIS HEAD] *Henry you've got to help me.*

SAM I think you should do something about it if you want our marriage to work this time. I've got a really good book called 'The Big O'. I think you might... (find it helpful)

ROB TURNS THE RADIO ON AND LISTENS TO HENRY BLOFELDCOMMENTATING ON THE OVAL TEST, DURING THE ASHES 2001SAM AND ROB TOGETHER [TO DR RUTH AND HENRY DESPERATELY] *I've made such a huge mistake.*FADE OUT ON HENRY COMMENTATING.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ See Chapter 8 of this work – Scenes 9 - 9a

The ultimate pay off of this technique comes in the final scene, the irony being that Sam never actually sends the letters and Rob's confidential confessions to Henry have often been overheard by Sam:

ROB So do you think you might... (come back)

SAM No. You'll have to make do with talking to Henry. Tell me, does he ever answer back?

ROB (LAUGHING) You know!

SAM Of course! At first I thought you were just talking to yourself, but then I heard you going on about chocolate cake some time in the 1980s and I realised it was Henry.

ROB Were your confidants any more help? I used to find the letters sometimes.

SAM (LAUGHS) I never sent them. I was too scared of what they might tell me to do.¹⁰⁰

This uses Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* and gives a neat twist at the end of the play, making the listener re-evaluate what they have heard.¹⁰¹ If only Rob and Sam had believed and acted on the things they read and overheard they might have had an entirely different relationship. In addition to exposing subtext this technique makes the familiar strange in keeping with Matheson's findings and Jeffrey's earliest hypothesis.¹⁰² It is still difficult to hold the listener's attention in radio and techniques like this assist with alerting the mind if introduced with care and there is more consideration of how else a writer might do this later in this chapter.

Time frame dictates meaning Finally in this section on structure I want to examine the time frames of the plays and the reasons for the choices made. In *15 Ways* and *21C* the chronological and episodic structures allow for the examination of relationships over a long period of time. I use pivotal moments from the past to bring the characters to a point in the present (transmission date) in order to invite the listener to identify with the characters and examine the questions posed by the narrative. *21C* spans seven years and *15 Ways* 35 years. These large time spans work extremely well on radio because there are no issues with what the actors look like. 'The greater the jumps in time and space the more the audience is invited to consider the alternative plotting possibilities [...] and, thus, to notice and draw meaning from the playwright's choices.'¹⁰³ This method of using time allows for huge changes in the characters' circumstances and the listener can evaluate what has happened in between considering how the characters could have altered the outcome if they had behaved

¹⁰⁰ See Chapter 8 of this work – Scene 15c.

¹⁰¹ 'For Brecht, recognising the oddness of things is the first step in freeing ourselves from the day-to-day numbing down of our perceptions which sees the status quo as natural and inevitable.', Edgar, p. 19

¹⁰² See Chapter 3 of this thesis.

¹⁰³ Edgar, p. 104.

differently. It also invites the listener to guess what the next scene might be and lets the writer subvert their expectations. For example, in scene 12 of *15 Ways*, which is set in 2004 Sam and Rob go to see a Relate counselor; at the end of the scene Rob announces that he thinks Sam is having an affair.¹⁰⁴ The expectation of the listener might be that the couple will have separated by the next scene, which is set a year later, but they are still together and Sam only confesses to the affair at the end of scene 13, thus delaying what was expected, and turning it into a surprise.¹⁰⁵

JDKCD has greater emphasis on romantic comedy than argument, and is more dependent upon plot, so the time frame is much shorter, spanning only a year. It still encourages examination of the characters' actions over time, but allows for a more typical romantic plot. The plot dictates the scenes that are included in the part of the story actually witnessed by the audience. Daniel tells the story in retrospect through narration, so the scenes with Chrissy, Nick and Mrs Woodhouse are all flashbacks. This use of disrupted time 'dramatise[s] post-traumatic stress and multiple personality syndrome' and is most commonly used in cinema.¹⁰⁶ It can also work well on the radio as long as clarity is maintained. It is used here as a method of conveying Daniel's unhappiness during those past events, which was why he created his Death character as an alternative means of experiencing his life at the time.

Plot and action

To plot means to navigate through the dangerous terrain of story and when confronted by a dozen branching possibilities to choose the correct path. Plot is the writer's choice of events and their design in time.¹⁰⁷

Edgar explains that this is based on the 'sjuzet' or 'the events as they are ordered in time and connected', taken from the Russian formalists and Prague School method of 'finding the underling patterns in narrative fiction'.¹⁰⁸ Ayckbourn explains that the plot is 'like a piece of thread' holding the play together and that the writer should 'cut in' or start as late as possible

¹⁰⁴ See Chapter 8 of this thesis.

¹⁰⁵ See Chapter 8 of this thesis.

¹⁰⁶ Edgar, p. 108.

¹⁰⁷ McKee, p. 43.

¹⁰⁸ Edgar, p. 108.

in the narrative.¹⁰⁹ These definitions are only helpful to the writer if s/he knows which events in the story are the most important to share with the audience. McKee's definition indicates what a hard thing this is. Steve Waters emphasizes the difficulty associated with plot by ignoring it throughout *The Secret Life of Plays*. Unlike Edgar, Waters sees writing for the stage as a separate discipline on the whole. However, even the early theorists recognized that plot was vital to radio. Gielgud explains that radio's listeners need clarity of plot because they cannot see what is happening:

Listeners, while having eyes are yet for this purpose blind. Development of plot, careful distinction of characters, even limitation of number of characters, and definite stamping of time and place must all be emphasized without being stressed to absurdity, or labeled to monotony.¹¹⁰

One would deduce from this that Gielgud believed radio best served by simple plots in order to maintain clarity when there are no visual clues. It would certainly be difficult to write something with a very complex plot for a 45 minute radio drama because the writer does not have long enough. The 45 minute radio drama is really a one-act play. But it still has a beginning, middle and end. Many screen and playwriting theorists concern themselves with act structures.¹¹¹ Most contemporary stage plays are written as two acts for the simple reason that theatres like to put in one interval, but this does not mean that they do not actually contain anything in the middle. The interval usually occurs half way through it. Because radio plays are condensed it works well to have a midpoint climax in order to propel the second half. This is a pivotal scene at the midpoint of the play, which is usually the point that brings about the greatest change: *2IC* - the department store gag (Conversation 9); *15 Ways* - the pudding bowl breaking when Sam announces she wants a divorce (Scene 7a); *JTD&KCD* - Nick rescues Daniel from the Friary Fighters (Scene 14) I take this simple approach when writing the Afternoon Drama because I ask the listener to consider the ideas within the play more than pondering the actual events. However, the plays need events in order to make the storytelling interesting and bring about change; the plot holds the organs that are the characters, and dialogue, which is the nervous system in place.¹¹² The plots are all detailed in the treatments that precede each of the plays, so I am not going to repeat them here, but if they seem familiar that is because they are. This is not because I have plagiarized; it is

¹⁰⁹ Ayckbourn, p. 25.

¹¹⁰ Gielgud, *How to Write Broadcast Plays*, p. 18.

¹¹¹ See particularly Waters, pp. 29-50, and McKee, pp. 217-22.

¹¹² Vincent McNerny, *Writing for Radio* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), pp. 91-92

because there are actually very few plots to choose from.¹¹³ These can be used in different ways to tell different stories with different meanings. I will not list them here because Edgar has already done this very clearly in *How Plays Work*.¹¹⁴ I will, however, attempt to explain something about their construction.

21C and *15 Ways* have the most in common with the work of Constanduros in that they are character driven plays, which is clearly stated under ‘style’ at the bottom of each treatment. In the case of both plays many of the main events of the plot take place off-microphone and are reported by the two on-microphone characters. Examples of these are Laura’s experiences with education that bring about her change from ‘nervous, down-trodden, housewife to successful university lecturer and feminist’; David’s experiences with various partners that bring about his change from ‘saucy, laddish, young romantic to cynical heartless misogynist’;¹¹⁵ Sam’s experiences with her career and children that bring about her change from ‘wide-eyed virgin with aspirations to travel the world to disillusioned career woman’ and the slow grind of life that transforms Rob ‘from a naïve cricket fan who dreams of bowling for England into a grumpy middle-aged bald bloke.’¹¹⁶ The scenes of the plays usually occur just after or before the life changing moments that propel the plots. For example in Conversation 5 of *21C* Laura gives David the news that she is changing her life and going to university.¹¹⁷ And in *15 Ways* scene 4a the audience receives the news that Sam is having a baby through the events of the scene itself, but the events of the wedding that they only partially witnessed in scenes 3 and 3a, which explain Sam’s distrust of Rob in stressful situations, are reported.¹¹⁸ Choosing to plot using only two characters on-microphone requires considerable ingenuity in order to convey the main events, but radio is an excellent medium for exposition through characters telling stories. Conversation 14 in *21C* is an example of how characters report the important off-microphone action:

CONVERSATION 14: Spring 2004: CHELSEA’S SALON (Fifteen months after CONVERSATION 13)

Laura opens a bottle of champagne and pours two glasses. The salon is packed and noisy. She’s already had a glass or two and makes no attempt to be quiet. David finds her highly amusing.

DAVID So what’s all this?

¹¹³ Christopher Booker, *The Seven Basic Plots* (New York: Continuum, 2004).

¹¹⁴ Edgar, pp. 19-26.

¹¹⁵ See Chapter 7 of this thesis.

¹¹⁶ See Chapter 8 of this thesis.

¹¹⁷ See Chapter 7 of this thesis.

¹¹⁸ See Chapter 8 of this thesis.

LAURA We're celebrating! This morning I received my Decree Absolute and Graham and I are officially divorced.

DAVID You must be a very happy woman.

They clink glasses

LAURA (*Getting louder*) I am: I'm forty-five years old and I feel twenty-five, my hair looks fantastic; thanks to you, and I'm going out with a man seventeen years younger than me.

DAVID Scandalous.

LAURA I own my house...

DAVID Don't forget the promotion.

LAURA ... and I've got a hugely successful career and I am no longer married to Graham – oh, I've already said that.

DAVID You've done so well to pick yourself up off the floor.

Laura now addresses the whole salon

LAURA (*Shouting*) Women don't need men; they're aliens.

DAVID (*Laughing*) Does that include hairdressers?¹¹⁹

Before moving on to discuss the construction of the plot in *JTD&KCD*, which is quite different to the other two plays, I want to examine another important idea borrowed from screenwriting and (sometimes) playwriting theory, that of the *inciting incident*.¹²⁰ Tim Fountain provides the best definition of this vital event as 'the moment without which the story would not exist'.¹²¹ In the interests of starting as late in the story as possible this event quite often takes place before the actual plot begins. It is what sets things in motion. In both *15 Ways* and *21C* this event takes place off-microphone before the play begins. In these plays the audience witnesses the plot from a distance.¹²² In *15 Ways*, which is a study of a long relationship and has the largest time span, the listener is invited to imagine the inciting incident; it takes place before the school disco when Sam is asked out by Rob; the listener is told about this by Sam in her letter to *Jackie* magazine agony aunts, Cathy and Claire.

1973. VOICE OVER: SAM READS A LETTER SHE IS WRITING

SAM Dear Cathy and Claire, I've been asked to go to the school disco with a boy I've liked for ages, but I've never kissed a boy before and don't know what to do when we get to the slow dances at the end...¹²³

21C has a shorter time frame, but still invites the listener to consider events over a number of years. The off-microphone inciting incident is reported in conversation 1a; it is the moment when Laura cuts off her hair in desperation, which then drives her to make the first appointment with David. Another important point that affects the construction of the plot in these plays is that in many ways they each show a different half of a whole story: *21C* is an

¹¹⁹ See Chapter 7 of this thesis.

¹²⁰ McKee, pp. 181, 189-94, 208, 311, 318, 356.

¹²¹ Fountain, p. 11

¹²² Ayckbourn, p. 22.

¹²³ See Chapter 8 of this thesis – Scene 1.

almost entirely off-microphone play in that the main event, which is Laura's awful marriage, is happening somewhere else. *15 Ways* on the other hand presents the marriage, but very often the private scenes witnessed by the listener take place while a bigger main event, like a wedding or family party is happening off-microphone.

JTD&KCD has the shortest time frame of the three and goes at a much faster pace, giving the listener a very different experience. In many ways it is the most classically constructed of the three plays because it has a more obvious main protagonist, even though he is not the one telling the story. The main plot is about Nick's inspiration to change and the listener witnesses the inciting incident, which takes place when Mrs. Woodhouse asks him to be in her play, and after some resistance he agrees.¹²⁴ The play is different to the other two plays because it also has 3 subplots (or strands), which is a technique more usually used in cinema; each of these subplots has its own protagonist:

- The bullying - Daniel
- The Mystery play process – Mrs. Woodhouse
- The parent trap – Daniel

Of the three plays *JDKCD* is by far the most cinematic in structure. All four plots reach a climax in two connected scenes, in which the Mystery play is performed, the parents are confronted and Nick gets the girl when he admits that he rescued Daniel from the Friary Fighters.¹²⁵ This is probably what R. E. Jeffrey meant by 'minor situations steadily mounting in crescendo to climax.'¹²⁶

A comparison between the treatments and the full scripts of all three plays shows that the plot is only really entirely discernible after the plays have been written because it changes over time as the piece evolves. The treatments give an outline, but this is only fully developed once the play is commissioned; the plots become clearer with each draft of the play. Some of the changes are quite subtle; there are births, deaths and illnesses in *21C* as promised but they do not happen to the protagonists themselves, only to their friends and family. Sometimes these changes are more marked; *15 Ways* does not just show the relationship breakups it also shows reconciliations because the original idea was too bleak. *JTD&KCD* required an extra character in the form of Mrs. Woodhouse because the story needs a mature voice as well as the young ones in order to be fully realized. This is examined in 'characters' below.

¹²⁴ See Chapter 9 of this work – Scene 1b.

¹²⁵ See Chapter 9 of this work.

¹²⁶ See 'Early radio theories' in Chapter 3 of this work.

The thing that remains the same from treatment to transmission is the *action*.¹²⁷ This is ‘a brief encapsulation of the narrative progression of a play, structured to convey its meaning’, which is how Aristotle meant it and both Edgar and I use it.¹²⁸ In distilling the plays down to their very essence it is possible to reveal their true meanings, which are not really dependent on protagonists, plots or genres. Edgar explains that the best way to express an action is through a project; ‘someone sets out to do something’, followed by a reversal, which usually begins with the word ‘but’.¹²⁹ Using this helpful model the action of both *21C* and *15 Ways* is the same: ‘a woman sets out to improve herself, but finds that she has to make sacrifices she did not expect, and realises that this is not necessarily the key to happiness.’ This reveals the bitter heart at the core of both plays; it is also the action of *The Bugginses*.

JTD&KCD reveals itself as a true romantic comedy when expressed through its action because there is no ‘but’. Edgar sums up all comedy at the end of his chapter on actions. He puts it as, ‘while we’ll never be as one, we can get closer to each other than we think’.¹³⁰ I have written it in a slightly different way at the end of my synopsis, but it means exactly the same thing; ‘they all find they have more in common than they ever thought’.¹³¹

Characters

The characters have already been discussed to a degree in the earlier sections of this story design. ‘Characters in plays are there [...] to perform certain tasks: to further the plot whilst also informing us – directly or indirectly, through word and deed – of their individual thoughts and emotions.’¹³² Ayckbourn believes his summing up to be oversimplified, but it indicates an important truth; characters are not just there to be themselves, they must perform a function; even in Constanduros’s most character driven work, *The Bugginses*, the characters are still functional.¹³³ My plays are all character driven, but the characters still serve the plot and act as mouthpieces for the ideas and arguments that the plot conceals. The most important thing in radio is that characters should be clear. Ashton believes that ‘the

¹²⁷ This word can also mean everything that happens on the stage, as in dramatic action; or simple physical activity, as in stage action; or as a verb it means the way an actor motivates an individual line. Edgar, p. 17.

¹²⁸ Edgar, p. 17.

¹²⁹ Edgar, p. 25.

¹³⁰ Edgar, p. 36.

¹³¹ See Chapter 9 of this thesis.

¹³² Ayckbourn, p. 36.

¹³³ See Chapter 4 of this thesis.

character's voice is truly crucial' and that the way in which this voice 'communicates [...] will set the tone, feel, pace rhythm [and] experience of the play.'¹³⁴ Thus character and mode of expression are inextricably linked. The way the character speaks is dictated by who the character is. Most of the characters in my plays change in some way unless there is a specific reason for them to stay the same, thus fulfilling Ayckbourn's 'obvious rule no. 21' in that they 'undergo a journey too. Not just the plot.'¹³⁵ I will not consider individual character traits here as these are clearly expressed in the treatments that precede the plays. What follows is a list of the on-microphone characters in the three plays with explanations of how they function.

Characters in 21C and 15 Ways These are considered together because, as already mentioned, these plays are two different aspects of the same story. All four characters are conveying the arguments, but they remain strongly differentiated within the pieces. The men are distinct opposites of the women because this not only allows for the expression of the argument it is also what makes the pieces funny. Like Constanduros, I have used Vorhaus's 'law of comic opposites' in that I have given the women a 'strong comic perspective' and then 'assign[ed] the opposite to' the men and 'lock[ed] them in'.¹³⁶ Mamet describes a good play as being like an exciting team game of closely matched opponents in which the teams alternate being in the ascendancy.¹³⁷ My characters take it in turns to have the upper-hand.

- *Laura and Sam* are desperately trying to improve their situations and both choose education as a means of doing it. This leads to both becoming radical feminists in order to escape from what they see as the oppression forced upon them by their husbands. They fit into what Elaine Hobby calls the 'repression-liberation model [which suggests] that women's true nature is fenced in and denied in patriarchal societies.'¹³⁸ Both feel that all they have to do is 'shrug off their conditioning so that they can become their real selves.'¹³⁹ Both find that it is not that easy to discover

¹³⁴ Ashton, p. 25.

¹³⁵ Ayckbourn, p. 44.

¹³⁶ Vorhaus, p. 51.

¹³⁷ Mamet, pp. 8-9.

¹³⁸ Elaine Hobby, *Virtue of Necessity* (London: Virago Press, 1988), p. 7.

¹³⁹ Hobby, p. 7.

their real selves because who [they] are is created by the world [they] live in' and that as their 'circumstances change [they] struggle to change circumstances.'¹⁴⁰

- *Rob* is Sam's husband, but he could also be the off-microphone husband, Graham, who is married to Laura. Both men lose the women they are married to because they are unable to change the way in which they perceive them.
- *David* is a foil for Laura's feminist views; he gradually espouses and expresses ideas that conflict with hers as he becomes more sexist because of the way his off-microphone girlfriends behave. His role as a professional allows Laura to express her thoughts. For most of the play they are 'locked in' the salon. The sudden shift to somewhere outside the salon allows them to step out of their roles of professional and client and acknowledge their friendship.

Characters in *JTD&KCD* This play is more plot-driven than the other two, so the characters function rather differently.

- *Nick* is the protagonist and he undergoes the greatest change.
- *Chrissy* is the antagonist; she is the main cause of the change in Nick and undergoes her own less radical change throughout the play.
- *Daniel* is the narrator; he is subjective, has strong opinions and is not entirely trustworthy.¹⁴¹ He changes too, becoming more mature.
- *Mrs Woodhouse* acts as a catalyst by instigating the inciting incident and pushing the other characters to change. She is not in the original treatment, but I added her because she expresses the argument for community theatre. The other characters are too inarticulate or lack the perspective required to express these views. Characters have to speak as themselves in order to maintain credibility.¹⁴²

Off-microphone characters Ayckbourn is an advocate of using characters that the audience never actually meet as a way of creating life beyond the play, 'however confined the action is'.¹⁴³ These are particularly useful in radio plays with small casts and allow the writer to tell a much bigger story. I make a distinction between silent characters and off-microphone

¹⁴⁰ Hobby, p. 7.

¹⁴¹ Ashton, p. 25.

¹⁴² Rib Davis, *Developing Characters for Script Writing* (London: A&C Black, 2001), p. 41.

¹⁴³ Ayckbourn, pp. 42-43.

characters. If they are off-microphone they never come into the play, but if silent, they are in scenes, but say nothing. Sometimes characters that begin as off-microphone might become silent in a later scene and vice versa, like Tom and Annie Walters in *JTD&KCD*.¹⁴⁴

In *2IC* Laura's family are all off-microphone and her descriptions of their behaviour and personalities allow the listener to understand her life. They all have their own comic perspectives, which contrast with hers: Graham is the confused and uneducated husband who is mystified by his wife's transformation; Jamie is the son who grows from a small child with his father's inclination to dismantle things into a teenager who is only interested in the latest trends and gadgets; even Jamie's friends allow the audience a better grasp of Laura's life beyond the salon, as in this example:

LAURA PJ is one of Jamie's classmates: horrible blonde brat with a basin haircut; Jamie went to his party: enormous house, swimming pool, circus performers...

DAVID I've got the picture.

LAURA His mother thinks I'm a charity case. The other day she came over to my car carrying a big bag. She leaned in and said, "I hope you don't mind, but I thought you might like these." Then she stood there simpering while I opened the bag: it was full of clothes and I didn't know where to look. I just said thank you. She gave me this patronising smile: "I was going to take them to the dress agency, but then I thought of you."

DAVID What a bitch! Well she won't be patronising you tonight. From eighties ugly duckling into a beautiful nineties swan: you look fabulous.¹⁴⁵

David has several off-microphone girlfriends; he demonstrates his real attitudes as he describes these women to Laura, which allows the listener to hear his change from romantic to misogynist. For example, Lucy is beautiful and he extols her physical perfection, while Vicky is disposed of because she refuses to do all his domestic chores. David's silent assistants fulfil a slightly different function, which I will discuss in 'running gags', along with Archangel Michael from *JTD&KCD*.

There are a number of off-microphone characters in *15 Ways* who perform similar functions to those in *2IC*: Lewis, Jenny, the guinea pig and Aunty Betty all help to create a strong impression of family life. The delinquent Lewis is an example of how the wider life of an off-microphone character can be used to further the plot with comic effect; including the Capri there are 7 off-microphone characters in this short extract:

¹⁴⁴ See Chapter 9 of this work – Daniel addresses his mother and father when he is in the play, but they do not respond.

¹⁴⁵ See Chapter 7 of this thesis – Conversation 2.

Scene 8a

A FEW WEEKS LATER: OUTSIDE THE HEADMASTER'S STUDY. THE BELL IS RINGING FOR BREAK. SAM IS SITTING WAITING AND ROB ARRIVES LATE AS USUAL.

ROB [APPROACHING, OUT OF BREATH] Thank God, I thought I'd missed it. I've just run all the way from the car park.

SAM [SARCASTICALLY] Fortunately the Head Teacher's time keeping seems to be as good as yours. I suppose the Capri conked out again.

ROB [SITTING] No! I was in the middle of the Battle of Hastings. I got here as fast as I could.

SAM This is all your fault. If we hadn't split up ... (it would all be okay)

ROB How is it my fault? You're divorcing me!

SAM Lewis has never done anything like this before.

ROB No one's ever done anything like it before. Most builders wouldn't be stupid enough to leave a bulldozer at a school with its key in.

SAM Apparently the driver had only nipped to the loo.

ROB Mr Chatterjee says they'll have to completely re-turf the wicket.

SAM I know, but he told me they might be able to rescue the outfield with the roller. [PAUSE] You and your bloody cricket! Lewis was doing it to spite you.

THEY SIT IN SILENCE FOR A MOMENT AND THEN ROB BEGINS TO LAUGH.

SAM What could you possibly find to laugh about?

ROB [HE TRIES TO STIFLE HIS LAUGHTER] Sorry, most kids get expelled for smoking round the back of the gym, but Lewis manages to rip up a whole cricket pitch.

HE CAN'T CONTROL HIMSELF AND BURSTS OUT LAUGHING AGAIN.

SAM [BEGINNING TO SEE THE FUNNY SIDE] His story is that it was an accident. [LAUGHING] He only wanted to sit on it, but he hit the key by mistake...

SHE CAN'T CONTINUE FOR LAUGHING, SO ROB FINISHES THE STORY

ROB ... and it took off with him. It was old Chatterjee's fault for making Lewis field out at third man [HARDLY ABLE TO GET THE WORDS OUT] His mate Andy was furious; he was on a hat trick. [HE TRIES TO REGAIN CONTROL AND CAN'T] Mr Chatterjee had to push the wicket keeper out of the way or he'd have been flattened. [STILL TRYING AND FAILING TO SUPPRESS HIS LAUGHTER] But the good news is that first slip is recovering in hospital... Oh Dear...¹⁴⁶

The most noticeable off-microphone characters in *JTD&KCD* who fulfill the function of providing life beyond the play are the Friary Fighters and the parents; Nick's angry father is a sinister presence and Tom and Annie Walters provide the reason for Daniel wishing to be in the *Harrowing of Hell*. In addition there is Sandra, the woman Tom is having an affair with. Her existence allows for the scene in which Chrissy transforms her acting skills, thanks to Nick's help, which also causes her to use her newfound skill of lying, in pretending to be someone else, which makes her more human:

NICK Have you thought of trying to split them up?

CHRISSY How would I do that?

NICK I dunno.

CHRISSY Fat lot of use you are!

NICK I know!

CHRISSY What?

NICK You have to ring the woman he's having it off with.

CHRISSY No way!

NICK What's your mom's name?

¹⁴⁶ See Chapter 8 of this thesis.

CHRISSY Annie.
 NICK And what about Dad's tart?
 CHRISSY Sandra.
 NICK And Dad's name is?
 CHRISSY Tom.
 NICK This is what you do: ring the bimbo, pretend to be your mom and say, [DOING A POSH WOMAN'S VOICE] 'Hello Sandra, I'm Annie, Tom's wife.' Have a try.
 CHRISSY I can't!
 NICK Yes you can – go on.
 CHRISSY [UNCONVINCING] Hello Sandra, I'm Annie...
 NICK [PATIENT] Make her older.
 CHRISSY [BETTER] Hello Sandra, I'm Annie, Tom's wife.
 NICK Good.
 CHRISSY Why is she ringing?
 NICK You've found Sandra's text on the phone and you're warning her off.
 CHRISSY [AS ANNIE] I've just found a text on Tom's phone from you. It seems like you think you're going out with him, but he's married to me. [YELLING] So stay out of his life.
 NICK Fantastic!
 CHRISSY Do you think it will work?
 NICK It's worth a try.¹⁴⁷

Language and dialogue

All early radio theorists agreed that the medium was unique because of its intimacy with the listener, but they had great difficulty understanding the implications of this in terms of performance, which led to radio plays sounding forced and unnatural. Matheson recognized the importance of achieving naturalism in broadcasting. Constanduros's flexible voice made her particularly suited to radio performance. Her work on *The Buggins Family* is a splendid example of how it is possible to use both comic business and physical humour on the radio if the writer understands the medium sufficiently and the actor is adept with vocal techniques. This emphasis on voice in radio means that facility with language is vital for a writer and Constanduros's work shows how effective comedy of language was, even in the early days of radio, and that this device is not peculiar to post 1950 broadcasts.¹⁴⁸ Expression through differing types of language, whether for comic, poetic or dramatic effect is still important in the medium that heightens the impact of the spoken word. Ashton explains that 'radio is certainly the most naked dramatic form' because the 'words either stand up and carry the whole production or buckle under their own dead weight.'¹⁴⁹ Dialogue has more significance on the radio. The writer must know the characters well enough to be able to write what they

¹⁴⁷ See Chapter 9 of this thesis – Scene 47.

¹⁴⁸ Crisell suggests comedy of language began with *The Goons*, see Chapter 4 of this thesis.

¹⁴⁹ Ashton, p. 23.

would say and the best dialogue should multi-task.¹⁵⁰ It would be possible for me to explain the inclusion of every word in the plays, but space precludes this, so I will confine myself to some specific examples.

The dialogue in all three plays is in a slightly heightened style, which is partly what makes the plays funny.¹⁵¹ There is very little redundant speech because of the condensed nature of the Afternoon Drama format. Redundant speech is defined by Edgar as ‘things we say so we can work out what to say next.’¹⁵² On the whole my characters do not hesitate, so in this respect my dialogue is less than naturalistic. When Chrissy and Nick are unable to articulate what they want to say to each other I have employed Matheson’s idea of using ‘plays of great poetry’ and used Shakespeare’s words because they sound more interesting than teenage ums and ahs:

CHRISSEY [SHOWING OFF] Wilt thou be gone? It is not yet near day;
 It was the nightingale , and not the lark,
 That pierced the fearful hollow of thine ear,
 Nightly she sings on yonder pomegranate tree.
 Believe me, love, it was the nightingale.
 NICK [SHOWING OFF] It was the lark, the herald of the morn,
 No nightingale. Look, love, what envious streaks
 Do lace the severing clouds in yonder east;
 Nights candles are burnt out, and jocund day
 Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops.
 I must be gone and live, or stay and die.
 CHRISSEY [DELIGHTED] You know it!
 NICK Yeah... But I need more direction.¹⁵³

Using language from a classic play is a good way of keeping the listener’s attention because it sounds so different to the other dialogue that surrounds it, and it can also express subtext. In *15 Ways* Millamant’s lines from Congreve’s *The Way of the World* (1700) allow Sam to show her feelings towards Rob instead of sitting in resentful silence:

SAM They’d be more encouraged if you led by example. No wonder it took years for you to let me watch you play. [SHE HANDS HIM THE BOOK]. This is the scene where Mirabell proposes. Let’s go from [AS MILLAMANT] *Mirabell, I’ll lie abed in a morning as long as I please.*
 ROB Ha! You wish!
 SAM Read the next line please.
 ROB [READING MIRABELL] *Then I’ll get up as early as I like.*
 SAM [SARCASTICALLY] He obviously plays a lot of away cricket matches! [AS MILLAMANT] *Ah! Idle creature, get up when you will – and d’ye hear, I won’t be called names after I’m married; positively I won’t be called names.*

¹⁵⁰ Ayckbourn, p. 45. Edgar, p. 156.

¹⁵¹ Rib Davis, *Writing Dialogue for Scripts* (London: Methuen, 2008), pp. 100-10.

¹⁵² Edgar, p. 155.

¹⁵³ See Chapter 9 of this thesis – extra Scene 47.

ROB [AS MIRABELL] *Names!* [AS HIMSELF] I'd call her names if she wouldn't get up in the morning.

SAM [AS MILLAMANT] *Aye, as wife, spouse, my dear, joy, jewel, love, sweetheart, and the rest of that nauseous cant, in which men and their wives are so fulsomely familiar – I shall never bear that – good Mirabell don't let us be familiar or fond, nor kiss before folks, like my Lady Fadler and Sir Francis.*

ROB The woman's bonkers!

SAM She just doesn't want to be taken for granted.

ROB Look at this list of rules she gives him before she says she'll marry him! [HE AFFECTS A POSH, SQUEAKY WOMAN'S VOICE] *Pay and receive visits from whom I please; write and receive letters without interrogatories; wear what I please; come to dinner when I please; to have my closet inviole!* [AS HIMSELF] Anyone would think she was going to prison not marrying this perfectly decent bloke Mirabell.

SAM [DEFIANTLY] She knows what she's getting into. [AS MILLAMANT] *These articles subscribed, if I continue to endure you a little longer, I may by degrees dwindle into a wife.*

ROB [IRRITATED] You needn't think that I'm looking after the kids while you run around being militant.¹⁵⁴

The use of this famous scene also gave the opportunity to use a Constanduros-style pun on 'Millamant' and 'militant', which is probably why Congreve chose the name originally.

There are no such devices in *21C* because the characters are already expressing what they think a lot of the time, but that does not mean they can always say everything that I want them to. They still have to use language that is suitable for who they are, so David uses the jargon associated with hairdressing.¹⁵⁵ Comedy of language is again an effective tool. Mamet explains that 'gossip [has a] great capacity to command our momentary attention' and dismisses the 'issue play' as gossip.¹⁵⁶ But 'momentary attention' is precisely what is required for the condensed format of the Afternoon Drama, so I have used this idea to keep the listener engaged in *21C*; almost all of it masquerades as 'casual and idle chat'.¹⁵⁷ The decision not to use any head voices in this play means that characters have to express subtext by different means. This extract demonstrates how David expresses his jealousy through double entendre and puns. Silence along with slightly suggestive words indicates what they are thinking. When David tells Laura she has been 'unfaithful' with another hairdresser it is significant because he is genuinely very attracted to her; the characters talk as if they are lovers, and the subtext is that they would like to be:

DAVID Don't you think it's time you told me the truth Laura?

LAURA What do you mean?

DAVID I can tell when a woman has been unfaithful to me.

LAURA I haven't ... It's the first time David. I feel terrible, but I hadn't heard from you...

¹⁵⁴ See Chapter 8 of this thesis – Scene 5a.

¹⁵⁵ Davis, *Writing Dialogue for Scripts*, pp. 100-10.

¹⁵⁶ Mamet, *Three Uses of the Knife*, p. 24.

¹⁵⁷ *Collins English Dictionary*.

DAVID You were the first person I contacted, as soon as we opened.
 LAURA Yes, but you were ages and I just had to get my hair cut, so I went to that salon on Market Street and had a session with a man called Matt.
 DAVID What? You hussy!
 LAURA I know, all these years it's only been you David, but I was really desperate. No matter how much I analyse and write about the Human Condition I still need to get my hair done. I hate it, but I can't live without it.
 DAVID So was Matt any good? Did he have hot tongs and a big diffuser?
 LAURA David...
 DAVID No I want to know; was he any good or not?
 LAURA If you really must know – he was quite good...
 DAVID (*Deflated*) Oh.
 LAURA But nowhere near as good as you.
 DAVID You probably say that to all the men.
 LAURA No really; he was okay, but it didn't feel right somehow. His hands felt different.
 DAVID (*Joking*) Well women do say that about me.
 LAURA I promise David I won't ever let another man touch my hair – from now on I shall practice tonsorial fidelity.
 DAVID I've no idea what that is, but I like the sound of it.
 LAURA You're just like all men – you expect to tease and tousle all the women you want while they remain absolutely faithful.
 DAVID Mm – that seems the way it should be (*hesitates*)... So ... can I take you out for dinner?
 LAURA What? No!¹⁵⁸

Laura also uses language specific to her profession as she becomes more educated; the vernacular associated with feminist academics conveys Laura's changing character to the listener;

LAURA I have! Jamie thinks I'm mad. I've tried to get him to do some housework, but he just throws a strop and tells me his dad never makes him do it. I keep telling him that our biological makeup has no connection with informing our social roles and behaviours.¹⁵⁹

And vernacular has even greater importance in *15 Ways*. The language of cricket is integral even though the play is not about cricket. In the following extract cricket becomes a metaphor for the relationship as Sam and Rob finally manage to communicate, but sadly it is too late:

SAM [TEASING A BIT] And now you're sitting in a cupboard at the end of the Corridor of Uncertainty.
 ROB Yes
 SAM And you're experiencing a batting collapse.
 ROB [SADLY] Yes, I'm a rabbit.
 SAM [UNDERSTANDINGLY] And someone's bowled you a Yorker.
 ROB [BEGINNING TO REALISE WHAT SHE'S DOING] Or a Chinaman.
 SAM [ENCOURAGING] But you could lamp it through Extra Cover.
 ROB [SEEING SOME HOPE] With a slog!
 SAM You just need to play yourself in.
 ROB And avoid being stumped
 SAM There's always hope in cricket. I mean you could forge a new partnership.

¹⁵⁸ See Chapter 7 of this thesis – Conversation 20.

¹⁵⁹ See Chapter 7 of this thesis – Conversation 11.

ROB [PERKING UP] That's right, you get a second chance.
 SAM There's another innings.
 ROB Only if it's a Test. What if it's a one-dayer?
 SAM Then you need to maximise your Power Plays.
 ROB [LAUGHING WITH DELIGHT] Ah, but what if it rains?
 SAM Then there's always the Duckworth Lewis.
 ROB You're speaking my language!
 SAM I always could, I just didn't let on.¹⁶⁰

15 Ways is the only consciously Brechtian of the 3 plays. It uses the least naturalistic language and has an ironic title;¹⁶¹ Sam and Rob never really leave each other until the end; their problem is that they cannot leave each other, like the Bugginses and the Steptoes.¹⁶² The announcements at the beginning of each scene remove all 'illusion of reality'.¹⁶³ They have a similar effect to the use of 'titles and screens' in Brecht's stage plays, in that they indicate the content of the scene to come and encourage the listener to reconsider exactly what s/he is hearing.¹⁶⁴ As Brecht explains, 'Footnotes, and the habit of turning back in order to check a point need to be introduced into play-writing too.'¹⁶⁵ These short statements are based on ways of getting out in cricket and therefore give the play 'the possibility of making contact with other institutions' in an unexpected way.¹⁶⁶ The reason for using these is simply that the play examines such often-discussed subject matter that the listener might lose concentration; in using the language of cricket I have attempted to 'estrangle the world's doings so that [the listener is] prodded into asking' questions and re-examining received ideas.¹⁶⁷ Brecht's concerns were also those of Matheson and Jeffrey; they all wished to keep the audience's attention and this technique is as effective on radio as on stage.

There is another type of spoken word used in my plays in addition to dialogue; the device of narration, which was discussed earlier in my consideration of structure and subtext. Some purists dislike it because they think it shows the weaknesses of the medium, but even though words should never become a lazy way for the writer to avoid creating atmosphere they can sometimes be used very carefully to compensate for the lack of a visual dimension.

¹⁶⁰ See Chapter 8 of this thesis – Scene 15c.

¹⁶¹ The title of Brecht's play *Mother Courage* is ironic. Brecht wanted audiences to see that the determination and apparent bravery shown by his eponymous character in continuing to do business throughout the war brought about the tragic deaths of her children. See J. L. Styan, *Modern Drama in Theory and Practice 3: Expressionism and Epic Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 156-61.

¹⁶² See Chapter 4 of this work.

¹⁶³ Styan, *Modern Drama in Theory and Practice 3: Expressionism and Epic Theatre*, p. 141.

¹⁶⁴ Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. by John Willett (London: Methuen, 1978), p. 43.

¹⁶⁵ Brecht, p. 44.

¹⁶⁶ Brecht, p. 43.

¹⁶⁷ Edgar, p. 19.

It is possible to make the invisible visible through dialogue without detracting from the play. The best example of this is in *21C* because hairstyles do not make a noise. They can only be appreciated through seeing them or possibly touching them, so the only way of expressing this is through description, but I have tried to find interesting ways to do this, which sometimes involves using a joke:

LAURA I look like Kemal off Big Brother.

DAVID Well you said you wanted something more up to date.

LAURA Have you done this on purpose because I told you a few home truths the time-before-last?

DAVID Of course not; it looks nice.

LAURA (*Becoming more annoyed*) This is deliberate isn't it? You hardly spoke to me the last time I was in.¹⁶⁸

This is also an example of how dialogue multitasks: Kemal was a famous *Big Brother* contestant in 2005 and had an extreme hairstyle for which he was famous.¹⁶⁹ In likening her appearance to his, Laura reminds the listener of the era in addition to indicating what she looks like. But by far the best way to create atmosphere or setting is through the use of sound, which I will examine next.

Setting, sound effects and music

The heading above would also be applicable to all the other storytelling media, but it is particularly important in radio for the simple reason that the writer is trying to convey the story to the ear alone. The evidence indicates that by themselves noises are a poor way to convey a story to a listener, but this does not mean that the writer does not need to consider background sound at all. Sound is important for creating atmosphere; sounds can give important clues to the audience regarding location, time and, to a degree, the occupation of the characters while they are speaking, but the plays in this thesis demonstrate that an understanding of the technicalities of the medium is not always relevant for a radio playwright and this extract from the BBC Writersroom supports this:

Radio is not about sound - it's about significant, meaningful sound. So don't be afraid of silence, or varying the distance between the speaker and the mike [*Sic*]. The intimacy of a speaker with the listener can be immensely powerful. In real life, lots of sounds happen all at once. Think of Sunday morning: grass cutters, distant church bells, bubbling pans, kids playing in the street. Use background sound to create an atmosphere that will help the listener's imagination create an entire world. Choose a

¹⁶⁸ See Chapter 7 of this thesis – Conversation 16.

¹⁶⁹ *Big Brother* was a Channel 4 reality TV Show, which has now moved to Channel 5. See <<http://www.channel5.com/bigbrother>> [accessed 24, November 2013].

setting with a distinct aural environment and use those sounds to underscore the story. Use sound to cut between places and times.¹⁷⁰

Tim Crook provides a complex analysis of sound design methods in *Radio Drama*, but as a writer one really needs to know very little of the science involved with producing radio in order to use sound effectively.¹⁷¹ Instead it is more useful to think about ‘acoustic environment’ as suggested by Ashton.¹⁷² Writers are discouraged from describing sound effects by Ashton, but occasionally a single effect can be used to make something funny, as in the ‘loo flush’ on the first page of *JTD&KCD*.¹⁷³ Location can be indicated through sound as long as the environment has a noise associated with it, but if the location doesn’t have a specific recognisable sound that can be continued throughout the scene the listener quickly forgets where the characters are, so a reminder using words can be helpful.¹⁷⁴ The coat cupboard in *15 Ways* is an example of this.¹⁷⁵

SAM ... and you are in the coat cupboard having sex with a girl only slightly older than your daughter.

It really helps to think of the listener, not the audience. I will now consider the main types of sounds used in the plays. I have devised my own categories based on ideas taken from Jeffrey, Matheson, Ashton and the BBC Writersroom.

Atmosphere The style of *21C* is described as ‘realistic’ in the treatment.¹⁷⁶ This called for the sound of a hairdressing salon, which was recorded on location by Peter and a sound technician before the play itself was recorded. I have described the sound very naturalistically in the script:

*David’s voice fades out and the sound of the salon takes over... perhaps a montage of sounds of hair being wrapped in foils, heated with a drier and shampooed.*¹⁷⁷

The realistic sound of the salon was created by using a mixture of spot effects and the pre-recorded sound. The spot effects take place in the studio and are performed by a technician

¹⁷⁰ ‘Writing radio drama’ in *Scriptwriting Tips* <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom/write-a-script/writing-radio-drama>> [accessed 07 October 2013].

¹⁷¹ Crook, pp. 74-89.

¹⁷² Ashton, p. 24.

¹⁷³ See Chapter 9 of this thesis.

¹⁷⁴ See R. E. Jeffrey’s thoughts on this in ‘Early radio theories’ in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

¹⁷⁵ See Chapter 8 of this thesis – Scenes 14a and 15c.

¹⁷⁶ See Chapter 7 of this thesis.

¹⁷⁷ See Chapter 7 of this thesis – Conversation 1a.

physically creating the sound at a suitable distance from the microphone. The actors rarely do this themselves because they are usually holding scripts. Certain activities are more convincing when indicated through this method than if they are pre-recorded, as in the example below, which is also from *21C*:

*During the following David brushes the hair off Laura's clothes and helps remove her gown and gets her coat.*¹⁷⁸

Movement The following example from *JTD&KCD* shows how the actors can create an idea of things moving by actually doing some of the things themselves:

NICK GRABS DANIEL AND SEARCHES HIS POCKETS

DANIEL [STRUGGLING]_Ow! Pack it in! I said I haven't got any!

NICK [FINDING FAGS] What are these then, eh? [HE SHOVS DANIEL AWAY]_They're mine now. [WALKING OFF] Thanks Dan-Man! Next time just give them to me when I ask.¹⁷⁹

The spot effects person shook the packet once Nick had found them. The direction 'approaching' indicates that someone is entering a scene, and 'leaving' means that they are going.¹⁸⁰ Sometimes footsteps can be heard in all the recordings when people are coming and going. There is always a note to actors to wear hard soled shoes on the script they are sent.

Time and Era Matheson had particular views on how music can be used to indicate the time of year, as in *21C*:

*Horrible Christmas music is playing.*¹⁸¹

And the era:¹⁸²

*Pulp's "Common People" can be heard faintly in the background.*¹⁸³

The era is also indicated by the changing cricket commentary in *15 Ways*, but this is supported by other indicators because not all listeners have sufficient knowledge of cricket. Sam's mentors indicate era, depending on when each one was in vogue, along with music.

¹⁷⁸ See Chapter 7 of this thesis – Conversation 4.

¹⁷⁹ See Chapter 9 of this thesis – Scene 4.

¹⁸⁰ This is used throughout all the plays.

¹⁸¹ See Chapter 7 of this thesis – Conversation 13.

¹⁸² See Chapter 3 of this thesis.

¹⁸³ See Chapter 7 of this thesis – Conversation 6.

Distance It is possible to convey how far apart characters are by putting actors nearer or closer to the microphone as in this scene from *JTD&KCD*:

Scene 15:

REHEARSAL ROOM

CHRISSY AND NICK ARE ABOUT TO BEGIN REHEARSALS.

MRS W Okay! I'm pleased to see everyone at rehearsal today. [MOVING AWAY] From the top please.

CHRISSY [HISSING] Where were you yesterday?

NICK [UNDER BREATH] Sorry.

CHRISSY [UNDER BREATH] I said you were at the dentist's.

NICK [UNDER BREATH] Couldn't you think of anything better?

CHRISSY [UNDER BREATH] No – it was bad enough having to tell a lie as it was.

NICK [UNDER BREATH] Thanks.

CHRISSY [UNDER BREATH] Mrs Woodhouse made me work on my big speech over and over again because you weren't here.

MRS W [FROM A DISTANCE] Okay guys – let's make a start. Chrissy, why don't you show Nick what you've done with Lucyfer's big speech?¹⁸⁴

Themes Music is sometimes used thematically, as well as in the ways I have explained above. Examples of this are found in the teenage love songs that link between scenes in *JTD&KCD* and in many of the songs in *15 Ways*, like *Puppy Love*, which also sets the era, and *The Twelfth of Never*, which is used ironically when Sam and Rob split up the first time.¹⁸⁵ But the cleverest use of music is probably at the beginning of *15 Ways* with the thematic use of *Fifty Ways to Leave Your Lover*: we were not allowed to change the words, so the music stops at the right moment and the title of the play is spoken instead of the famous line. The football chants are used thematically at the beginning of *JTD&KCD*, especially when used with the sinister sounds of Nick's noisy boots and can. Dan sings football chants, so the listener knows that he and Nick have something in common, but the third time Nick is heard singing a football chant is when Daniel is being beaten by the Friary Fighters, so there is a moment of suspense before we realize he is going to help Daniel. Finally they sing a chant together to signify their new understanding.¹⁸⁶ Music may not be 'as much a part of the writer's craft' as 'plot and characters' in the way that Matheson advocated, but it is still a useful device in telling a complete story.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ See Chapter 9 of this thesis.

¹⁸⁵ See Chapter 8 of this thesis – Scenes 1 and 1a.

¹⁸⁶ To understand this effect it is easier to listen to the football chants on the CD than read them in the script.

¹⁸⁷ See 'Early radio theories' in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

Silence and Laughter There are ‘ominous silences’ in both *21C* and *15 Ways* that create tension and indicate subtext. Laughter has the opposite effect and breaks the tension in *15 Ways*, when Sam and Rob get the giggles over Lewis’s cricket pitch modification in Scene 8; this also acts as a reference to the famous *Test Match Special* ‘leg over’ incident for anyone knowledgeable about cricket.¹⁸⁸

Comic business and running gags

Ayckbourn has a theory that in order to be respected as a writer of comedy and put on a par with a writer of drama ‘you need to have been dead preferably for a century. By which time most of the comedy is incomprehensible and can only be laughed at by scholars.’¹⁸⁹ Much of this thesis has defended writing comedy, and I hope that I have also shown that this aspect of story design is a superficial layer that disguises the dark material underneath; or the “sugar on the pill”. The point is that the comedy writer actually has to do more work than the drama writer because s/he has to create an outer-wrapping of lightness that hides what is really going on. The under-layers must be very serious in order for the comedy to be truthful. There has been considerable criticism of comedy writing methods and space precludes an in-depth analysis of every technique I have employed in making the plays funny, but I have selected one example from each of the plays in order to illustrate the complex process involved in wrapping a play in a final layer of froth. It is important for the comedy writer to remember that radio is a blind medium and adapt the techniques accordingly. The three plays that follow demonstrate the importance of today’s writer understanding the fact that the audience cannot see the actors in the same way that Constanduros understood how to use comic business and create physical humour, even though the actors cannot be seen. These are some examples of running jokes that operate in different ways in my plays. These devices also help to keep the attention of the listener in accordance with Jeffrey’s early ideas.

The silent assistants in *21C* are funny even though the listener never hears them. They have a distinct comic perspective that is common to them all and expressed through the way Laura

¹⁸⁸ In 1991, while commentating on a Test match between England and the West Indies, TMS legends Brian Johnston and Jonathan Agnew were undone by the most famous fit of giggles in broadcasting history. <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/8157299/Test-Match-Specials-greatest-gaffe-the-Leg-Over.html>> [accessed 23 November 2013].

¹⁸⁹ Ayckbourn, p. 4.

and David react to them.¹⁹⁰ They are all young women aged somewhere between 16 and 20 who are shallow, uneducated and rather sentimental. They worship David and his treatment of them says as much about him as it does about them, which is one of the main reasons for their inclusion. The assistants represent Laura when she was their age and expose David as being very similar to a young Graham, even though Laura thinks he is so different. The assistants could easily be one person, but by making them several they also function as a comic device for showing the changing era. Their names reflect what was in fashion at the time they were born, so for example, Kylie, who is David's assistant in 2002, was born in 1986 when the ITV Australian soap opera *Neighbours* was becoming popular in Britain and Kylie Minogue, the famous pop singer, was just beginning her career.¹⁹¹ Lois who represents 1997 does not have a name that indicates era, but her reaction to the recent death of Princess Diana indicates the year instead:

LAURA To be honest Lois I didn't really care about her one way or the other, I certainly never said anything bad about her, and I never read all that rubbish in the press, so I haven't actually got anything to feel guilty about. It is a shame that she's died though.

DAVID (*Approaching*) Hello. Come and take a seat. (*To Lois*) Lois, try to stop going on about Princess Di love; we're running out of tissues. (*Back to Laura*) Sorry about that, Lois was a big fan; it's knocked her for six.¹⁹²

The pudding bowl in *15 Ways* is what Brecht calls a 'gestus', which is defined by Edgar as 'an emblem around and through which the action [...] unfolds.'¹⁹³ The pudding bowl has its own comic journey that symbolises the marriage throughout the play. It also illustrates the difference between writing for the ear and the eye quite neatly. The listener encounters the pudding bowls five times through a technique Edgar calls 'figuring'.¹⁹⁴

- i. Scene 2: The pudding bowls are set up as the height of sophistication for Sam in 1982. They are expensive and Rob thinks Auntie Betty cannot afford to buy them. The scene ends with the sound of breaking china as Rob knocks a bowl off the shelf while demonstrating his spontaneity in suddenly kissing Sam. This is a harbinger of things to come, both for the bowls and the relationship.¹⁹⁵ Breaking china has a distinctive sound which is easily identified; a set of towels would be far less effective

¹⁹⁰ Vorhaus, p. 31.

¹⁹¹ < <http://www.kylie.com/> > [accessed 24 November 2013] See Chapter 7 of this thesis – Conversation 10.

¹⁹² See Chapter 7 of this thesis – Conversation 7.

¹⁹³ Edgar, p. 182.

¹⁹⁴ Edgar, p. 169.

¹⁹⁵ Edgar, p. 169.

on radio because they do not make a distinguishable noise, so while they would be an equally appropriate wedding gift the characters would have to give more explanation. A towel could be ripped or torn, but that requires more physical effort and the sound is less obvious, therefore the china is more plausible. The couple's differing attitudes to the bowls indicate their different comic perspectives; Sam cares deeply about them and everything that they signify in terms of taste and social status; Rob on the other hand finds this perspective shallow and has no interest in self-improvement or pudding bowls.¹⁹⁶

- ii. Scene 7a: A bowl is dropped by Rob and it is revealed that Auntie Betty managed to buy the bowls, which gives them extra significance and creates pathos later.¹⁹⁷ Sadly only two are left. The order in which things happen is important here; first the listener hears the bowl break as an indicator of what is to come and a reminder of what happened before; next the listener is told there is still a bowl left, which is being used for the guinea pig's water (the status of the bowl has fallen to its lowest point); finally when Rob displays that his attitude to the bowls has not changed Sam asks for a divorce.¹⁹⁸ The broken bowl symbolizes the break-up which has been caused by Rob's inability to change.
- iii. Scene 8: Sam gives the remaining bowl to Rob on the list dividing their belongings. The irony is that she no longer wants the bowl or him. It symbolizes Sam's feelings for Rob; he might as well have the bowl because the guinea pig has died, implying he is now lower than the guinea pig; he can only have the low-status bowl because the unfortunate creature no longer needs it.
- iv. Scene 8a: The pudding bowls are mentioned fondly as Sam and Rob laugh about what has gone before, thus reintroducing the bowl as a symbol of what is good about their relationship, which adds to its poignancy when the listener encounters it for the last time.
- v. Scene 15c: Sam finds that Rob has kept the bowl in a box with the platform shoes she was wearing on their first date.¹⁹⁹ It is a sentimental reminder of what he loved about their relationship and could not appreciate at the time. The bowl adds to the pathos of

¹⁹⁶ See Chapter 4 of this thesis on class.

¹⁹⁷ See Chapter 4 of this thesis on underlying sadness.

¹⁹⁸ Edgar, p. 169. This technique is called 'signing'.

¹⁹⁹ See also Chapter 8 - Scenes 1a - 1c.

the situation because everything has changed except Rob; Auntie Betty has died and so has the relationship. Sam has finally left him and he has become attached to the bowl at last, but it is too late.

The Archangel Michael in *JTD&KCD* is a plot device disguised as a joke in the form of an off-microphone character. The device uses the ‘rule of three’, which is a technique in which the writer uses two similar things and then one that differs and is surprising, thus making it funny.²⁰⁰ The Archangel is first set up as being greedy in scene 51, just before the dress rehearsal. Edgar describes set-ups as ‘fuses laid’, so pay-offs are the explosive repercussions.²⁰¹ The Archangel’s greed is reiterated in scene 52 when he fails to come on stage because he is distracted by eating. The pay-off comes in scene 56 when Daniel tricks the Archangel with food, so that he can take his place in the form of his Death character and deliver a speech to his mother and father, who are in the audience.

Denouement

When McKee describes story design as ‘terrifying’ he is referring to the way in which a writer is exposed by the true meaning of what s/he writes.²⁰² Both *21C* and *15 Ways* reveal me as an angry feminist; a truth that led me to write this thesis. Perhaps the action of Constanduros’s *The Buggins Family* reveals her as this too. Vorhaus’s theory of truth and pain might clarify why Filson Young could not understand what made *The Bugginses* so funny, and this reasoning could also explain why some listeners objected to *21C* and *15 Ways* when they were broadcast; the message boards were full of debate, as shown by these responses to some very positive posts:

Two totally unbelievable characters, one a 19 year old hairdresser (with the voice of a 40 year old) who’s a fully qualified stylist – did he start training at age 12? The other a stereotypical dissatisfied female wanting to change her life (yawn).²⁰³

yawn... yawn.... yawn...re the tired old Educating Rita/Shirley Valentine theme!....²⁰⁴

²⁰⁰ Rod A. Martin, *The Psychology of Humour: An Integrative Approach* (London: Elsevier Academic Press, 2007), pp. 11-12, 62.

²⁰¹ Edgar, p. 169.

²⁰² McKee, p. 19.

²⁰³ CapricornM, *I bet you don’t hear a better play all year! – Conv* (Online posting 20 Jan 2007), BBC Radio 4 Message Boards <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/mbradio4/F2766771>> [accessed 6 March 2007].

Vorhaus believes that when people do not ‘get’ a joke it is because they do not recognise the truth.²⁰⁵ It is probable that people react to my plays according to whether they believe what I say about gender; people who think the battle of the sexes is outmoded do not find the plays funny and neither do people who dislike seeing their own gender in a bad light. People who think domestic comedies examine a trivial aspect of life reveal themselves, as do people who think writing comedy is easier than writing drama. The way someone reacts to the work often says as much about him or her as it does about the work; it exposes understanding or a lack of it. Filson Young’s lack of understanding of the real meaning of *The Bugginses* reveals him as the patronising sexist Matheson experienced; he found the work funny not because he recognised the truth about the difficulties faced by women and their families, but because he thought it made fun of people who were of a lower class than him, which is another type of humour altogether, based on being part of a group of humanity that has to suffer the pain of tolerating another group.²⁰⁶ It says a great deal about Young and his ‘ill-natured’ sense of humour.²⁰⁷ Part of Constanduros’s genius was in managing to disguise her real feelings about the treatment of women and ‘integrate[d]’ with the men at the BBC for such a long time, which Matheson failed to do; Matheson briefly ‘infiltrated’ the BBC, but sadly was unable to hide the way she felt about the men she was working with.²⁰⁸

Perhaps Constanduros’s sense of humour was what made the difference; she was able to wrap the bitter truth in a sweeter-tasting layer: ‘Many a true word is spoken in jest.’²⁰⁹ But as Young and the two bloggers quoted above demonstrate this can be something of a curse because comedy writers are so often misunderstood. ‘Secretly I suspect we don’t really believe we’re [hearing] anything worthwhile unless we’ve had a really miserable time.’²¹⁰ But I try not to allow this to push me into removing the funny coating I put on my plays; I remind myself that, ‘The idea of “fun” (*Spass*) occurs again and again in Brecht’s writings’;

²⁰⁴ Krjalmb, *I bet you don’t hear a better play all year!* – Conv (Online posting 20 Jan 2007), BBC Radio 4 Message Boards <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/mbradio4/F2766771>> [accessed 6 March 2007].

²⁰⁵ Vorhaus, p. 5.

²⁰⁶ Vorhaus, p. 6.

²⁰⁷ Filson Young, *Shall I Listen: Studies in the Adventure of Broadcasting* (London: Constable and Co Ltd, 1933). p. 248.

²⁰⁸ Gale, p. 4. See Chapter 2 of this thesis.

²⁰⁹ Late 14th Century proverb. *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, ed. Elizabeth Knowles (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 606.

²¹⁰ Ayckbourn, p. 4.

like Shakespeare he wrote things “‘primarily that he and his friends got fun out of.’”²¹¹ And if, like Constanduros’s work, the first two plays expose my concerns about the difficulties faced by women in society then *JTD&KCD* reveals me as an optimist at heart, who thinks there is hope for the human race because we all have more in common than we think, and we just have to discover what those things are. Matheson believed this too; she just had a very different way of expressing it. If only she had learnt the vital lesson about feminism: ‘it’s alright to laugh; a sense of humour is one of everyone’s most valuable assets and there is no human enterprise that is not improved by it’.²¹²

²¹¹ Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. by John Willett (London: Methuen, 1978), p. 9. Willett cites Elisabeth Hauptmann, who was Brecht’s ‘secretary and lifelong collaborator’.

²¹² Ann Oakley, *The Sociology of Housework* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1985), p. ix.

7. 21 CONVERSATIONS WITH A HAIRDRESSER

Notes on the play

A recording script with numbered lines was produced by the production assistant from my original. This is much harder to understand unless the reader is involved with the technical side of the production or acting in it, so this script is in the format of the final draft accepted for recording by Radio 4.

Directions on SFX are described naturalistically.

There are simple directions to actors in parenthesis throughout. This is because the rehearsal time for a radio play is very short: a single read-through and discussion followed by recording. The total time allowed for a 45 minute play is usually 2 days.

21 CONVERSATIONS WITH A HAIRDRESSER TREATMENT

An idea for a forty-five minute radio play by Carolyn Scott Jeffs

Developing a good relationship with their hairdresser is as vital for most women as any other relationship in their life. A good hairdresser not only manages her crowning glory, but is also her marriage guidance counsellor, image consultant, psychiatrist, dietician, health advisor, fashion guru, purveyor of gossip and stand up comedian.

David is Laura's hairdresser and fifteen years her junior; she has adored him since he first transformed her from a throw-back 1980's New Romantic into a modern elegant, grown up.

Over fifteen years and twenty-one visits to the hairdressers we chart the course of their relationship and the ups and downs of their lives, as they talk their way through twenty-one hair consultations. They support and encourage each other through births, deaths, marriages, divorce, ill health, romance and all manner of human experiences.

Throughout the play they change: Laura from nervous, downtrodden, housewife to successful university lecturer and feminist, David from saucy, laddish, young romantic to cynical, heartless misogynist.

When Laura, who has always thought of him as a kid, realises that he is older than her new boyfriend, she has to re-evaluate her feelings towards him: but despite her attraction to him she thinks her hair is too important to change their relationship. When David announces that he is leaving the salon to start his own business in a town some miles away, Laura decides to try another local hairdresser with disastrous results. When she manages to find David in his new location, she begs him to forgive her infidelity. He agrees to cut her hair on the condition he can take her to dinner, and she finds herself unable to refuse.

Characters:

LAURA 33 - 48, a woman who transforms from housewife to successful feminist

DAVID 18 - 33, a very good heterosexual hairdresser with an abundance of charm

Style:

Very simple: sweet and funny, but realistic and unsentimental, it takes the form of twenty-one conversations, of varying length, in a hairdresser's salon. The main strength of the piece is in its dialogue and characters.

21 CONVERSATIONS WITH A HAIRDRESSER SCRIPT

By Carolyn Scott Jeffs

Directed by Peter Leslie Wild

CAST

Laura – Eleanor Tremain

David – Joseph Kloska

Afternoon Play BBC Radio 4

Broadcast: 17 January 2006, 14.15 – 15.00

CHARACTERS:

LAURA 33-48 A woman who transforms from downtrodden housewife to successful university lecturer and feminist over fifteen years. Her grammar improves and her accent becomes less pronounced as she becomes more educated.

DAVID 18-33 A charming, talented young hairdresser with big ambitions and romantic aspirations, who becomes a cynical, heartless misogynist over fifteen years

LOCATIONS:

Two different hairdresser's salons, a pub and a restaurant.

TIME:

1991 - 2006

STYLE:

Simple, realistic and unsentimental

PUNCTUATION:

/ : Second speaker talks over the first from /

... : Unfinished sentence; either the character can't say the words or is cut off before the end of the speech.

() : Words in brackets are unspoken.

CONVERSATION 1: Spring 1991: CHELSEA'S SALON

David, a young man with a pleasant accent, answers the phone in the hairdresser's salon where he works, to Laura, a woman in distress, who is telephoning from a callbox in the pouring rain. The salon is empty.

DAVID Hello Chelsea's: David speaking how may I help you?

LAURA Oh... I don't know if I want a man to do it for me.

DAVID Do you want to make a hair appointment?

LAURA Yes – No – Yes – I mean I think so... I mean I don't know... You see I've got this parents' evening to go to and I can't face those women looking like this.

DAVID Okay - when do you want the appointment for?

LAURA Now.

DAVID Well I'm the only stylist in today, so if you wanted a woman to cut it the earliest we could do would be the day after tomorrow.

LAURA It's got to be today; parents' evening is tonight.

DAVID Oh! Come in now then; we're not very busy.

LAURA I've got this magazine you see and I can't look like that, I just can't. She's not real. No one wears clothes like that and no one has hair like that.

DAVID Would you like to make an appointment?

LAURA I suppose I could just cut it all off and have a kind of teenage boy's haircut like that woman on the checkout in Sainsbury's, but I don't think Graham would like it if I looked like a boy.

DAVID (*Bemused, but polite*) Okay, how soon can you get here?

LAURA Straightaway.

DAVID Fine; what's the name please?

LAURA Laura.

DAVID Laura...?

LAURA Williams.

DAVID Okay, you're with David – that's me; straightaway.

LAURA It was alright when I was in my twenties, I looked okay then and before Jamie started school I didn't have to go out much, but now there are all those women at the school gates with makeup and false nails and Gucci handbags at half past eight in the morning.

DAVID Well I'll see you when you get here then.

LAURA Okay, I'll come in then.

DAVID Where are you?

LAURA In the phone box outside your door; it's raining.

CONVERSATION 1A: Spring 1991: CHELSEA'S SALON: continuous

Laura hangs up and opens phone box door – the rain is torrential and she gasps as she runs from the phone box while trying and failing to put up an umbrella. She enters Chelsea's Hair Salon for Men and Women in a terrible fluster and drops her umbrella, her bag and the magazine she is carrying. David comes to help her.

DAVID Hello; can I help? You must be Ms Williams

He picks up her bag and umbrella

LAURA Mrs - It's raining cats and dogs.

DAVID *(Laughing)* Now that's funny; my gran used to say that.

LAURA *(Serious)* I've brought a picture *(She bends down to pick up the magazine)* only it's a bit soggy. I want you to make me look like that.

DAVID *(Studying the magazine)* Are you sure? I don't get many women who want to look like Bruce Forsythe.

LAURA *(Grabbing the magazine back)* Oh no! Jerry must have fallen out. *(It's all too much and she starts to snivel)* It was Jerry Hall!

DAVID Well thank god you lost her. *(He surveys the bedraggled, snivelling Laura for a second and then takes pity on her)* Shall I take your coat? *(He does)* Can I call you Laura? I'm David and I'm your stylist today *(He steers her to a consultation chair)* Why don't you come and sit down over here and let me have a look at your hair.

He sits her down and there's a pause

LAURA Well?

DAVID Well it's an attractive hat, but I can't do your hair with it on.

LAURA Oh.

David goes to take her hat off, but Laura grabs hold of it and won't let go. They struggle with the hat during the following.

LAURA No I can't - you see I was looking at that magazine and looking at my hair in the mirror and I knew I could never be like those women...

DAVID You can – a few woven highlights to enhance your natural colouring/ and you'll.... (look fantastic)

LAURA (*Rather hysterically*) /so I thought I'd just... (cut it all off)

She yanks off her hat and David registers the full extent of the damage.

DAVID (*Pause*) Oh right! Well...

LAURA (*Calmer*) But then I realised what I was doing and rushed straight here. My dad used to support Chelsea, that's why I chose you. Can you do anything with it?

DAVID Laura I'm a hairdresser; I can work miracles. Actually you've only really chopped the back off; a nice graduated bob ought to do it, and we'll warm up the colour a bit too. Come on; let's make a start. (*Calling off*) Roxanne! Roxanne!

David's voice fades out and the sound of the salon takes over... perhaps a montage of sounds of hair being wrapped in foils, heated with a drier and shampooed.

CONVERSATION 2: Spring 1991: CHELSEA'S SALON (About an hour after CONVERSATION 1)

David is putting the finishing touches to Laura's haircut. The salon is still quiet.

DAVID Can you see how these subtle lighter tones make you look younger and the extra volume gives the hair a big sexy glamorous feel.

LAURA I don't know what to say. Wait until PJs mother sees this.

DAVID Sorry who's PJ?

LAURA PJ is one of Jamie's classmates: horrible blonde brat with a basin haircut; Jamie went to his party: enormous house, swimming pool, circus performers...

DAVID I've got the picture.

LAURA His mother thinks I'm a charity case. The other day she came over to my car carrying a big bag. She leaned in and said, "I hope you don't mind, but I thought you might like these." Then she stood there simpering while I opened the bag: it was full of clothes and I didn't know where to look. I just said thank you. She gave me this patronising smile: "I was going to take them to the dress agency, but then I thought of you."

DAVID What a bitch! Well she won't be patronising you tonight. From eighties ugly duckling into a beautiful nineties swan: you look fabulous.

He shows her the back with a mirror and gives her a final spritz of hairspray.

LAURA Graham won't recognise me; I don't recognise me.

CONVERSATION 3: Autumn 1991: CHELSEA'S SALON (A few weeks after CONVERSATION 2)

David is cutting Laura's hair and the scissors can be heard snipping away throughout the following. The salon is quite busy.

LAURA Graham doesn't like it.

DAVID That's a shame.

LAURA He says I look like a trifle gone wrong.

DAVID Is it the colour?

LAURA I think so

DAVID He's bit old fashioned then?

LAURA I can't win with him; if I don't get my hair done he says I'm letting myself go, and if I make an effort he's rude about it. It wouldn't be so bad if he didn't look like Telly Savalas on a bad hair day.

DAVID Who?

LAURA Kojak. That bald detective with the lollypops.

DAVID A bit before my time I think

LAURA Now I'm depressed; I feel ancient.

DAVID Well you don't look it; I've transformed you.

LAURA I do feel better: who cares if Graham doesn't like it? He'll have to put up with it.

DAVID You've bought some new clothes too. Those trousers are great; very Madonna.

LAURA They weren't expensive; Graham can't bear me spending money. I took all my old ones to Oxfam.

DAVID They were a bit eighties – you should have got your own back and given them to PJs mum.

LAURA I thought about it – but she was really nice at the parents’ evening – told me I looked fabulous. If Graham had his way I’d still be wearing shoulder pads – he’s always had a thing for Joan Collins, which is funny because he can’t stand bossy women.

DAVID How long have you been married?

LAURA Seven years: it feels like forever.

DAVID I’m sure you don’t mean that.

LAURA Yes I do! If I’d realised what it was going to be like I’d never have done it.

Pause

DAVID He can’t be that bad.

Pause

LAURA How old are you David?

DAVID Nearly nineteen.

LAURA Still in your teens, good at your job and film star looks – the girls must be queuing up.

DAVID (*A bit self-conscious*) There’s no one special.

LAURA Well when there is don’t marry her.

DAVID (*Laughing*) Okay. I am going to get married one day though. When I meet the right beautiful blue eyed blonde.

LAURA Has she got to be blonde?

DAVID If she isn’t we have the technology.

LAURA You’ve got it all planned then.

DAVID I’m going to get married on a beach in Bali. It’s going to be love at first sight. My mum says that’s what it was like when she met my dad; they’ve been married twenty years. She used to be a hairdresser, but she gave it up when she had me.

LAURA What does your dad do?

DAVID He’s a Builder.

LAURA Good thing you didn’t want to be a ballet dancer.

DAVID Now you come to mention it – only joking; I’ve got two left feet.

LAURA So has Graham: all the grace of a Black and Decker.

DAVID (*Laughing*) What does he do?

LAURA He's a mechanic: diesels mostly. Jamie already takes after him; I caught him trying to dismantle the lawnmower last weekend.

CONVERSATION 4: Christmas 1992: CHELSEA'S SALON (Eighteen months after CONVERSATION 3)

David is blow drying Laura's hair. They have been silent for some time. The salon is frantic.

DAVID (*Switching off the drier and showing her the back with a hand mirror*) Are you all ready for Christmas then?

LAURA Is that a joke?

DAVID Don't you like it?

LAURA My hair's fine; I mean the C word.

DAVID No; it's what I ask everyone. It's right up there with "Are you going away at all this year?"

During the following David brushes the hair off Laura's clothes and helps remove her gown and gets her coat.

LAURA It's going to be awful; Graham is even worse at Christmas. I think it's to do with his parents; his dad's got this mystery illness; he was given three months to live in 1986 and we've already had five last Christmas's. Sometimes I wish he'd hurry up and die; it's getting ridiculous – oh that sounds heartless. Last year Graham refused to get out of bed and I had to take Jamie on my own, which would have been okay if both my sisters-in-law hadn't got him the same present. I mean there's not much a five-year-old can do with book tokens on Christmas day. It will be even worse this year because Angela; my-sister-in-law, is pregnant. I know that's all she's going to talk about because they've been trying since they got married and that was in 1985. She's even older than me, so we all thought she'd missed the boat, then bingo, she's pregnant and it's all disposables versus terrys and camomile tea with the NCT. We've been invited to the birth! Can you believe it; they're having a party while she's in labour. Anyone would think it was some kind of Immaculate Conception, but then if you saw my brother-in-law you'd think it would have to be. She'll probably go into labour on Christmas day just to try and outdo Mary.

She leaves the salon without saying goodbye.

CONVERSATION 5: Autumn 1994: CHELSEA'S SALON (A year and nine months after CONVERSATION 4)

Laura is sitting in the consultation chair and David approaches. The salon is fairly quiet.

DAVID You look different.

LAURA I'm changing my life.

DAVID (*To himself*) Wish I could change mine. (*To her*) What can I do for you today?

LAURA Cut it off – I want something really radical.

DAVID Are you sure? What about Graham?

LAURA Something studenty - I'm starting at Aston next week.

DAVID Villa?

LAURA University! I've always wanted to go, but couldn't when I was eighteen because I had to look after my mum.

DAVID What was wrong with her?

LAURA Cancer. By the time she died I thought it was too late, so I got a job in accounts.

DAVID I thought accountancy was a good career.

LAURA It is – but I'm not an accountant – I just did the books for a building suppliers. That's how I met Graham.

DAVID Ah.

LAURA Anyway I gave that up when I got married and since then I haven't really done anything except look after Jamie and try to cope with Graham, but since Jamie's been at school I've started reading books again; I always loved books when I was at school.

DAVID I didn't. Give me gossip over literature every time. Sometimes I'd wish I paid more attention though; I might be more confident about starting my own salon. It's just a dream at the moment.

LAURA You have to make dreams come true.

DAVID What are you studying?

LAURA Philosophy.

DAVID Wow (*Pause*) What's that?

LAURA It's a bit complicated, but basically it's the study of ideas. Graham says it's pretentious rubbish and I'd be better off getting a job in Safeway's if I want to earn some money, but that isn't the point is it? You don't just go to work to earn money do you? His mother isn't helping; she keeps comparing it to when she did an evening class in Origami at the local tech.

DAVID Right well we'd better get you shampooed. (*Calling to Candice*) Candice can you shampoo Laura please.

CONVERSATION 6: Spring 1995: CHELSEA'S SALON (Six months after CONVERSATION 5)

Laura is sitting in the consultation chair and they are looking at photographs. The salon is empty.

DAVID That's Lucy

LAURA She looks like a supermodel

DAVID I know; she's beautiful. (*Handing Laura another picture*) Look at her eyes in that one.

LAURA You're in love with her! (*Pause*) You are I can tell. I thought there was something different about you.

DAVID I've grown my hair.

LAURA (*Laughing at him*) It's very cute, but you're still in love.

Pause

DAVID (*Ruffling her hair*) How are you having it today?

LAURA Just a trim please; I'd like the colour done again, but I can't afford it.

DAVID Right, well let's get you shampooed.

He takes her over to the backwash and shampoos her hair throughout the following. Pulp's "Common People" can be heard faintly in the background.

LAURA No Candice today?

DAVID She's left: gone down with terminal flu or something.

LAURA That's hardly surprising, whenever I see her she's practically naked like most of the girls I'm at uni with; they walk around in little tops and no socks when it's snowing and wonder why they get pneumonia.

DAVID You sound just like my mum! There's a boy called Damian starting tomorrow. Don't worry; he's as camp as a row of pink tents – not at all like his name. Is the water okay for you?

LAURA Fine thanks. What's this music?

DAVID Pulp

LAURA It's fantastic; I keep hearing it around the campus.

DAVID I like Oasis as well: they're going to be huge.

LAURA Oh they're really cool.

DAVID Cool?

LAURA Sorry; it's student speak. Graham says I'm too old to use it. I left the car radio tuned to Virgin and he wasn't happy.

DAVID Well keep listening; it's very cool.

LAURA Tell me more about Lucy then, was it love at first sight? She must be quite something to have you all soppy.

DAVID (*Changing the subject*) How are you getting on at uni?

LAURA Fantastic; I'm reading Nietzsche at the moment.

DAVID Is he that German footballer?

LAURA (Laughing) Close; he was German. Didn't go a bundle on women.

DAVID How are you managing with your husband and everything?

LAURA With difficulty; although it has got easier since Graham's father died.

DAVID Sorry to hear that.

LAURA Don't be; we're all relieved.

DAVID I looked up philosophy in the dictionary.

LAURA David! You actually read a book?

DAVID It's Greek.

LAURA Graham would say it's all Greek! The word does come from the Greek though: philosophos, it means lover of wisdom – philos means loving. You can put it before or after a word to mean "lover of"; which makes you a Lucyphile.

She giggles. He's cross and wraps her rather roughly in a towel.

LAURA Ow!

DAVID Let's get one thing straight; I am not in love with Lucy.

CONVERSATION 7: Summer 1997: CHELSEA'S SALON (Two years and three months after CONVERSATION 6)

Laura has just arrived at the salon and we hear the end of her conversation with Lois before she sits in the consultation chair. The salon is packed and there's a buzz of driers and chat.

LAURA To be honest Lois I didn't really care about her one way or the other, I certainly never said anything bad about her, and I never read all that rubbish in the press, so I haven't actually got anything to feel guilty about. It is a shame that she's died though.

DAVID *(Approaching)* Hello. Come and take a seat. *(To Lois)* Lois, try to stop going on about Princess Di love; we're running out of tissues. *(Back to Laura)* Sorry about that, Lois was a big fan; it's knocked her for six.

He leads Laura to a chair.

LAURA I gathered that. You're really busy.

DAVID *(Sitting her in the chair and examining her hair)* Mmm, business is very good. We haven't seen you for ages; I thought you'd fallen out with me. Your hair's really long.

LAURA I couldn't afford to have it done and you know what I'm like with the scissors, so I just let it grow. But I'm graduating next week, and I thought I'd have it done for the ceremony.

DAVID That's great! Congratulations!

LAURA Thank you. I'm also forty; well nearly, it's next Wednesday. How can I be middle-aged? I've even tried wearing flares, but when you're old enough to remember them the first time it isn't quite the same.

DAVID We could try some warmer tones through your hair to emphasise your layers and hide these few grey ones.

LAURA What? Where?

DAVID There's only a few, but better to get them early before anyone notices.

LAURA I feel a hundred.

DAVID Don't worry I'm the man that can; have a look at this colour chart. (*He shows her the card with all the different colours on.*) How about a few of these Warm Amber low lights? They should cheer you up.

LAURA It'll take a lot more than low lights. Haven't you got any good news?

DAVID (*Sheepishly*) Yes; I'm getting married.

LAURA No! Who too?

DAVID (*Wishing he hadn't said anything and rushing on*) How about Rich Chestnut? Those would suit you. And then I could give you a bit of a restyle – I think some face-framing layers would give more depth and intensity to ... (the look)

LAURA David who are you marrying?

DAVID Lucy.

LAURA Lucy? After everything you said about not being in love!

DAVID I did say I'd get married some time.

LAURA You're impossible – you used to believe in love at first sight – whatever happened to that?

DAVID I know, but she's The One.

LAURA David there is no such thing as The One; it's just part of the Romantic Myth.

DAVID What's the Romantic Myth?

LAURA All that rubbish we're bombarded with from birth about there being one person in the world who will be our true love and then we'll live happily ever after. It's in every fairy story we're told, there are endless songs and novels about it, and despite all the evidence to the contrary we still go on believing it. It's no more sensible than believing in Father Christmas – only for some reason most people manage to grow out of that. Anyway good luck. When is it?

DAVID August.

LAURA Where?

DAVID Bali.

LAURA (*Groans*) On the beach?

DAVID Yes, we're going to be barefoot. Sorry you don't approve.

LAURA I just can't understand why you're doing it. No one has to get married these days.

DAVID So is it the Warm Amber or the Rich Chesnut?

CONVERSATION 8: Autumn 1999: CHELSEA'S SALON (Two years and three months after CONVERSATION 7)

David is colouring Laura's hair using tin foil, which rattles all the way through the scene. The salon is very quiet.

LAURA Are you sure this is going to work?

DAVID Trust me.

LAURA Oh I do; you're the only person I'll let near my hair.

They are silent for a while and David continues to paint on the colour and fold the hair into packets of tinfoil.

DAVID Well go on then say "I told you so"

LAURA Wouldn't dream of it. I can't say I'm surprised though - what was the final straw?

DAVID There wasn't one really we just didn't get on and sort of drifted apart. She didn't like me doing anything without her and she wouldn't do the housework or the cooking.

LAURA I've been listening to you moan about that poor girl for the last two years. If it wasn't her lack of domestic skills it was her disinclination to have sex with you. I've told Graham that he's got to start helping with the housework. It's the duty of all feminists to rebel against male domination.

DAVID Marriage wasn't what I expected. She said I was angry all the time

LAURA Your expectations were way too high: people get angry when their expectations exceed actuality - Seneca

DAVID You're losing me now.

LAURA Seneca was a philosopher: I'm writing my PhD on the Metaphysics of Feminism. Not that Seneca was much of a feminist; but he did say some clever stuff.

DAVID Right.

LAURA I'm particularly interested in Simone de Beauvoir; "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman". She was a lot cleverer than Jean Paul Sartre you know; wrote all his essays for him when they were at university, yet it's him who's remembered for his theories on Existentialism.

DAVID Exiwhatism?

LAURA Okay – look at my hair. You can see that my hairstyle exists because it's there in front of you, but before you created the hairstyle...

DAVID It's not finished yet.

LAURA Bear with me – before you created the actual hairstyle you had the idea of the hairstyle didn't you?

DAVID I suppose so yes.

LAURA But if you'd never seen anyone else's hairstyle you wouldn't have known what a hairstyle was and therefore couldn't have created one. Do you follow?

DAVID Kind of.

LAURA Oh come on David it's obvious: it's like life: that's what Sartre was saying.....

The conversation fades out mid-sentence

CONVERSATION 9: Spring 2001: CHELSEA'S SALON (Eighteen months after CONVERSATION 8)

Laura's hair has been shampooed and David is about to cut it, again the salon is quiet

LAURA Can you make me look a bit more serious?

David doesn't reply

LAURA (*Impatient*) I said can you/... (make me look more serious)

DAVID /Shhh - What was that?

LAURA What?

DAVID (*Walking away to look out of the window*) That noise.

LAURA What is it?

DAVID Oh my God – someone's just run into your car.

LAURA (*Rushing to the window and losing her towel, knocking David's scissors out of his hands in the process*) What? Who?

DAVID Just kidding; I thought some bad news might help.

LAURA Very funny!

DAVID Aren't academics allowed a sense of humour?

LAURA Only if they look serious. That's the problem; I don't. The other day I went into the staff loo and one of the cleaners refused to believe I was a lecturer; I had to go and get my identity card so that I could have a pee.

DAVID You should be pleased you look so young.

LAURA Graham says I look like a delinquent teenager. He's got no room to talk, the way he's been behaving lately. When I took him out for a meal with some of my colleagues he told my Head of Department he thought philosophy was useless. It would be like telling your boss that you think hairdressing is a waste of time.

DAVID I've already done that.

LAURA You haven't?

DAVID Kind of; I'm really fed up; I want to start my own salon.

LAURA Good for you.

DAVID Well now Lucy is out of the picture I can concentrate on my career.

LAURA How old are you now David?

DAVID Twenty-eight.

LAURA Sounds like the perfect age to start your own business.

DAVID Thought I'd better look the part, so I bought a new car last week: a Mazda MX5

LAURA Graham says those are hairdresser's cars! Actually I'm a bit worried about Graham; he's started riding around on a huge motorbike and wearing leathers.

DAVID I've never wanted a bike, they're too dangerous. And I never fancy the kind of women who ride bikes.

LAURA Well that's the thing; he wants me to go on the back of it. I'm terrified.

DAVID I'm not surprised.

LAURA I'm even more terrified that he'll have Jamie on the back of it.

DAVID Jamie must be about fifteen now.

LAURA He doesn't need any more bad influences. He's obsessed with acquiring stuff. I keep telling him he doesn't need new MP3 players and computer games to make him happy, and I've been trying to get him to read some Aristotle, but he won't.

DAVID I quite like computer games. I've put it down as one of my hobbies on Local Lovers.

LAURA You're computer dating?

DAVID Yes, but I haven't had much luck so far; all the women I've met have been ugly.

LAURA There are other things that are attractive about women as well as looks.

DAVID Such as?

LAURA I can't believe you just said that!

DAVID I've got a joke for you: a woman hears that there's a new husband shop in town; she wants a husband, so she goes along to buy one. The shop has six floors. She is told that she can keep going up the floors, but can't return to a previous floor once she's rejected the men on it. The first floor has a sign which says "All these men have jobs". She thinks that sounds very good, but maybe the next floor will have even better men. The second floor has a sign saying "All these men have hundred-thousand-pound-a-year jobs and are skilled in bed". Even better, but she still goes up a floor. The next floor has a sign reading "All these men have hundred-thousand-pound-a-year jobs, are skilled in bed and love DIY". The woman is tempted, but thinks there might be even better men on offer higher up, so she continues to the fourth floor, where there's a sign saying "All these men are millionaires, are world-class in bed, love DIY and adore children". At this point the woman almost stops to buy a man, but decides the next floor might be even better, so up she goes. On the fifth floor there's a sign saying "All these men are multi-millionaires, are world-class in bed, love DIY, adore children and have a strong romantic streak". The woman is really excited now, but thinks that if the men on this floor are so fantastic they must be astonishing on the top floor. When she gets to the sixth floor she finds a sign saying "There are no men on this floor; it only exists to prove that women are never satisfied"

There is an ominous silence

LAURA (*Very cool*) You didn't finish it.

DAVID Go on laugh – it's funny

LAURA (*Really getting her own back*) You missed the bit about the wife shop. On the first floor there are women who love sex. On the next floor there are women who love sex and can cook. There are many more floors with many many women offering a plethora of different skills and attributes; but sadly no man has ever got beyond the second floor.

CONVERSATION 10: Spring 2002: CHELSEA'S SALON (One year after CONVERSATION 9)

David is in the middle of cutting Laura's hair and the snipping scissors can be heard all the way through his opening speech. The salon is very busy and they don't want to be overheard

LAURA David I did warn you what would happen if you had a relationship with a girl ten years younger than you.

DAVID I didn't want her to move in; she just arrived with a big wheelie suitcase and made herself at home. I wouldn't care but Freddie likes her better than me.

LAURA The Jack Russell? Has he stopped peeing on the carpet yet?

DAVID Yes, but he's still chewing my leather sofa. Anyway now Emma's taking him for walks and letting him sleep on the bed. I can't get him to do anything now he's so spoilt. Still she has her compensations I suppose: for a start off she looks like Liz Hurley; I don't blame Hugh Grant for getting tempted like that, but you'd think when he'd got Liz he'd have shown a bit of restraint. Perhaps Liz isn't willing to do the business in the front of a car. Not like that Gillian Tylfirth. Perhaps that's why your husband drives a 4x4. Has he still got his motorbike?

Suddenly Laura starts to sob, and the noise in the salon subsides slightly as people react to her

DAVID *(Stops cutting)* Laura? Are you okay? What's the matter?

LAURA I'm sorry, I shouldn't have come.

DAVID Of course you should. Whatever is it? *(Calling)* Kylie get Laura a cup of tea.

He gives Laura a tissue

LAURA I'm sorry.

She blows her nose. The salon buzz returns to normal.

DAVID Do you want to tell me what's happened?

LAURA It's Graham; he's left me. The pig! After all these years he's left me and Jamie for some floozie just because she likes going on the back of his bike and I don't.

DAVID When did he leave?

LAURA Yesterday. I was going to cancel, but I didn't see why I should because of him.

DAVID Quite right.

LAURA He's moved in with her.

DAVID Didn't you have any idea it was going on?

LAURA I suppose I did – I just pretended all those texts he was getting... *(were from clients)*

The conversation fades out mid-sentence

CONVERSATION 11: Autumn 2002: CHELSEA'S SALON (Six months after CONVERSATION 10)

David is just finishing blow-drying Laura's hair, and shouts over the drier before switching it off. The salon is fairly quiet.

DAVID *(Over the drier)* I think the knickers were the final straw.

LAURA *(Shouting Over the drier)* Pardon?

DAVID *(Still over the drier)* Knickers.

LAURA *(Still over the drier)* Knickers?

DAVID *(Switching off the drier)* Well you know how men collect them.

LAURA Do they? Whatever for?

DAVID *(Conspiratorially)* Well you're always hoping she might come back for them. *(Brushing her hair into place)* Do you like it straight?

LAURA Mm, I think I prefer it. I'm sure Graham never collected knickers.

David applies the straightening irons to Laura's hair throughout the following

DAVID I bet he did. It's like all men have a porn collection, but their wives, mother's and girlfriends are in denial. See how these new ceramic straighteners give a really glossy finish?

LAURA They're fantastic. So do you think Simon has a knicker collection?

DAVID Who is Simon?

LAURA This man I've been seeing. He's doing his PhD and I met him in the Common Room.

DAVID If he's doing a PhD he's probably too clever to collect knickers. Or at least he's clever enough to make sure his girlfriend doesn't find them. I think it was the number of pairs that was the problem.

LAURA Jamie's sixteen; does that mean he's got a knicker collection?

DAVID Probably not, but I bet he's got some porn hidden somewhere.

LAURA We feminists don't approve of porn: it's exploiting women.

DAVID Try telling that to a sixteen-year-old boy.

LAURA I have! Jamie thinks I'm mad. I've tried to get him to do some housework, but he just throws a strop and tells me his dad never makes him do it. I keep telling him that our biological makeup has no connection with informing our social roles and behaviours.

DAVID Would you like to see the back?

CONVERSATION 12: Summer 2003: CHELSEA'S SALON (Nine months after CONVERSATION 11)

David is half way through cutting Laura's hair. There are just a couple of elderly clients, who they don't want to offend.

LAURA Oh he didn't last very long; if you work in a university the last thing you want to do is go out with someone else who works in a university; all you ever talk about is work. Haven't you got any decent magazines in here?.

DAVID Don't you like that article about David Beckham's Mohican?

LAURA He's all the rage in Japan apparently: according to this Japanese women are having their pubic hair done in the same style.

DAVID *(Slightly louder)* I hope it catches on here – it would make my job more interesting.

LAURA Shh – Mrs Smith might hear you.

DAVID It's okay she's taken her hearing aid out. So are you seeing anyone else?

LAURA Ah that would be telling!

DAVID But you've always told me everything.

LAURA Not everything David; just some things.

DAVID Why's it such a big secret?

LAURA Who I go out with is nobody's business but my own.

DAVID Oo-oo be like that then.

LAURA You went "oo-oo" like I was a small dog that had just bitten you. It's what a certain kind of man does if you answer him back. Anyway what about you? Who's the latest?

DAVID Mind your own business!

LAURA How many women have you lived with since you split up with Emma the Liz Hurley look-alike?

DAVID Five if you count Judy.

LAURA The one who only stayed one night because she didn't get on with Fred?

DAVID That's the one; he tried to bite her whenever she got into bed. I decided that he was probably a better judge of women than me and told her to pack her bags.

LAURA Why do you let them all live with you?

DAVID I don't ask them to; they just kind of creep up on me and before I know what's happening there's a pink razor hanging in the shower. I'm squaring off the back for a change and chipping into the top to add more texture.

LAURA Mm – sounds like how you'd do a Japanese Mohican.

DAVID Cheeky – it'll look fab wait and see. Anyway Vicky's got to go, but I don't know how I'm going to tell her.

LAURA So why've you gone off her?

DAVID She won't cook, clean or do the ironing and she's started sleeping in a kind of babygrow. I think I'll become a Mormon and then I can have them all at once. They're only ever really good at one thing, so I'd have one for the cleaning, one for the cooking, one who could hold a conversation, one who was a great/ (shag)

LAURA \Stop! (*Incensed*) No woman would ever want more than one husband; she'd just have more men to look after. Now look at me!

DAVID I am looking at you.

LAURA Not in the mirror. (*She gets up*) Face to face!

DAVID What's wrong?

LAURA I'm a woman David.

DAVID I can see that Laura; please sit back down.

LAURA When you look at a woman you don't see your equal do you?

DAVID What do you mean?

LAURA You see either a servant or a perfect princess.

DAVID You've lost me now.

LAURA You don't see a person who may have different skills to you, but they are just as valuable as yours.

DAVID I'd like to see you try and do your own hair.

LAURA Underneath all that trendy boyish charm you're just like Graham.

DAVID I'm not!

LAURA You think women were put on earth to do what you want. Now finish my hair before I get really annoyed.

Laura sits back down and David resumes snipping.

DAVID (*Laughing*) You can be so scary! It's my birthday today. I'm thirty. I was going to ask if you wanted a piece of cake, but I've changed my mind now.

LAURA How old did you say?

DAVID Thirty.

LAURA But you were just a kid when you first started cutting my hair. (*Genuinely shocked*) You can't be thirty.

DAVID Well I am; what's the big deal? It's just a number – or so I keep telling myself.

LAURA But you're older than...

She hesitates

DAVID Who?

LAURA The man I'm seeing.

DAVID So you are going out with someone then?

LAURA Kind of ... but I don't know what to make of it... it can't possibly work...

DAVID Why?

LAURA He's twenty-eight.

DAVID Twenty-eight! You cradle-snatcher!

CONVERSATION 13: Christmas 2003: CHELSEA'S SALON (Six months after CONVERSATION 12)

Horrible Christmas music is playing: Laura is standing at Reception eating a mince pie and sipping sherry. The salon is empty.

LAURA These mince pies are very nice; and I only popped in to make an appointment. Everyone's doing this now, this is my third glass of sherry and I've still got the bank to go. So are you all ready for Christmas then?

DAVID Ha ha – very funny

LAURA Just getting my own back; you've been asking me for years (*She notices something on the counter*) What are these?

Laura picks up a party blower and blows it so it makes a noise and unrolls, nearly hitting David on the nose.

DAVID Ow! God that's loud.

LAURA You look a bit the worse for wear.

DAVID Had a night out with some of the lads last night; I've got the hangover from Hell.

LAURA You needn't expect any sympathy from me.

DAVID I don't! We went to the Anchor, only I got us thrown out of there for saying "Look it's the only gay in the village" when the bouncer walked past, so then we went to the King's Head, and finally ended up at Spearmint Rhino's.

LAURA Disgusting: you've got everything you deserve. (*She blows the party blower at him again*) Merry Christmas. I hate all this enforced jollity, that's why I'm going to Italy with Tim to get away from all that stuff.

DAVID Very nice. Is Tim the twenty-eight year old?

LAURA That's the one. We're going skiing.

DAVID I bet he's been to Spearmint Rhino's; skiing doesn't sound very philosophical. What about Jamie; aren't you taking him?

LAURA He's staying with his dad and she-who-shall-not-be-named.

DAVID He must be practically a grown-up.

LAURA He is – he's away at uni now doing Construction Engineering

DAVID No more child maintenance for you then.

LAURA You know perfectly well that Graham never paid me any maintenance. Good job I went out and got a career when I did.

DAVID Are you still in dispute over the house?

LAURA Yes, but there's a limit to how long it can go on for; my solicitor's very good and we're scheduled for a final hearing in March next year. What are you doing at Christmas?

DAVID Nothing really. I think it will just be me and Fred and a Marks and Spencer Turkey Dinner for One.

LAURA What no latest airhead?

DAVID I've given them up for a while.

LAURA Good for you. How are you getting on with your plan to start your own business.

DAVID Not very well really.

LAURA You must make it your New Year resolution.

CONVERSATION 14: Spring 2004: CHELSEA'S SALON (Fifteen months after CONVERSATION 13)

Laura opens a bottle of champagne and pours two glasses. The salon is packed and noisy. She's already had a glass or two and makes no attempt to be quiet. David finds her highly amusing.

DAVID So what's all this?

LAURA We're celebrating! This morning I received my Decree Absolute and Graham and I are officially divorced.

DAVID You must be a very happy woman.

They clink glasses

LAURA (*Getting louder*) I am: I'm forty-five years old and I feel twenty-five, my hair looks fantastic; thanks to you, and I'm going out with a man seventeen years younger than me.

DAVID Scandalous.

LAURA I own my house...

DAVID Don't forget the promotion.

LAURA ... and I've got a hugely successful career and I am no longer married to Graham – oh, I've already said that.

DAVID You've done so well to pick yourself up off the floor.

Laura now addresses the whole salon

LAURA (*Shouting*) Women don't need men; they're aliens.

DAVID (*Laughing*) Does that include hairdressers?

The women in the salon become hushed as they listen to Laura rant. David laughs occasionally, but stops finding it funny when it gets to the part about him.

LAURA When I was married to Graham I didn't truly believe the feminist teachings, no matter how hard I tried I still wanted to pursue the Romantic Myth; you can read as many books as you like, but in the end you can only see the truth if you experience it. If a man doesn't clean his house no one ever judges him; it's expected. But women are still assessed on their cleaning ability. So much for Mary Wolstonecraft and Germaine Greer. Have you seen that advert for toilet cleaner; "What does your loo say about you?" It doesn't say anything about a man does it? Even though he's the one you have to clean up after. It plays on every woman's paranoia about the state of her house. But I am going to reject it; I'm not going to worry about the state of my bathroom anymore. My husband has gone and my son's moved out, so there aren't any men for me to look after. I am now beyond the control of women's magazines and reality TV, and it's bliss. You see the thing about getting to forty-five David is that you start to know who you really are. That's your problem, you're afraid of who you really are. Kierkegaard said that the most common despair was not choosing to be oneself: or even worse, to choose to be another than oneself. That's what I was doing, pretending to be someone else for Graham. I was humouring him all the time. *(She takes her voice down and speaks directly to David)* Can't you see? That's what you're doing, humouring your boss, the other staff, and your clients: that's why you're stuck, because until you find the courage to be yourself David, you'll never leave here. You'll just keep on talking about it, but still buying into all this women's magazine, image-based crap!

DAVID *(Taking a glug of champagne; angry but calm)* Laura if you're so good at all this being-yourself-image-rejecting-feminism and philosophy – why are you still getting your hair done?

CONVERSATION 15: Autumn 2004: CHELSEA'S SALON (Six months after CONVERSATION 14)

The scissors click away as David cuts Laura's hair, but neither of them says anything for a very long time. The salon is busy

DAVID Blow dry or climazone?

LAURA Definitely climazone.

CONVERSATION 16: Spring 2005: CHELSEA'S SALON (Six months after CONVERSATION 15)

David has finished Laura's hair and is showing her the back with a mirror. The salon is quiet.

DAVID What do you think?

There is an ominous silence

LAURA I look like Kemal off Big Brother.

DAVID Well you said you wanted something more up to date.

LAURA Have you done this on purpose because I told you a few home truths the time-before-last?

DAVID Of course not; it looks nice.

LAURA (*Becoming more annoyed*) This is deliberate isn't it? You hardly spoke to me the last time I was in.

DAVID That's because you were engrossed in *The Female Eunuch*, and I think any woman brave enough to read porn in public should be given some space.

LAURA What are you going to do about my hair?

DAVID It looks fantastic; the three colours give it some texture.

LAURA (*Furious*) What does that mean? I look like a traffic light!

DAVID Okay, okay, I'll tell you what, try it for a week and if you still don't like it I'll change it for you.

LAURA I can't walk around like this for a week. I've got to chair a session at the Women in Philosophy Conference next Friday and I'm supposed to be delivering a paper on the legacy of the 1970 New York Women's Uprising.

DAVID (*Trying to calm her down*) And you'll look very glamorous while you're doing it.

Pause

LAURA (*Defeated*) You don't understand, I've split up with Tim.

DAVID Oh; sorry.

LAURA He found someone more his own age. If he sees my hair like this he'll be even more glad he dumped me.

LAURA I make him feel stupid apparently.

DAVID That's because he is stupid. Come back tomorrow and I'll colour your hair back to how it was.

CONVERSATION 17: Spring 2005 CHELSEA'S SALON (The day after Conversation 16)

David is finishing off Laura's hair with a shine product. The salon is quiet.

DAVID (*Putting product in her hair*) There we are, a bit of serum to make it shiny: now - is that better?

LAURA Much.

DAVID You're all set for the conference.

LAURA Yes. Thank you.

DAVID I was just trying to make it look more up-to-date.

LAURA I know; I just didn't feel like myself.

DAVID And that's important?

LAURA I've told you before David it's the most important thing.

DAVID Right. I am trying you know; I won't be stuck here forever – I'm trying to borrow the money to set up on my own, but no luck so far.

LAURA I know I was angry yesterday; I'm sorry.

DAVID Even philosophers get angry about their hair then?

LAURA There are two major things philosophers have never really managed to crack – apart from the existence of God of course – love and hair dos. But that's only the female ones; men don't have to worry. Actually I knew it was time for Tim to go; he'd started bringing his shirts for me to wash. Men have no idea how much effort goes into a shirt; they don't even know which order to iron it in.

DAVID There's an order?

LAURA Back, sleeves, front, collar

DAVID I always start with the front.

LAURA That's why your shirts are always creased then; even in this day and age no one teaches boys how to iron properly.

DAVID No one teaches girls either; I'm sure all my girlfriends started with the front.

LAURA That's because it's a worthless skill. When I handed Tim his perfect shirt he just said that my washing machine must be better than his!

CONVERSATION 18: Autumn 2005: A PUB (Six months after CONVERSATION 17)

David and Laura are at the bar. It's not too busy

LAURA (*Ordering from the barman*) A glass of red wine and a pint of bitter please.

DAVID (*Approaching*) Hello.

LAURA Why are you here?

DAVID I'm on a date. You?

LAURA Oh... the same.

DAVID You haven't been in for a while.

LAURA No, I know, I was letting it grow a bit.

DAVID It's not because of what happened with the colour is it?

LAURA Of course not.

DAVID So which bloke are you with? Let me guess; is it that one with the leather patches on his elbows?

LAURA He's about a hundred!

DAVID Looks like a university type though.

LAURA Well it's not him; which one's yours? Is it the one who looks like she's forgotten to put her skirt on?

DAVID No; I've grown out of women like that; I go for the more sophisticated type these days.

LAURA Oh really? By sophisticated do you meant that she prefers kebabs to fish and chips?

DAVID Very funny! That's her in the pin-stripe suit.

LAURA No! She looks like a proper grown-up. Very attractive.

DAVID She's forty-nine; we're just friends really; her name's Victoria, I met her in that new wine bar opposite the law courts; she's a solicitor. I told you; I like sophisticated women.

LAURA Well I'd never have believed it. Is she rich?

DAVID Minted. So, which one's yours then?

LAURA Over there by the pot-plant.

DAVID He only looks about twenty.

LAURA Actually he's twenty-one; he's one of my best students; well he was; he's just graduated.

DAVID Isn't that immoral?

LAURA I don't see why I shouldn't; age is just a construct.

CONVERSATION 19: Autumn 2005: CHELSEA'S SALON (A week after CONVERSATION 18)

David is cutting Laura's hair. The salon is quiet.

DAVID How's the toyboy?

LAURA How is your sugarmummy?

DAVID Talking of which; I'm leaving at last.

LAURA What?

DAVID Victoria and I are just business partners – she's going to finance my new salon. It's what I've always wanted to do, be my own boss.

Pause

DAVID Say something.

LAURA The last man to say he was leaving me for another woman was Graham, and frankly I was less shocked.

DAVID Why are you shocked?

LAURA I've got used to you being here.

DAVID You were the one who kept telling me to be myself and realise my ambitions.

LAURA I know, but I hadn't thought about the consequences of you not being here – who's going to do my hair?

DAVID You can still come to me; I'm only going to be a few miles away. I'll ring with the address of my new place as soon as it's all settled.

CONVERSATION 20: Spring 2006: DAVID'S SALON (Six months after CONVERSATION 19)

Laura is having her hair done by David in his new salon – she is sitting in a towel and is unusually coy. It's quite busy.

LAURA Looks like you're doing well. It was very good of you to ring.

DAVID No problem at all; I said I would. Did Brook give you a nice head massage?

LAURA Yes – she seems more intelligent than your usual assistants; she never mentioned Sharon Osborne at all. It's a lovely place; very contemporary; are you pleased?

DAVID Pleased and scared. It's different working for yourself. *(Taking her towel off)*
So what can we do for you today?

LAURA I'm not sure – what do you think?

David combs her hair and runs his fingers through it.

DAVID Don't you think it's time you told me the truth Laura?

LAURA What do you mean?

DAVID I can tell when a woman has been unfaithful to me.

LAURA I haven't ... It's the first time David. I feel terrible, but I hadn't heard from you...

DAVID You were the first person I contacted, as soon as we opened.

LAURA Yes, but you were ages and I just had to get my hair cut, so I went to that salon on Market Street and had a session with a man called Matt.

DAVID What? You hussy!

LAURA I know, all these years it's only been you David, but I was really desperate. No matter how much I analyse and write about the Human Condition I still need to get my hair done. I hate it, but I can't live without it.

DAVID So was Matt any good? Did he have hot tongs and a big diffuser?

LAURA David...

DAVID No I want to know; was he any good or not?

LAURA If you really must know – he was quite good...

DAVID *(Deflated)* Oh.

LAURA But nowhere near as good as you.

DAVID You probably say that to all the men.

LAURA No really; he was okay, but it didn't feel right somehow. His hands felt different.

DAVID *(Joking)* Well women do say that about me.

LAURA I promise David I won't ever let another man touch my hair – from now on I shall practice tonsorial fidelity.

DAVID I've no idea what that is, but I like the sound of it.

LAURA You're just like all men – you expect to tease and tousele all the women you want while they remain absolutely faithful.

DAVID Mm – that seems the way it should be (*hesitates*)... So ... can I take you out for dinner?

LAURA What? No!

CONVERSATION 21: Spring 2006: A SMART RESTAURANT (A week after CONVERSATION 20)

Laura and David have just finished dinner – they've had a glass or two of wine

DAVID What made you change your mind?

LAURA I don't know – yes perhaps I do; I think I decided to come because you've finally given up on the Romantic Myth and become someone I can talk to.

Pause

DAVID Remember when you told me I wasn't being myself and I was only humouring people?

LAURA Yes

DAVID Well I was actually humouring you as well.

LAURA What do you mean?

DAVID Every woman whose hair I've styled feels like you: they all have terrible husbands and nightmare teenagers; they all hate their in-laws and are struggling to cope. You're all having the same experience.

LAURA (*Laughs*) It's the Human Condition.

DAVID You think you know about philosophy because you've read a lot of books, but I've listened to people Laura, and is it so very bad to tell women what they want to hear if it makes them feel better? Who's really the Doctor of Philosophy; you or me?

She laughs

LAURA Touché. I thought if I changed my life and studied philosophy I'd find a solution.

DAVID That's the thing that makes you different: you really did change your life; you were courageous enough to do what you wanted; and that gave me the courage to do it too.

LAURA Even when I found the courage to be someone else David, I still wasn't really who I am: all that Guardian reading and academic philosophy wasn't really me either; it was as prescriptive as the life I had before in its own way; I was still trying to be someone else.

DAVID And now?

LAURA I've stopped looking for happiness in things or other people.

DAVID Me too. But I wouldn't say I'd entirely given up on the Romantic Myth - tell me Laura; how do you feel about a trip to Bali?

8. 15 WAYS TO LEAVE YOUR LOVER

Notes on the play

A recording script with numbered lines was produced by the production assistant from my original. This is much harder to understand unless the reader is involved with the technical side of the production or acting in it, so this script is in the format of the final draft accepted for recording by Radio 4. It is formatted more like a TV script than the previous play with a list of locations at the beginning. This reflects its rather filmic structure in moving from place to place.

Directions on SFX are more specific and detailed than in the previous play.

There are simple directions to actors in parenthesis throughout. This is because the rehearsal time for a radio play is very short: a single read-through and discussion followed by recording. The total time allowed for a 45 minute play is usually 2 days.

15 WAYS TO LEAVE YOUR LOVER TREATMENT

An idea for a forty-five minute radio play by Carolyn Scott Jeffs

This comic play examines the effects of family life on the Romantic Myth.

Samantha and Bob are one of those couples who can't live with or without each other. They have been together (and apart a lot as well) since they first met at a school disco in 1973. Every time they break up they say it will be the last, but of course it never is.

Over the course of their relationship they have fifteen major break-ups, which form the scenes of the play: as they age and their lives change the nature of each break-up is different, the first one being a teenage spat on the night they meet and the final one a quiet defeated admission that they simply can't live together anymore – or can they?

Throughout the play they get married and divorced and married again. They produce two children who alternately break them up and keep them together as they struggle to cope with the demands of parenthood. Samantha changes from a wide-eyed virgin with aspirations to travel the world into a disillusioned career woman, while Bob transforms from a naïve cricket fan who dreams of bowling for England into a grumpy middle-aged bald bloke. Their relationship is by turns hilarious and heartbreaking.

When Samantha has an affair with her boss at work and Bob becomes obsessed with his teenage daughter's best friend it looks like the final straw, but even during their final break up there is a glimmer of hope when a memory of that first night in 1973 reminds them how far they have come together; perhaps it's not the end after all.

Characters:

SAMANTHA 14 – 40s, a woman who transforms from innocent, romantic virgin to hard-edged disillusioned career woman

DAVID 15 – 40s, a man who life just knocks the stuffing out of

Style:

Very simple: funny and sad, but realistic and unsentimental, it takes the form of fifteen scenes of varying length, each one supposedly being the end of their relationship. The main strength of the piece is in its dialogue and characters.

15 WAYS TO LEAVE YOUR LOVER SCRIPT

By Carolyn Scott Jeffs

Directed by Peter Leslie Wild

CAST

Ron – Tom Goodman-Hill

Sam – Alex Kelly

Young Rob – Jacob Lloyd

Young Sam – Lucy Jones

Afternoon Play BBC Radio 4

24 April 2008 14.15 – 15.00

CHARACTERS:

SAMANTHA 14-49, a woman who transforms from innocent, romantic virgin to hard-edged, disillusioned career woman

ROB 15-50, a man who life just knocks the stuffing out of

LOCATIONS:

1. A telephone box and Rob's parents' living room
2. A department store
3. Outside a church and in a car
4. A labour suite on a maternity ward
5. A cricket match
6. A posh restaurant
7. Rob's and Sam's kitchen
8. Centenary Square and outside a headmaster's study
9. A hotel bedroom and bathroom
10. A car: interior and exterior
11. A university robing room
12. An office at Relate
13. Rob's and Sam's garden
14. Rob's and Sam's coat cupboard
15. Rob's living room and coat cupboard.

TIME:

1973 - 2008

STYLE:

Simple and unsentimental with heightened realism

PUNCTUATION:

/ : Second speaker talks over the first from /

... : Unfinished sentence; either the character can't say the words or is cut off before the end of the speech.

() : Words in brackets are unspoken.

INTRO MUSIC '50 WAYS TO LEAVE YOUR LOVER' BY PAUL SIMON. (TRY TO USE THE ACTUAL DESCRIPTIONS E.G.: 'HOP ON A BUS GUS', 'MAKE A NEW PLAN STAN'... ETC

ANNOUNCEMENT: 15 WAYS TO LEAVE YOUR LOVER – OR 15 WAYS OF GETTING OUT.

Scene 1: Sam 14yrs, Rob 15yrs

ANNOUNCEMENT: NUMBER ONE: 'THE RUN OUT'.

1973. VOICE OVER: SAM READS A LETTER SHE IS WRITING

SAM Dear Cathy and Claire, I've been asked to go to the school disco with a boy I've liked for ages, but I've never kissed a boy before and don't know what to do when we get to the slow dances at the end...

FADE OUT OF V/O WITH A BIT OF 'PUPPY LOVE' BY DONNY OSMOND

Scene 1a:

SPRING 1973 - MIDNIGHT: A TELEPHONE BOX.

FIRST THE SOUND OF TORRENTIAL RAIN BEATING ON THE PHONE BOX, THEN THE PHONE RINGS AND THE PIPS GO AS IT IS ANSWERED BY ROB. SAM PUTS THE MONEY IN AND THE CALL CONNECTS. THE RAIN FADES, BUT REMAINS IN THE BACKGROUND. ROB ANSWERS THE PHONE WITH 'BLOCKBUSTER' BY SWEET PLAYING LOUDLY IN THE BACKGROUND. HE REMAINS ON THE OTHER END OF THE LINE THROUGHOUT.

ROB [SHOUTING] Hello.

SAM DOESN'T REPLY AND HE TURNS THE MUSIC DOWN.

ROB Hello... Hello... Hello, who is that?

SAM EMITS A LOUD SNIFFLE BUT DOESN'T SPEAK.

ROB Hello... Sam is that you? Hello...? Sam?

SAM [FROSTY] My name is Samantha.

ROB [OBLIVIOUS] Hello Sam – why are you in a phone box? Do you want your shoe back?

SAM [FURIOUS] I'm not talking to you.

ROB Oh, what are you doing then?

SAM [VERY LOUDLY] I'm shouting at you!

ROB Why?

SAM [STILL YELLING] You know why.

ROB Sam please stop screaming at me and tell me what's wrong.

SAM [STILL YELLING] You're a pig Robby Walters, a great big fat dirty pig.

ROB It's a myth that pigs are dirty, actually they are very... (clean)

SAM [FURTHER INCENSED] Don't try to be clever with me Robby; you know exactly what you've done.

ROB And they're not fat either, just pig-shaped. I'm obviously not pig-shaped.

SAM [MAD AS HELL] Just pig-headed!

ROB Either tell me what I've done or let me get back to Blockbuster. [HE SINGS A BIT]
The cops are out... they're running about...

SAM [QUIETER, BUT STILL CROSS] They're rubbish.

ROB At least they're sweet, which is more than can be said for you.

SAM [TEARFUL] Do you want us to break up Robby?

ROB I didn't know we were together.

SAM [OFF AGAIN] What?

ROB Well we've only been out once and that was tonight.

THE RAIN BEATS HEAVILY ON THE PHONE BOX.

SAM [STIFLING SOBS] You do want us to break up don't you?

ROB As we're not together we can't really break up, can we? Is that rain I can hear? What are you doing out in the rain at this time in one shoe? Your mum and dad will go barmy.

SAM GIVES UP STIFLING HER CRYING AND WAILS.

ROB Please stop crying Sam and go home.

SAM [THROUGH SNIFFS] My dad would kill you if he knew what you did.

ROB [LOSING PATIENCE] What did I do? One minute we were dancing to 'The Twelfth of Never' and the next you were running off like Cinderella; you even left me your shoe. Donny Osmond's singing isn't that bad. On second thoughts... [perhaps it is]

SAM You know what you did.

ROB [GIVING IN] It was an accident.

SAM You don't touch a girl there by accident Robert Walters.

ROB Honestly my hand slipped. No one calls me Robert.

SAM [ANGRY AGAIN] You're a liar! I don't want to go out with you anymore.

ROB We're not... [going out together]

SAM I never want to see you again!

SHE SLAMS THE PHONE DOWN AND CRIES AS THE RAIN DRUMS ON THE PHONE BOX. PERHAPS A BIT OF 'THE TWELFTH OF NEVER'.

Scene 1b:

A FEW MINUTES LATER. VOICEOVER: SAM READS ANOTHER LETTER SHE IS WRITING TO CATHY AND CLAIR.

SAM Dear Cathy and Claire, my life isn't worth living. I've split up with my boyfriend because he wanted to... [SOBS] He tried to... you know... [SNIFFS] What am I going to do? I really love him... and he's got my shoe...

THIS FADES INTO THE LAST BIT OF 'BLOCKBUSTER'.

Scene 1c:

A FEW MINUTES LATER: ROB'S PARENTS' LIVING ROOM.

ROB SINGS LOUDLY OVER THE TOP OF 'BLOCKBUSTER' UNTIL IT FINISHES. WHEN IT ENDS THE RECORD GOES ROUND AND ROUND ON THE TURN TABLE CLICKING. ROB SWITCHES THE RECORD PLAYER OFF.

ROB [DOING A HENRY BLOFELD IMPRESSION AS HE DOES AN IMAGINARY RUN-UP] That pigeon had better look out because it's Robert Walters to bowl from the Pavilion end. Now can he make this his tenth wicket of the match? He's in... he bowls... and...[HESITATES FOR EFFECT, THEN YELLS]... he's bowled him! Oh my giddy aunt he's been bowled with a platform shoe! That's the end of Australia. They're all out for 75 and Rob Walters has achieved the impossible on his England debut...

FADE OUT OF BLOFELD IMPRESSION INTO REAL BLOFELD COMMENTARY, AT A POINT DURING THE HEADINGLY TEST IN THE 1981 SERIES AGAINST AUSTRALIA (WHICH BECAME KNOWN AS 'BOTHAM'S ASHES'). PREFERABLY

THE BIT DURING BOTHAM'S HISTORIC SECOND INNINGS KNOCK, WHICH
TURNED THE MATCH FOR ENGLAND.

Scene 2: Sam 22, Rob 23

ANNOUNCEMENT NUMBER TWO: 'THE DIRECT HIT'

SUMMER 1981: DEPARTMENT STORE.

ROB IS LISTENING TO HENRY BLOFELD ON TMS WITH THE RADIO PRESSED
AGAINST HIS EAR. WE GRADUALLY BECOME AWARE THAT HE IS IN A
DEPARTMENT STORE. THERE MIGHT BE SOME HORRIBLE PIPED MUSIC AND
PERHAPS AN ANNOUNCEMENT FOR A FREE KITCHEN KNIFE.

SAM [PERSUASIVELY] Ro-ob will you switch that off please?

ROB [GOOD NATURED] But Ian Botham's wacking it off his eyebrows

SAM [TRYING TO SHOW ENTHUSIASM] So are England winning?

ROB [AFFECTIONATELY] Sam this is cricket, no one's ever really winning.

SAM When are you going to let me watch you play?

ROB [EVASIVELY] No! I mean, I don't know... it's tricky... I haven't got the fixtures list yet.

SAM Well make sure you let me know when you have. Anyway, please switch it off; we've got to choose the presents.

ROB SIGHS AND SWITCHES OFF THE RADIO.

ROB You do realise that you're the only woman in the world I'd switch this off for.

SAM I know.

ROB I hope you're going to reward me later.

SAM [FLIRTY] Mmm... I might.

ROB [TRYING REALLY HARD TO SOUND INTERESTED] Okay then, where are these plates?

SAM I really like the Wedgwood.

ROB Okay.

SAM Shall we have the traditional blue or the ones with the gold rim?

ROB I don't mind.

SAM Which do you prefer?

ROB I have no preference.

SAM You mean you don't care!

ROB No, I just don't mind.

SAM But you must mind.

ROB No I'm really not bothered whether my plates have a gold rim or not.

SAM How can you not mind?

ROB I honestly don't notice the plate when I'm eating.

SAM We've got to decide what to put on our wedding list.

ROB Why do we have to have a list?

SAM It says in Fairytale wedding magazine. It's so that we don't get too many toasters.

ROB A spare toaster or two would be handy; they're always breaking.

SAM [IGNORING HIM] Okay, so we're having the Wedgwood with the gold rim; how many shall we have of each, six or eight?

ROB There's only two of us.

SAM We might have guests. Let's go for six, it's more affordable for people.

ROB I don't think my Auntie Betty will be able to afford any of it.

SAM Well she can join in with someone else to make up a set. So that's six large plates, six side plates, six soup plates...

ROB That's an awful lot of plates

SAM [IGNORING HIM] Six pudding bowls.

ROB Pudding bowls?

SAM [PICKING ONE UP] These.

ROB You wouldn't get much pudding in that. Why do you want those?

SAM They're polite. It says in Fairytale.

ROB There's nothing polite about a tiny bit of spotted dick. If you're having pudding you want plenty of it.

SAM In that case you come back for seconds.

ROB You might as well have the right amount in the first place. [HE PICKS UP A SOUP PLATE] These are a better size.

SAM Don't you know anything? Those are the soup plates!

ROB You could use them for pudding too.

SAM [SUDDENLY CHANGING HER TONE] You don't care about this wedding do you?

ROB What? [PLACATINGLY] Sa-am.

SAM You wish you hadn't asked me to marry you don't you?

ROB Of course I do... I mean I don't... I mean...

SAM I knew you didn't mean it.

ROB Of course I meant it. I just can't see the connection between loving someone and pudding bowls.

SAM If you really loved me you'd understand.

ROB In our house we use the cereal bowls.

SAM Well in our house we're going to do things properly.

ROB What's happened to you? I thought we were going to go travelling not worry about tableware. You used to dream about backpacking round the world.

SAM Well you used to dream about bowling for England, but now you've decided to do something more sensible thank God.

ROB I'm doing it for you Sam, so that we can get married. Anyway being a teacher won't stop me playing for England. It's temporary.

SAM I've started dreaming about things I can really make happen. I'm going to be like Princess Diana and float down the aisle in a Cinderella dress. I want romance! Why aren't you more romantic Rob?

ROB Department stores aren't very romantic places.

SAM Anywhere can be romantic if you're young and in love like we are. You need to be more spontaneous.

ROB You want me to be spontaneous? [LOUDLY] I love you.

SAM Sh... people will hear.

ROB [EVEN LOUDER] I love you! Come here!

ROB GRABS HER, AND KISSES HER.

SAM [STRUGGLING AND LAUGHING] Rob don't.

ROB [YELLING] I love you Samantha.

HE KISSES HER AGAIN AND SHE LAUGHS.

ROB You wanted spontaneity.

SAM Mind the pudding bowls!

THERE IS A SOUND OF BREAKING CROCKERY AS THE PUDDING BOWLS CRASH TO THE FLOOR.

ROB Oh no! I'm sorry.

SAM [LAUGHING] I wouldn't marry you if you were the last man on earth.

THE BREAKING CROCKERY BECOMES WEDDING BELLS.

Scene 2a

A FEW MONTHS LATER. VOICEOVER: SAM READS A LETTER SHE IS WRITING OVER THE BELLS.

SAM Dear Fairytale Magazine, I would like to enter your Bride of the Year competition. We are getting married on June 12th 1982...

FADE VOICE INTO BELLS

Scene 3: Sam 23, Rob 24

ANNOUNCEMENT NUMBER THREE: 'TIMED OUT'

SUMMER 1982: OUTSIDE THE CHURCH.

THE CHURCH BELLS ARE RINGING IN THE BACKGROUND.

SAM [HORRIBLY EXCITED] Quick the man from Fairytale wants to take some photos before the guests come out. I can't believe we're actually married. Oh Rob it's so romantic; I feel like Cinderella. I can't wait to escape from all these people so we can be on our own. It's going to be so perfect, just you and me together forever, happily ever after.

ROB [UNDER HIS BREATH] This was a huge mistake.

SAM What?

WE CAN HEAR THE PHOTOGRAPHER SAYING SOMETHING LIKE ‘STAND A BIT CLOSER TOGETHER’

ROB Nothing.

SAM Did you say ‘this was a huge mistake’?

ROB [TRYING TO COVER UP] I said ‘the vicar made a huge mistake’

SAM When?

ROB [MAKING IT UP] During the service.

SAM I didn’t notice anything.

ROB He said my name wrong.

SAM No he didn’t.

ROB You didn’t hear the Test Match score while you were waiting in the car did you?

SAM No

ROB I need to know if Botham’s got Kapil Dev out; he was on 28 last night. I’m going to see if I can find out the score.

SAM You can’t go now, what about the photographer.

ROB [GOING] I won’t be a minute, I’ll just see if the limo driver’s got a radio.

SAM [CALLING AFTER HIM] But what about the Fairytale Bride of the Year?

HE RUNS OFF AND THE GUESTS CAN BE HEARD COMING OUT OF THE CHURCH.

Scene 3a:

HALF AN HOUR LATER: THE LIMO.

HENRY BLOFELD IS COMMENTATING ON THE LORD’S TEST MATCH DURING THE SERIES AGAINST INDIA (SAT 12TH JUNE 82) ON THE CAR RADIO. IT WOULD BE GREAT IF IT WAS THE MOMENT WHEN BOTHAM GETS DEV, BUT HE COULD BE SAYING SOMETHING ABOUT LONDON BUSES. ROB TURNS THE RADIO DOWN AND STARTS TALKING TO HENRY.

ROB [ALMOST LIKE HE'S PRAYING] Hello Henry, it's Rob here. I've been bowled a wobbler and I'm walking back to the pavilion with everyone booing. I'm out for a duck and I've let the whole team down. I can't go back... I just can't. Oh, by-the-way, I've just got married and I think I've made a terrible mistake, I'm not actually talking about cricket you understand. I really love Sam, but I don't know how I ended up married. Forever is longer than a Boycott innings. [PAUSE] I suppose I'd better go back; I've been gone half an hour. At least we've got plenty of cake at the reception.

Scene 4: Sam 29, Rob 30

ANNOUNCEMENT NUMBER FOUR: 'THE UNEXPECTED DELIVERY'

SEVEN YEARS LATER. VOICE OVER: SAM IS READING A LETTER SHE IS WRITING TO THE NATIONAL CHILDBIRTH TRUST.

SAM Dear NCT, I have decided that I want a completely natural birth, please advise me on the best way to achieve this...

FADE OUT OF V/O INTO 'JINGLE BELLS'.

Scene 4a:

CHRISTMAS EVE 1989: THE LABOUR SUITE ON A MATERNITY WARD. SAM IS IN LABOUR AND THE BABY IS IMMINENT, WHICH SHOULD BE EVIDENT ALL THE WAY THROUGH THE FOLLOWING. SHE IS LYING ON THE BED TRYING TO DO HER BREATHING AS ROB APPROACHES.

SAM Where have you been?

ROB [APPROACHING] Sorry. I got chatting to the doctor about Allan Border. He's Australian.

SAM [VAGUELY] Who?

ROB The doctor. And Allan Border of course. [GETTING CARRIED AWAY] He was going on about how they thrashed us 4 nil, but we only had Botham for half the series...

SAM [INTERRUPTING] Rob, we've got to talk about tomorrow.

SHE GROANS AS SHE GETS A CONTRACTION

ROB [IGNORING HER] I've warned him that Beefy will be back by next winter... (and then they'd better look out)

SAM Will you be able to cook the lunch?

ROB [LAUGHS TO HIMSELF] My first child is going to be delivered by an Aussie; he's bound to be a wrong 'un. [SUDDENLY REALISING WHAT SHE SAID] Lunch?

SAM Yes! You can't have forgotten Aunty Betty.

ROB But you know I always watch 'The Miracle of Headingly' while you're cooking the lunch on Christmas day. I haven't seen it for a whole year. Won't you be back to cook it?

SAM [GETTING ANOTHER CONTRACTION] Of course not. You'll have to cook it yourself. [PANICKING] Now don't you dare go off and leave me like you did at our wedding.

SHE GROANS AS SHE GETS ANOTHER CONTRACTION

ROB [MORE SENSIBLE] I'm not going to leave you.

SAM It's what you usually do when things get tough. I've never forgiven you for losing me that competition.

ROB I came back didn't I? Anyway I was just a kid then. It was seven years ago.

SAM Well you're going to get a kid of your own soon.

SHE GROANS AGAIN

ROB You're making a lot of fuss.

SAM When was the last time you had a baby Rob?

ROB Why don't you have some gas and air?

SAM No! I've got to have a natural birth. It says in all the books.

ROB Well the baby won't be able to read the books.

SAM [UNREASONABLE] I still want to call him Lewis Ben or Louise Beth if it's a girl.

ROB You can't give a child the initials LBW Sam.

SAM [JUST GROANS]

ROB [BECOMING TEACHERY] Now breathe. You're supposed to breathe.

SAM [PANTING] I am breathing.

ROB [AS IF HE'S COACHING] Good. That's very good. Now take another deep breath. Good. Now breathe again... and hold it... one, two, three...

SAM For God's sake Rob shut up and let me get on with it.

ROB [TEACHERY AGAIN] Come on now breathe... [SAM PANTS] ... No no no... not like that... you've got to get your technique right...

SAM Shut up! You're supposed to be my birthing partner not a cricket coach!

SHE GETS OFF THE BED WITH A LOT OF EFFORT

ROB Where are you going?

SAM [MOVING AWAY] I don't want this baby...

ROB [CALLING AFTER HER] Sam come back! You're in labour

THE DOOR SLAMS AS SHE LEAVES THE ROOM GROANING. THIS BECOMES THE SOUND OF ROB GROANING FOR THE NEXT SCENE

Scene 5: Sam 31, Rob 32

ANNOUNCEMENT NUMBER FIVE: 'RETIRED HURT'

SUMMER 1991: A LOCAL CRICKET MATCH.

ROB HAS JUST BEEN HIT ON THE HAND BY A CRICKET BALL AND IS MAKING A GREAT DEAL OF FUSS. HE WALKS OFF THE PITCH TOWARDS SAM.

ROB [APPROACHING] Ow. Ow. Barnesy was an idiot throwing the ball at me like that.

SAM I thought you were supposed to hold on to it.

ROB When was the last time you caught a cricket ball Sam? Ow

SAM You're making a lot of fuss. What have you done?

ROB It's my finger. Call an ambulance or something! Ow. Oh God I think it's broken.

ROB'S CRIES OF AGONY FADE INTO THE LOVELY SOUND OF BAT ON BALL AND APPLAUSE.

Scene 5a:

HALF AN HOUR LATER: ON THE BOUNDARY.

ROB IS TOO INJURED TO PLAY SO THEY ARE WATCHING HIS TEAM LOSE. HE AND SAM ARE SITTING WITH THE KIDS. JENNY IS IN HER PRAM AND LEWIS IN HIS PUSHCHAIR. THERE IS AN ANNOUNCEMENT: 'WOLFREYS FROM THE CITY

END'. ROB IS FED UP BECAUSE HE CAN'T PLAY AND SAM JUST DOESN'T WANT TO BE THERE.

SAM Which team is winning?

ROB [IGNORING HER AND YELLING] Come on Julian give him a jaffa.

SAM What's a jaffa?

ROB A peach of a ball.

SAM So in cricket a peach is an orange? No wonder normal people can't make any sense of it. How's your hand?

ROB Very painful. I've told Alan Barnes to be more careful with his throws.

SAM I'm sure it's only bruised. I've never heard anyone make such a fuss.

ROB I don't think I'll be able to play for a while, they'll have to manage with Wolfreys. [SUDDENLY YELLING] Catch it Nick! Oh that was a sitter. Pathetic. [DOING GEOFFREY BOYCOTT] My Auntie Betty could have caught that in her pinny.

SAM Calm down Rob you'll wake Jenny.

A WHIMPER COMES FROM THE PRAM AND SAM GETS UP AND ROCKS IT

SAM Why do you get so excited? It's only a game.

ROB I have been trying to explain cricket to you since 1973, so that's nineteen years you've had to understand the basics.

SAM But it's all in a foreign language.

ROB If you understand cricket you understand life. You're keen enough to learn the language of that ridiculous play you're in.

SAM If you understand Restoration Comedy you understand life.

ROB I don't know why you're doing amateur dramatics anyway, as if you haven't got enough to do with the house and the kids and your dad and everything.

A CRY OF HOWZAT COMES FROM THE PITCH. ROB APPLAUDS LOUDLY

ROB [YELLING] Well bowled Julian! [THEN QUIETER TO SAM] It was looking like buffet bowling there for a bit.

SAM You're going to wake Lewis and then he'll want to get out of his pushchair and there will be chaos.

ROB Well that's what happens when you give a child the initials LBW Sam. [YELLING] Come on Nick bowl round his legs.

SAM You don't even know which part I'm playing or which play it is

ROB Which part are you playing?

SAM Millamant in 'The Way of the World'. You might as well test me on my lines instead of sitting here doing nothing.

ROB [INDIGNANT] I'm encouraging the rest of the team. Look at that for a rank long hop; Nick Freeman needs every bit of help he can get!

SAM They'd be more encouraged if you led by example. No wonder it took years for you to let me watch you play. [SHE HANDS HIM THE BOOK]. This is the scene where Mirabell proposes. Let's go from [AS MILLAMANT] *Mirabell, I'll lie abed in a morning as long as I please.*

ROB Ha! You wish!

SAM Read the next line please.

ROB [READING MIRABELL] *Then I'll get up as early as I like.*

SAM [SARCASTICALLY] He's obviously plays a lot of away cricket matches! [AS MILLAMANT] *Ah! Idle creature, get up when you will – and d'ye hear, I won't be called names after I'm married; positively I won't be called names.*

ROB [AS MIRABELL] *Names!* [AS HIMSELF] I'd call her names if she wouldn't get up in the morning.

SAM [AS MILLAMANT] *Aye, as wife, spouse, my dear, joy, jewel, love, sweetheart, and the rest of that nauseous cant, in which men and their wives are so fulsomely familiar – I shall never bear that – good Mirabell don't let us be familiar or fond, nor kiss before folks, like my Lady Fadler and Sir Francis.*

ROB The woman's bonkers!

SAM She just doesn't want to be taken for granted.

ROB Look at this list of rules she gives him before she says she'll marry him! [HE AFFECTS A POSH, SQUEAKY WOMAN'S VOICE] *Pay and receive visits from whom I please; write and receive letters without interrogatories; wear what I please; come to dinner when I please; to have my closet inviolet!* [AS HIMSELF] Anyone would think she was going to prison not marrying this perfectly decent bloke Mirabell.

SAM [DEFIANTLY] She knows what she's getting into. [AS MILLAMANT] *These articles subscribed, if I continue to endure you a little longer, I may by degrees dwindle into a wife.*

ROB [IRRITATED] You needn't think that I'm looking after the kids while you run around being militant.

THE BABY STARTS CRYING AND WAKES THE TODDLER WHO STARTS YELLING

SAM Oh no.

ROB [SUDDENLY DISTRACTED] Actually dwindle would make a good cricket term. Now would it be a stroke or a ball....?

SAM [PICKING UP THE BABY AND TRYING TO CALM THE KIDS] Sh.. it's okay Jenny Sh.... Rob can you see to Lewis?

LEWIS YELLS LOUDER.

ROB [OBLIVIOUS] Definitely a ball ... a mysterious slow delivery that dwindles into the stumps ... I shall send it to Blowers...

SAM [EXASPERATED] Rob can you get Lewis out of his pushchair?

ROB [GOING] We're going in for tea. I'll see you in there. [CALLING AFTER HIS MATES] Hang on Barnesy, I'm coming!

SAM STRUGGLES WITH THE TWO CHILDREN.

SAM [SHOUTING AFTER HIM] I've certainly dwindled.

THE SOUND OF 'TEA', PERHAPS CLINKING CROCKERY AND A BUZZ OF CONVERSATION, BECOMES THE RESTAURANT FOR THE NEXT SCENE.

Scene 6: Sam 39, Rob 40

ANNOUNCEMENT NUMBER SIX: 'OBSTRUCTING THE FIELD'

SEVEN YEARS LATER. VOICE OVER: SAM IS READING A LETTER SHE IS WRITING

SAM Dear Claire Raynor, my husband doesn't seem to care about me. I really love him, but the only thing he loves is cricket...

Scene 6a:

SUMMER 1998: A RESTAURANT.

IT'S SAM'S AND ROB'S 16TH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY. WE CAN HEAR THE LOW MURMURINGS OF OTHER DINERS, THE CLINK OF GLASSES AND CUTLERY, AND SOME DISCRETE CLASSICAL MUSIC. IT'S A VERY POSH RESTAURANT. SAM AND ROB CLINK GLASSES.

TOGETHER Happy anniversary.

ROB I can't believe it's been sixteen years. Where did that time go?

THEY SIT IN SILENCE FOR A LONG TIME. EVENTUALLY SAM BREAKS THE SILENCE

SAM This is very nice. [TO CLAIRE IN HER HEAD] *You see Claire he never helps me with the children or the housework.*

ROB Yes.

SAM How was the beef?

ROB Delicious.

SAM Good. [PAUSE] The lentil bake was nice too. [TO CLAIRE IN HER HEAD] *I have to do all the cooking as well as looking after elderly relatives.*

ROB Oh good. [PAUSE] How was your day?

SAM Fine... well busy actually. You?

ROB I had quite a good day for a change; Ms Laine was off sick.

SAM Aren't you getting on with her any better?

ROB She's the Head from Hell, always bossing... (me around)

SAM [INTERRUPTING] You just don't like being told what to do by a woman.

ROB [CHANGING THE SUBJECT] Dave Hill has got a trial for Warwickshire.

SAM That must bring back memories.

ROB I think he's got the potential to play for England. I knew it as soon as I saw him bat against King Edward's in year 9.

SAM There is some reward for being a teacher then?

ROB I just wish Lewis was more interested, but all he cares about is football.

SAM That's probably because you've bored him with cricket ever since he was born, you should try listening to what he's got to say about football. That's your problem, you never listen. [TO CLAIRE IN HER HEAD] *I've tried getting involved with things like amateur dramatics to take my mind off it, but it just means I have even less time to get everything done.*

ROB [INDIGNANT] I do!

SAM [EARNESTLY, TAKING HER OPPORTUNITY] It's because you're a man. I've been reading this fantastic new book called 'Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus' and it explains that men and women are incompatible because men can't listen to women and they don't speak the same language. You're probably worse because you're a teacher. You're used to talking not listening. You should read the book, I'm sure it would improve our relationship.

THERE IS A LONG SILENCE.

ROB There's nothing wrong with our relationship.

SAM Of course there is. [TO CLAIRE IN HER HEAD] *Please help me I'm at my wits end.*

ROB What exactly?

SAM Well you're a man and I'm a woman for a start. We're incompatible.

ROB [JOKING AND TRYING TO DIFFUSE HER] I wish you'd realised that before we got married.

SAM [DEADLY SERIOUS] The thing is, we don't actually talk to each other.

ROB I'm talking to you now.

SAM [TO CLAIRE IN HER HEAD] *Do you see what I mean Claire?* [TO HIM] You're saying words Rob; that's not the same as talking.

ROB [BECOMING ANNOYED] Well how else are we supposed to communicate?

SAM The problem is that you don't speak my language.

ROB Why do I have to speak your language? Why can't you learn to speak mine?

SAM [SUPERIOR] That's just typical of a man.

ROB [GETTING VERY HEATED] Did you know there was anything wrong with our relationship before you read that bloody book?

SAM If you read the book you'd understand.

ROB Is 'Men Are from Mars' your latest pet project?

SAM [FURIOUS] I knew you'd resort to that! Men have important missions while women have 'pet projects'! [TO CLAIRE IN HER HEAD] *So Claire, do you think it's time I got a job and tried to be more independent?*

FADE OUT OF RESTAURANT

Scene 7: Sam 39/40, Rob 41

ANNOUNCEMENT

NUMBER SEVEN: 'THE STUMPING'

A YEAR LATER. VOICE OVER: SAM IS READING A LETTER SHE IS WRITING TO THE AUTHOR OF 'MEN ARE FROM MARS'

SAM Dear John Grey, I tried to get my husband to read your wonderful book, 'Men are from Mars' but we had an argument about it. I really want my marriage to work, but I can't get my husband to make any effort...

FADE OUT OF VOICE INTO DISHWASHER STACKING**Scene 7a:**SPRING 1999: THE KITCHEN.

IN THE EARLY HOURS, AT THE END OF A PARTY. THE BIRDIE SONG CAN BE HEARD COMING FROM THE ROOM NEXT DOOR ALONG WITH SOME WHOOPS OF JOY AND LAUGHTER. SAM IS STACKING THINGS INTO THE DISH WASHER AND ROB IS WASHING UP THE REST.

BOB [ALLUDING TO THE NOISE NEXT DOOR] I haven't heard the Birdie song since our engagement party in 1981!

SAM I'm glad some people are happy about me being forty. Doesn't Auntie Betty ever get tired?

ROB Not since she had her new hip.

SAM She didn't eat much did she?

ROB I don't think she likes Tofu.

ROB DROPS A PUDDING BOWL AND THERE IS A CRASH OF BREAKING CROCKERY AS IT HITS THE FLOOR.

SAM Clumsy! What was it?

ROB The last of the Wedgwood.

SAM One of Auntie Betty's pudding bowls?

ROB It rebelled against those vegan mini bites.

SAM I thought we'd got three of those left.

ROB Lewis broke one in the microwave and Jenny uses the other one for the guinea pig's water.

SAM [OUT OF THE BLUE] Rob I want a divorce.

ROB [LAUGHING] That's a bit extreme isn't it? I mean it's only a pudding bowl.

SAM I'm serious

ROB Where's this come from all of a sudden? Talk about a googly.

SAM Actually that's part of the problem, you talk about googlies far too much.

THE SOUND OF THE PARTY GETS LOUDER AND THEN FADES INTO RUNNING BATH WATER.

Scene 7b:

A FEW WEEKS LATER: VOICEOVER: ROB IS TALKING TO HENRY WHILE RUNNING A BATH AND GETTING INTO IT.

ROB [SPLASHING] Well Henry who would have thought being single could be so much fun! I was shocked at first, but now it's fantastic! I feel like I'm 20 again! I'm never going to be taken in by a woman again! Who needs them? [PAUSE] I miss the kids though – even Lewis. Don't tell anyone, but I'd rather talk about football than nothing at all. Still mustn't get down-hearted, after all there are lots of single women to meet out in cyberspace.

HE LAUNCHES INTO A HORRIBLE RENDITION OF SPRINGSTEEN'S 'BORN TO RUN' WHICH GRADUALLY FADES INTO PARTY SOUNDS FOR THE NEXT SCENE

Scene 8: Sam 40, Rob 42

ANNOUNCEMENT NUMBER EIGHT: 'THE DODGY DECISION'

NEW YEAR'S EVE: 1999, 11.58 PM, CENTENARY SQUARE.

NINE MONTHS LATER. SAM AND ROB ARE ATTEMPTING A FAMILY NIGHT WHILE IN THE THROES OF DIVORCE. THE SOUND OF PEOPLE CELEBRATING IS ALL AROUND THEM AND GRADUALLY FADES SO THAT WE FOCUS ON THEM.

ROB [TRYING TO BE CHEERFUL] Any minute now we'll be in the new Millennium.

SAM [EDGY] Yes – and here's to a happy divorce! Another few months and it will all be over.

ROB The kids seem to be having a great time.

SAM Considering. [PAUSE] It was a shame you were so late getting here.

ROB I did explain.

SAM I don't know what you see in that car.

ROB It's a classic.

SAM And it doesn't go.

ROB Yes it does... sometimes... and anyway that's not the point.

SAM What is the point of having a car that keeps breaking down?

ROB We're separated I can do what I like now.

SAM You always did anyway!

ROB Not if I wanted any peace I didn't. Now I can listen to TMS in the bath, I can put Bruce Springsteen on whenever I want, and I can drive around in my vintage Ford Capri.

SAM You're obviously having a mid-life crisis.

ROB It's not a crisis; it's very nice.

SAM [SARCASTIC] You're really sad Rob.

ROB And you're not?

SAM Actually I'm not.

ROB It must be all those teenage boys you're sleeping with.

SAM Mark is not a teenage boy!

ROB He's young enough to be your son!

SAM He's 30!

ROB Lewis says you met him on the internet.

SAM Yes as a matter of fact I did.

ROB It's ridiculous computer dating at your age.

SAM If you're going to be rude I'm taking the kids home.

PAUSE. THE COUNTDOWN TO THE NEW YEAR BEGINS IN THE BACKGROUND

ROB I had a look at the list from your solicitor.

SAM Good.

ROB You've said I can keep the pudding bowl. I presume that's a joke

SAM Not at all, the guinea pig died last week, so he won't be needing it any more.

THE MILLENNIUM BELLS START CHIMING AND THEN BECOME A SCHOOL BELL FOR THE NEXT SCENE

Scene 8a

A FEW WEEKS LATER: OUTSIDE THE HEADMASTER'S STUDY. THE BELL IS RINGING FOR BREAK. SAM IS SITTING WAITING AND ROB ARRIVES LATE AS USUAL.

ROB [APPROACHING, OUT OF BREATH] Thank God, I thought I'd missed it. I've just run all the way from the car park.

SAM [SARCASTICALLY] Fortunately the Head Teacher's time keeping seems to be as good as yours. I suppose the Capri conked out again.

ROB [SITTING] No! I was in the middle of the Battle of Hastings. I got here as fast as I could.

SAM This is all your fault. If we hadn't split up ... (it would all be okay)

ROB How is it my fault? You're divorcing me!

SAM Lewis has never done anything like this before.

ROB No one's ever done anything like it before. Most builders wouldn't be stupid enough to leave a bulldozer at a school with its key in.

SAM Apparently the driver had only nipped to the loo.

ROB Mr Chatterjee says they'll have to completely re-turf the wicket.

SAM I know, but he told me they might be able to rescue the outfield with the roller.
[PAUSE] You and your bloody cricket! Lewis was doing it to spite you.

THEY SIT IN SILENCE FOR A MOMENT AND THEN ROB BEGINS TO LAUGH.

SAM What could you possibly find to laugh about?

ROB [HE TRIES TO STIFLE HIS LAUGHTER] Sorry, most kids get expelled for smoking round the back of the gym, but Lewis manages to rip up a whole cricket pitch.

HE CAN'T CONTROL HIMSELF AND BURSTS OUT LAUGHING AGAIN.

SAM [BEGINNING TO SEE THE FUNNY SIDE] His story is that it was an accident.
[LAUGHING] He only wanted to sit on it, but he hit the key by mistake...

SHE CAN'T CONTINUE FOR LAUGHING, SO ROB FINISHES THE STORY

ROB ... and it took off with him. It was old Chatterjee's fault for making Lewis field out at third man [HARDLY ABLE TO GET THE WORDS OUT] His mate Andy was furious; he was on a hat trick. [HE TRIES TO REGAIN CONTROL AND CAN'T] Mr Chatterjee had to push the wicket keeper out of the way or he'd have been flattened. [STILL TRYING AND FAILING TO SUPPRESS HIS LAUGHTER] But the good news is that first slip is recovering in hospital... Oh Dear...

HE GIVES UP AND TRIES TO GET HIS BREATH

SAM [STILL LAUGHING] It must run in the family. Do you remember when you went to kiss me and knocked all the plates over in Buxton's?

ROB [STILL LAUGHING, BUT LESS HYSTERICALLY] Yes! [REMEMBERING] That's why Aunty Betty bought us the pudding bowls.

THEY CONTINUE TO GIGGLE AFFECTIONATELY THROUGHOUT THE FOLLOWING.

SAM What about when I ran off and lost my shoe at the school disco?

ROB You were such princess. Do you remember when you were in labour with Lewis and you stormed out of the delivery suite?

SAM Yes! And what about when you thought you'd broken your finger playing cricket?

ROB And when you tried to make Aunty Betty... (eat Tofu)

FADE OUT OF CONVERSATION AND INTO 'THE TWELFTH OF NEVER'

Scene 9: Sam 42, Rob 43

THE MUSIC FADES.

ANNOUNCEMENT NUMBER NINE: 'CAUGHT IN THE COVERS'

AUTUMN 2001: A HOTEL ROOM A FEW MONTHS LATER. VOICEOVER: ROB IS TALKING TO HENRY WHILE PUTTING ON HIS PYJAMAS. SAM IS RUNNING THE TAPS IN THE ADJACENT BATHROOM, WHICH CAN BE HEARD IN THE BACKGROUND.

ROB Henry, she's in there having a bath. She's getting all ready. Any minute now she'll be here, expecting me to well... you know... get the ball in all the right areas, so to speak. But I don't feel ready. You see I'm so out of match practice, as it were... and... well... what if she doesn't like my pyjamas?

CUT STRAIGHT TO NEXT SCENE

Scene 9a

SAM AND ROB ARE IN BED HAVING SEX. SAM IS VERY CONFIDENT, BUT ROB IS NERVOUS. THERE IS RUSTLING OF SHEETS THROUGHOUT.

SAM [SEXILY WHISPERED] Are you glad you changed your mind?

ROB [MORE MATTER OF FACT] Of course.

SAM We are better together aren't we?

ROB My solicitor thought I was mad.

SAM So did mine, but I just explained to her that we were very young when we got married and that we were childhood sweethearts before that and that we'd just lost sight of what we had.

SAM GIGGLES AND THERE IS MUCH RUSTLING OF SHEETS

ROB [ALARMED] What are you doing? [TO HENRY IN HIS HEAD] *Henry I think I've got a problem.*

SAM Don't you like it?

ROB You've never done that before. [TO HENRY IN HIS HEAD] *Um... I'm bowling on a very flat pitch.*

SAM There's a first time for everything [COMPOSING A LETTER TO DR RUTH IN HER HEAD] *Dear Dr Ruth, my husband and I have just got back together after a near divorce...*

ROB You obviously had lots of practise while we were apart. [TO HENRY IN HIS HEAD] *You see I've lost my technique.*

SAM [GIGGLING AND RUSTLING] What did you expect me to do Rob? [TO DR RUTH IN HER HEAD] *...but I think I've made a huge mistake.*

ROB You were lovely and innocent when I first knew you. [TO HENRY IN HIS HEAD] *I can't seem to bowl a maiden over.*

SAM I was 14 when you first knew me! [TO DR RUTH IN HER HEAD] *I'm becoming very frustrated...*

ROB [BEGINNING TO REALLY PANIC] You're not the same person. [TO HENRY IN HIS HEAD] *I haven't got a full toss...*

SAM Neither are you! [TO DR RUTH IN HER HEAD] *...with my husband's lack of enthusiasm in bed.*

ROB [HIDING HIS ANXIETY WITH ANGER] I suppose you practise sex techniques along with business skills on that MA you're doing. [TO HENRY IN HIS HEAD] *...my zooter is non existent...*

SAM You think people should only have sex in the dark while still wearing their pyjamas. [TO DR RUTH IN HER HEAD] *...I feel I'm doing well careerwise...*

ROB Are you saying you don't like my pyjamas? [TO HENRY IN HIS HEAD] *...and my doosra is right up the swanny!*

SAM [TO DR RUTH IN HER HEAD] *...but I want to be more fulfilled in my personal life.* [TO ROB] You know you could always try taking the blue pill.

ROB [HORRIFIED] Are you saying what I think you're saying? [TO HENRY IN HIS HEAD] *Henry you've got to help me.*

SAM I think you should do something about it if you want our marriage to work this time. I've got a really good book called 'The Big O'. I think you might... (find it helpful)

ROB TURNS THE RADIO ON AND LISTENS TO HENRY BLOFELD COMMENTATING ON THE OVAL TEST, DURING THE ASHES 2001

SAM AND ROB TOGETHER [TO DR RUTH AND HENRY DESPERATELY] *I've made such a huge mistake.*

FADE OUT ON HENRY COMMENTATING.

Scene 10: Sam 43, Rob 44

ANNOUNCEMENT NUMBER TEN: 'EDGED TO SLIP'

SUMMER 2002, ALMOST A YEAR LATER: VOICEOVER: SAM READS A LETTER SHE'S WRITING TO THE AUTHOR OF 'CAN YOU HAVE IT ALL?'

SAM Dear Ms Horlick, I have been so inspired by your wonderful book. I have started to plan my life with precision and determination. If you can do it so can I. My husband isn't ambitious, but I realise that I can 'Have it All' if I really want it...

FADE OUT OVER HER TALKING.

Scene 10a:

THE ROBIN ROOM AT A UNIVERSITY.

IT IS JUST BEFORE SAM'S GRADUATION CEREMONY. THERE IS AN EXCITED BABBLE OF CONVERSATION FROM FELLOW GRADUATES AND THEIR FAMILIES. SAM IS PUTTING ON HER GOWN AND BOARD.

ROB That hat is ridiculous.

SAM [DRESSING AND LOOKING IN THE MIRROR] Didn't you have to wear one when you graduated?

ROB You know I didn't attend the ceremony.

SAM Oh yes I remember. [WITH AN EDGE] Why was that exactly? Was it because you only got a Third Class degree?

ROB [REGRETTING TAKING HER ON] Yes, well, I was too busy playing cricket to do much studying...

SAM While I, on the other hand, am about to receive an MA with a Distinction...

ROB [SNAPPY] There's no need to gloat.

SAM ... which I have managed to achieve despite very little assistance from you.

ROB [GETTING UNPLEASANT] What I want to know is, who's going to pick up the kids from school now you've got that fancy new job?

SAM Now Lewis is at the Grammar he can easily get the train and you can collect Jenny on your way home. She can stay for after school club.

ROB You've got it all worked out haven't you? I've never had to pick the kids up.

SAM This is too big an opportunity to miss. Tristan thinks I can be a huge asset to the company.

ROB Who is Tristan?

SAM My new boss; he's a self-made man. He's quite an inspiration.

ROB Are you sure you want to spend your life selling people stuff they don't want?

SAM They do want it. They just don't know until I tell them.

ROB I couldn't do it.

SAM But you sell stuff to the kids you teach all the time. How many of your kids want to learn History?

ROB That's different.

SAM I can't see how.

ROB [GETTING ON HIS HIGH HORSE] You're pedalling the religion of Consumerism. You convince people that they will be a failure if they don't possess the latest gadget.

SAM Well you try to convince impressionable schoolchildren that they are nothing without learning.

ROB Because that's true!

SAM What about cricket? All that jargon you're always forcing on me and anyone else unfortunate enough to be in the same room.

ROB But cricket is endlessly fascinating; you just don't get it.

SAM It's a belief system like any other. The Laws are worse than the Bible.

ROB At least it has a code of conduct, not like your system of selling to the most vulnerable.

SAM [DISMISSIVE] You choose to believe in the ideals of cricket and education while I choose to believe in something that might pay the mortgage. No wonder our marriage doesn't work.

SOME FORMAL MUSIC, WHICH COULD BE THE DEGREE CEREMONY STARTING, BUT THEN TURNS INTO A FUNERAL MARCH.

Scene 10b

VOICEOVER: SAM CONTINUES READING MORE OF HER LETTER TO NICOLA HORLICK OVER THE MUSIC.

SAM ... Actually Nicola (I feel as if we are friends) my husband doesn't understand my newfound drive and confidence; he keeps trying to undermine my efforts and put me off success and... well I don't know quite how to put this... I've done a terrible thing... I've never done anything like it before, but you see he's obsessed with cricket... (and I wanted to get my own back.)

FADE OUT OF VOICE AND BRING MUSIC UP INTO FUNERAL MARCH

Scene 11: Sam 43, Rob 44

THE MUSIC FADES

ANNOUNCEMENT NUMBER ELEVEN: 'HIT WICKET'

AUTUMN 2002: A CAR INTERIOR

FEW MONTHS LATER. WESTLIFE'S 'UNBREAKABLE' PLAYS ON THE RADIO. ROB IS TRYING TO REVERSE OUT OF A NARROW DRIVE AND STARTS FIDDLING WITH THE RADIO AT THE SAME TIME, WHICH CRACKLES IN AND OUT OF TMS (IT WOULD BE GOOD IF A BIT OF COMMENTARY COULD SAY

THAT RAIN HAS STOPPED PLAY AT THE OVAL IN THE DECIDING TEST AGAINST INDIA) . SAM IS IN THE PASSENGER SEAT

SAM [A BIT ANXIOUS] I hope the kids will be alright with Aunty Betty, she never looks very happy to have them.

ROB [FIDDLING WITH THE RADIO] That's because the last time he was here Lewis demolished her roses with the lawnmower!

SAM Perhaps we should take them with us after all.

ROB [STRUGGLING TO DO TWO THINGS AT ONCE] No! We are not taking Lewis to a funeral; he might go joyriding in the hearse! [DISTRACTED] Why can't you get long wave in cars any more? I said we should have brought the Capri. [TMS COMES ON LOUDLY ANNOUNCING THAT RAIN HAS STOPPED PLAY] What! No! Now the series will be a draw!

SAM [TRYING TO SWITCH OFF THE RADIO] You can't listen to cricket on the way to my father's funeral! [THEY STRUGGLE WITH THE CONTROL] Look out you're going to hit that... (wall)

THERE IS A LOUD BANG AND THE CAR STOPS WITH A JOLT.

ROB [ENRAGED] What have I hit?

SAM [CALMLY, TURNING THE RADIO OFF] The wall.

ROB Who put that there?

SAM It's always been there.

ROB It hasn't always been that colour!

SAM [REMARKABLY TOGETHER] Aunty Betty had it painted when she had the pebbledash done. If anything it's easier to see.

ROB [RESIGNED] I'd better go and have a look at it

ROB GETS OUT OF THE CAR TO INSPECT THE DAMAGE AND SLAMS THE DOOR. HE SHOUTS BACK TO SAM, WHO REMAINS IN THE CAR AND WINDS THE WINDOW DOWN AND CALLS BACK TO HIM THROUGH IT. WE GO WITH ROB WHO STAMPS ABOUT INSPECTING THE DAMAGE.

Scene 11a:

OUTSIDE THE CAR: CONTINUOUS

ROB [CALLING FROM THE BACK OF THE CAR] It's dented the bumper and scratched the paint!

SAM [SENSIBLE] Is it still driveable?

ROB Just about. I'll pull the bumper out a bit so it doesn't catch the wheel.

HE STRAIGHTENS THE BUMPER. IT COMES OFF IN HIS HAND.

ROB Shit!

SAM [FROM THE CAR] What's happened?

ROB [CALLING BACK] Nothing! Won't be a minute.

HE CONTINUES TO FIDDLE ABOUT TRYING TO RE-ATTACH THE BUMPER.

ROB [TO HENRY IN HIS HEAD] *Henry I'm having the day from Hell! Not only is it raining at the Oval and the series is one-all, but I've got to drive my wife to her poor old dad's funeral. She wouldn't let him listen to the cricket either. She said he was too ill, but it might have cheered him up! He loved cricket. England might have beaten India in the one dayers if Sam's dad had been cheering them on. She's made such a fuss about looking after him; anyone would think she was Mother Theresa. My parents were thoughtful enough to peg it early and Auntie Betty doesn't take much looking after. Mind you, I suppose her forty-a-day habit will catch up with her eventually. Anyway I think Sam's finally gone off her rocker. You'll never believe what she did...*

SAM [CALLING FROM THE CAR] Come on Rob, we'll be late!

ROB [TO HENRY IN HIS HEAD] *Sorry Henry... I'll have to tell you another time*
[CALLING BACK TO SAM] Okay – nearly there.

HE GIVES THE BUMPER A FINAL THUMP, STAMPS BACK TO THE CAR AND GETS IN. WE GET BACK IN THE CAR WITH THEM.

Scene 11b

INSIDE THE CAR: CONTINUOUS

SAM What took so long?

ROB [STARTING THE CAR] The bumper fell off.

SAM Idiot!

ROB At least it was an accident, which is more than can be said for what you did.
[PAUSES THEN LAUNCHES IN: THIS IS HIS MOMENT] I'll never forgive you for what you did.

SAM [RESIGNED] Oh not that again. It was an accident.

ROB It was bad enough having to pretend it was Bonfire Night in September!

SAM It was Dad's favourite, I didn't want him to miss it!

ROB It could have given me a heart attack, never mind your father.

SAM [BEGINNING TO PANIC] Now isn't the time Rob; we need to get there.

ROB It was a terrible thing to do.

SAM I didn't do it on purpose.

ROB No one dresses a Guy in cricket whites by accident.

SAM Well I did.

ROB I got the shock of my life; one minute I was trying to light a rocket and the next I was watching my effigy go up in smoke.

SAM It was an accident alright! I wanted something to dress the guy in and they just happened to be lying around.

ROB You must have known what they were; you've been washing them for the last twenty years.

SAM [LOSING IT] Exactly Rob. I've been washing your cricket whites for twenty years. Now all I ask in return is that you are supportive on the day of my Dad's funeral.

ROB [PULLING OUT OF THE DRIVE] I'm being supportive. I'm driving you to the crematorium aren't I?

SAM Is that what you think it means to be supportive? For goodness sake just drive will you! You know what? I need someone to do all the things for me that I do for you. I need a wife. [SUDDENLY YELLING] Look out Rob!

THERE IS A LOUD THUMP AS ROB HITS THE CAR IN FRONT

Scene 12: Sam 45, Rob 46

ANNOUNCEMENT NUMBER TWELVE: 'REFERRED TO THE THIRD UMPIRE'

SUMMER 2004: AN OFFICE AT RELATE.

ABOUT 18 MONTHS LATER: IT IS VERY QUIET, BUT A CLOCK TICKS IN THE BACKGROUND. SAM IS SITTING IN THE WAITING ROOM ON HER MOBILE PHONE TO ROB. WE ONLY HEAR HER SIDE OF THE CONVERSATION.

SAM [ON THE PHONE IN A HUSHED VOICE] ... I said 7.30 Rob!... I don't care what happened to the Capri! We're trying to save our marriage in 2004 not 1974!... Just park it and get here!

SHE CLICKS THE PHONE OFF AND WAITS. THE CLOCK TICKS.

ROB [ARRIVING AND SITTING. LOUD AND GRUMPY] Well I'm here.

SAM [IN A HUSHED VOICE] Ssh. There's a couple in there.
[SARCASTICALLY] I hope you managed to avoid their 4x4 in the car park. [PAUSE] Now we're supposed to be completely honest. Frank will just be there to make sure it doesn't become another row.

ROB [EQUALLY HUSHED] Who's Frank?

SAM [IRRITATED] The Relate counsellor!

ROB This is a terrible idea.

SOUND OF TICKING CLOCK

Scene 12a:

A FEW MINUTES LATER.

SAM AND BOB ARE TALKING TO FRANK INDIVIDUALLY. THEIR SPEECHES ARE CROSS CUT. SAM GETS MORE AND MORE ANGRY AS HER SPEECH PROGRESSES. ROB GETS SADDER AND QUIETER AS HIS SPEECH PROGRESSES.

SAM Rob has a points system.

ROB Samantha is unhappy. I've never been able to work out why, she just is. We've been together for over thirty years and she's still trying to fix me.

SAM Everything he does for me, even the smallest, tiniest little thing, like driving me to my dad's funeral, gets at least ten points.

ROB But I don't want fixing; I just want to be left in peace to teach History and follow the cricket.

SAM Everything I do for him: washing his cricket whites, bringing up the kids, cleaning, cooking, earning more because I've got a better job, and all that stuff that I do on a regular daily basis, has no value according to Rob.

ROB I've never once seen Sam happy. She keeps looking for things to try and make her happy.

SAM Nil points.

ROB She's been in love with love.

SAM At the end of the day Rob totals up our points and finds that he's way ahead of me because he put the bins out for the first time in six months, for which he awarded himself fifty points.

ROB Then she wanted to be Bride of the Year.

SAM I, on the other hand, have a minus score...

ROB She's tried collecting china, natural childbirth...

SAM ...because I forgot to record the cricket highlights on Channel 4...

ROB ... amateur dramatics, being a vegetarian, being a high powered career woman: but she's never tried just 'being'.

SAM ... so he took points away from the points he hadn't given me!

ROB Sam is on a quest for perfect happiness, but she takes it so seriously it makes her more miserable by the day. [PAUSE] Oh... and I think she's having an affair.

SOUND OF TICKING CLOCK

Scene 13: Sam 46, Rob 47

ANNOUNCEMENT NUMBER THIRTEEN: 'THE YORKER'

SUMMER 2005: THE GARDEN.

ABOUT A YEAR LATER. A LAWNMOWER DRONES IN THE GARDEN NEXT DOOR. ROB IS LISTENING TO TMS ON THE RADIO. IT'S THE NAIL BITING END OF THE ENGLAND V AUSTRALIA TEST AT EDGBASTON. THE COMMENTATOR DESCRIBES HARMISON BOWLING ANOTHER FRUITLESS DELIVERY AND ROB LETS OUT A GROAN OF FRUSTRATION.

ROB No-ooo

HE SWITCHES OFF THE RADIO IN AGITATION

SAM [APPROACHING] Hello. [NOTICING THE STATE HE'S IN] Has someone died or are you having a heart attack?

ROB [WHISPERING LIKE A MAN POSSESSED] It's because I'm listening.

SAM [VERY MATTER OF FACT] Well put the TV on.

ROB [STILL WHISPERING] But then I'd be watching and that would be worse! That's why I had to leave Edgbaston and come home; if I watch them they won't be able to do it. [LOUDER, STILL LIKE A MAD MAN] No, no, no... I must stop listening or watching. [TINY WHISPER] I mustn't even think about it...

SAM [STILL MATTER OF FACT] Good. I've got something important to tell you.

ROB [UNREASONABLY ENRAGED] What could be more important than the Ashes?

SAM Our marriage.

ROB Oh that!

HE SWITCHES THE CRICKET BACK ON, BUT LEAVES THE VOLUME LOW. SAM PAUSES FOR BREATH AND THEN DOES THE FOLLOWING AS IF IT'S A LONG SPEECH WITHOUT LISTENING TO ROB'S RESPONSES.

SAM You know when we went to Relate last year...

ROB How could I forget frank Frank?

SAM ... and you accused me of having an affair...

ROB Well it was just something to say really.

SAM ... and I denied it...

ROB I thought I'd accuse you of something for a change.

SAM ... and then I screamed at you and broke Frank's clock and left home for three days...

ROB It was one of your more spectacular tantrums.

SAM ... well it was true. I mean you were right. I've been having an affair with Tristan.
[PAUSE] My boss.

ROB I know who Tristan is.

SAM We're in love. I'm leaving and I'm not coming back. I'm going to have it all!
[PAUSE] Aren't you going to say anything?

IT IS APPARENT FROM THE COMMENTARY THAT ENGLAND HAVE WON. ROB TURNS THE SOUND UP AND CELEBRATES WITH THEM.

ROB [YELLING IN JUBILATION AND RUNNING ABOUT] Yes... yes... yes... Oh my God! Yes!

Scene 13a:

A FEW WEEKS LATER: THE SAME.

ROB IS LISTENING TO THE FINAL ASHES TEST AT THE OVAL. THE COMMENTARY IS AT THE POINT WHEN IT BECOMES OBVIOUS THAT KP HAS

SAVED THE MATCH AND ENGLAND ARE GOING TO WIN THE SERIES.
SUDDENLY HE TURNS THE RADIO DOWN.

ROB Henry, it's Rob. I know I should be happy, but I'm not. It's been weeks. I don't think she's coming back this time. I've never thought about it before, but I can't function without her. I know it's not the longest she's left me for, but somehow it seems the most final. Even when we were going to get divorced I knew it wasn't really over. I knew that it was just a break, so I pretended to be a teenager again. What am I going to do? Jenny won't speak to me; she's on her mother's side. Would you believe it? Jenny says she likes Tristan! As for Lewis, he never actually speaks. I'm sure I was able to talk by the time I was seventeen. He's so peculiar; probably because he was born in a corridor. There's got to be some way of getting her back. If only I could convince her that I really need her, that I'll even give up the points system if she'll just come back and tell me what to do again. That's the truth isn't it Henry? I mean if we're playing with a straight bat here, the truth is that I need something to kick against. I need her to care.

HE TURNS UP THE RADIO AND THE ROAR OF THE ASHES CELEBRATIONS GETS LOUDER AND THEN FADES.

Scene 14: Sam 47, Rob 49

ANNOUNCEMENT: NUMBER FOURTEEN: 'CAUGHT AND BOWLED'

CHRISTMAS EVE 2006: ABOUT EIGHTEEN MONTHS LATER. VOICEOVER. SAM READS ANOTHER LETTER SHE IS WRITING TO NICOLA HORLICK.

SAM ... even you must have come to realise that you can't 'have it all' Nicola. I know you're divorced now, so that proves it! I suppose I can have some of it. But you see I don't know which bits to have. I mean which are the best bits: the relationship, the career, the family, the beautiful home, or the endlessly fulfilling 'me time'? Perhaps you can 'have it all', just not all at once. Tristan turned out to be just like Rob – a man! At least Rob was always faithful... I suppose it's better the devil you know... (so I think I might go back to Rob)

FADE OUT OF VOICE AND INTO PARTY MUSIC. PERHAPS 'I WISH IT COULD BE CHRISTMAS EVERY DAY'

Scene 14a

INSIDE THE COAT CUPBOARD UNDER THE STAIRS. A CHORUS OF 'HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU DEAR LEWIS' CAN BE HEARD COMING FROM A ROOM SOME DISTANCE AWAY. SAM, HAVING SEEN A GIRL LEAVING THE COAT CUPBOARD, OPENS THE DOOR AND DISCOVERS ROB.

SAM Rob!

ROB [TRYING TO HIDE THE FACT THAT HE IS REALLY DRUNK] Sa-am!

SAM What were you doing with Kelly?

ROB She was helping me look for my Santa outfit.

PAUSE

SAM [ICY] She's Jenny's best friend

ROB I know

SAM I think you might have been breaking the law.

ROB [UNABLE TO HIDE HIS DRUNKENNESS] She's sixteen, I checked.

SAM What were you thinking of?

ROB [GIGGLING] Not cricket!

SAM I can't believe this is happening. It's Christmas Eve and Lewis's 18th. Everyone is here...

ROB Even Aunty Betty!

SAM ... and you are in the coat cupboard having sex with a girl only slightly older than your daughter

ROB We weren't having sex. [SUDDENLY JOYFUL] We were snogging! [WISTFUL] I haven't kissed a girl like that since... ooh... 1973. What was her name? [THINKS] Samantha! It was you Sam!

SAM [UNMOVED] Aunty Betty is waiting for her coat.

ROB Isn't it amazing that Aunty Betty is still alive. She's going to outlive us all! Isn't she staying for cake?

SAM No

ROB Which is her coat?

SAM The tweedy one.

ROB [HANDING IT OVER] It's lovely.

SAM I am going to kill you Robert.

ROB I haven't been called Robert since... [THINKS] ...1973 [A REVELATION] That was you too Sam! [REMEMBERING WITH ENORMOUS ENJOYMENT] It was after I put my hand on your breast while we were dancing to Puppy Love. [WISTFUL AGAIN] Women are like test matches; I can remember all the details.

SAM It was 'The Twelfth of Never' and actually it was my bottom.

ROB [NOT LISTENING] I must say Kelly didn't seem to mind. Girls are so much more advanced these days.

SAM I'm going to pack.

ROB Well that won't take long; you've only been back two days.

SAM I should never have come back

ROB [DRUNKENLY SPITEFUL] How is good old Tristan? Celebrating Christmas with... ooh... what's her name? [THINKS] Imogen! That's it! Imogen his new PA. Isn't that the job you used to have?

SAM [WALKING AWAY] I'm really not coming back this time.

ROB [CALLING AFTER HER] Have you still got those shoes?

THE NOISE OF THE PARTY GETS LOUDER AND THEN FADES OUT.

Scene 15: Sam 49, Rob 50

ANNOUNCEMENT NUMBER FIFTEEN: 'PLAYED ON'

EARLY 2008: A YEAR OR SO LATER: VOICEOVER. SAM READS A LETTER TO HERSELF.

SAM Dear Samantha, I've finally realised that you are the wisest person I know. You have had so much experience of life and you're the only person who really knows how I feel. How much time have I wasted doing what other people say? I'm going to be my own mentor from now on. How many wonderful people didn't I meet? How many things didn't I do? And how many places didn't I go because of my relationship with Rob and my obsession with having it all? Rob isn't capable of changing and I'm sick of compromises...

FADE OUT OF VOICE AND INTO A CROWD OF PEOPLE SINGING 'HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU'.

Scene 15a:

ROB'S LIVING ROOM: IT IS ROB'S BIRTHDAY AND HE IS SURROUNDED BY PEOPLE SINGING 'HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU'. AT THE END OF THE SONG EVERYONE STARTS SHOUTING 'SPEECH, SPEECH.'

ROB [IN HIS HEAD] *Oh my god! I can't stand this anymore. I've got to get out!*

ROB RUNS OFF LEAVING THE PARTY BEHIND.

Scene 15b:

ROB'S HALL : CONTINUOUS. WE TRAVEL WITH HIM AS HE RUSHES DOWN THE HALL, LEAVING PEOPLE CALLING AFTER HIM('ROB!' ROB!' 'WHERE ARE YOU GOING?' 'WHAT'S WRONG' ETC.).

ROB [TO HENRY IN HIS HEAD WHILE RUNNING] *Henry, it's Rob. This is an emergency! What am I going to do? I'm fifty!*

Scene 15c:

ROB'S COAT CUPBOARD: CONTINUOUS. HE OPENS THE COAT CUPBOARD DOOR AND CLIMBS INSIDE CLOSING IT BEHIND HIM AND SWITCHING THE LIGHT ON. IT IS MUCH QUIETER.

ROB [TO HENRY OUT LOUD] I've got no hair. I've got no prospects. I've got no friends on FaceSpace. [PAUSE] Everyone thinks I'm an idiot, especially Jenny and Lewis. And as for Sam... (I hardly recognise her).

SUDDENLY SAM OPENS THE DOOR AND CUTS HIM OFF. SHE TALKS TO HIM THROUGH THE OPEN DOOR FROM OUTSIDE THE CUPBOARD.

SAM Where is she?

ROB Who?

SAM The girl! When you hide in the coat cupboard you're sure to be with a girl. There are lots of Jenny's friends here; it could be any of them.

ROB Well come in and have a look then!

SAM CLIMBS IN THE CUPBOARD WITH ROB DURING THE FOLLOWING

SAM Why did you run off like that?

ROB I don't want to talk about it.

SAM Fortunately most of the guests are too drunk to notice.

ROB What are they doing?

SAM RUMMAGES ABOUT AMONGST THE COATS

SAM Drinking mostly. It's time you cleared out some of this junk.

ROB I keep thinking you might come back.

SAM I'm not coming back Rob. I don't want to be one half of something anymore.
[SHE CONTINUES TO RUMMAGE ABOUT AND SUDDENLY FINDS SOMETHING THAT SURPRISES HER] Good grief! Would you believe it?

ROB What have you found?

SAM Only these.

SHE HANDS HIM A PAIR OF PLATFORM SHOES.

ROB Where did you find those?

SAM They were in that box with the last pudding bowl.

ROB Ah.

SAM You sentimental old fool. Why did you keep them?

ROB Well, when Aunty Betty died I... (wanted to keep it.)

SAM Not the bowl, the shoes.

ROB Oh. I don't know. I suppose they reminded me of when you used to be Cinderella.

SAM As soon as I stopped behaving like that you didn't know what to do.

ROB I suppose I felt as if you needed me then.

SAM I'm not the same person.

ROB I know.

SAM Women are brought up to be Cinderella. We're taught to believe that we deserve to be looked after. If we are perfect enough we will have all life's riches bestowed upon us. My life was one continual quest for perfection. I wanted to have it all.

ROB Along with Prince Charming!

SAM I certainly never found him. I finally realised that no matter how much nut roast I ate I was still going to die in the end.

ROB What do you think it was that changed you?

SAM It wasn't one thing, it was all of it.

ROB You certainly tried enough things.

SAM I think women start at the beginning and keep trying different things in the hope of finding who they are, while men decide who they are early on and then try to become that person.

ROB [UTTERLY MISERABLE] I wanted to make out it was you that stopped me from doing things, but all the time it was me. All these years I used you as an excuse for my lack of ambition. If I did what you told me I never had to admit that I just wasn't good enough to play professionally.

SAM [TEASING A BIT] And now you're sitting in a cupboard at the end of the Corridor of Uncertainty.

ROB Yes

SAM And you're experiencing a batting collapse.

ROB [SADLY] Yes, I'm a rabbit.

SAM [UNDERSTANDINGLY] And someone's bowled you a Yorker.

ROB [BEGINNING TO REALISE WHAT SHE'S DOING] Or a Chinaman.

SAM [ENCOURAGING] But you could lamp it through Extra Cover.

ROB [SEEING SOME HOPE] With a slog!

SAM You just need to play yourself in.

ROB And avoid being stumped

SAM There's always hope in cricket. I mean you could forge a new partnership.

ROB [PERKING UP] That's right, you get a second chance.

SAM There's another innings.

ROB Only if it's a Test. What if it's a one-dayer?

SAM Then you need to maximise your Power Plays.

ROB [LAUGHING WITH DELIGHT] Ah, but what if it rains?

SAM Then there's always the Duckworth Lewis.

ROB You're speaking my language!

SAM I always could, I just didn't let on.

PAUSE

ROB So do you think you might... (come back)

SAM No. You'll have to make do with talking to Henry. Tell me, does he ever answer back?

ROB (LAUGHING) You know!

SAM Of course! At first I thought you were just talking to yourself, but then I heard you going on about chocolate cake some time in the 1980s and I realised it was Henry.

ROB Were your confidants any more help? I used to find the letters sometimes.

SAM (LAUGHS) I never sent them. I was too scared of what they might tell me to do.

ROB Are you sure you won't come back Sam?

SAM I can't. I've decided to stop trying to have it all. But I'm definitely going to have something. [SHE CLIMBS OUT OF THE CUPBOARD TO FREEDOM] Rob it's time we both got out of this tiny box we've squashed ourselves into.

FADE INTO A SNIPPET OF 'THE TWELFTH OF NEVER'

Scene 15d

SOMETIME LATER. THE MUSIC FADES

ROB [VOICEOVER] Hello Henry, it's Rob. Sam's gone for good this time, but it's okay, I mean it's the start of a new season and (*there will be something relevant to the series in New Zealand, depending on the result*) anything could happen...

FADE INTO SAM'S SPEECH

SAM [VOICEOVER] Dear Sam, I'm glad you worked out which were the best bits. It's a shame it took you thirty five years to realise that Rob wasn't one of them...

FADE OUT ON THE BIT OF '50 WAYS TO LEAVE YOUR LOVER' THAT GOES, 'THE PROBLEM IS ALL INSIDE YOUR HEAD SHE SAID... ETC'

9. JESUS THE DEVIL AND A KID CALLED DEATH

Notes on the play

A recording script with numbered lines was produced by the production assistant from my original. This is much harder to understand unless the reader is involved with the technical side of the production or acting in it, so this script is in the format of the final draft accepted for recording by Radio 4. It is formatted more like a TV script like the previous play with a list of locations at the beginning. This reflects its rather filmic structure in moving from place to place.

Directions on SFX are specific and detailed as in the previous play.

There are simple directions to actors in parenthesis throughout. This is because the rehearsal time for a radio play is very short: a single read-through and discussion followed by recording. The total time allowed for a 45 minute play is usually 2 days.

The dialogue ran unexpectedly fast in recording, so I was able to include scenes and dialogue from earlier drafts that had been edited out of the final draft because Peter thought it would be too long. These are included at the end. The scene numbers differ because they are based on the BBC recording script not my original.

JESUS, THE DEVIL AND A KID CALLED DEATH TREATMENT

An idea for a forty-five minute radio play by Carolyn Scott Jeffs

Jesus falls in love with the Devil, and Death is the narrator of their story in this contemporary comedy. Jesus and the Devil are characters in the Lichfield Mysteries play *Harrowing of Hell*. Death doesn't really exist (well only in his own mind) because he's not in the play, but he really feels he should be.

The local school's Year 11 GCSE Drama group has been allocated *Harrowing of Hell* by the Mysteries committee, and Nick, a boy with more ASBOs than he can count, has been cast as Jesus. His drama teacher hopes it will sort him out; he's very talented, but in danger of being excluded from school. Chrissy has been cast as Lucy-fer (in a bid for gender equality and because there's no one else); she is prim and religious and horrified at being given such a role. Daniel is Chrissy's obnoxious little brother; he's only Year 8 and can't be in the play because he's too young, but he has to stay behind to watch his sister rehearse. He gets so bored that he invents a character for himself called Death, and he plays the part in his imagination.

To begin with Nick and Chrissy hate each other, but over the rehearsal period they fall in love, and we witness their relationship directly, as they practice their *Harrowing of Hell* scenes, and through the eyes of Daniel, as he watches them take on some of the traits of the characters they are playing. Daniel starts out hating Nick and Chrissy almost as much as they hate each other. Nick is always pushing him around, while Chrissy is so wrapped up in herself that she hasn't even noticed that their parents are splitting up. Daniel's misery increases when he is horribly bullied by a gang of boys in his class. To his astonishment Nick intervenes to stop him being beaten up. Daniel finds himself pouring out his troubles to Nick over a burger after the incident, and Nick in turn, tells Chrissy what's happened. Chrissy doesn't believe Nick at first, but eventually realises that he is sincere. She starts to take more interest in Daniel and confesses that she has noticed the situation with their parents, but didn't want to admit it was happening. Daniel describes the changes to the listener as rehearsals progress; he is amazed when the bullying, surly, Nick becomes considerate and friendly. He's even more astonished by the change in his sister, who he's always thought too goody-goody for words (once she loosens up a bit he almost likes her). Daniel is more grown-up by the end and he finds that Chrissy isn't such a terrible sister after all. Chrissy discovers that it's sometimes good to be bad; when Nick asks her out during the final performance she says yes. Nick learns that there's more to life than petty crime and impressing your mates and they all find they have more in common than they ever thought.

Characters:

NICK/JESUS	16, a boy who transforms from delinquent to diligent
CHRISSY/LUCY-FER	16, a girl who transforms from haughty to human
DANIEL/DEATH	13, a boy who grows up a bit.

Style: Naturalistic comedy with Daniel's narration recorded straight to mic, interspersed with scenes between the characters, which incorporate some of the Mysteries' verse.

JESUS, THE DEVIL AND A KID CALLED DEATH SCRIPT

By Carolyn Scott Jeffs

Directed by Peter Leslie Wild

CAST

Nick/Jesus – James Rastall

Chrissy/Lucyfer – Leah Brotherhead

Daniel/Death – Connor Doyle

Mrs Woodhouse – Alison Belbin

Afternoon Play BBC Radio 4

17 February 2001 14.15 – 15.00

CHARACTERS:

<i>NICK/JESUS</i>	16, a boy who transforms from delinquent to diligent
<i>CHRISSY/LUCY-FER</i>	16, a girl who transforms from haughty to human
<i>DANIEL/DEATH</i>	13, a boy who grows up a bit
<i>MRS WOODHOUSE</i>	40s, a sincere teacher

LOCATIONS:

1. Bathroom
2. Playground
3. Corridor
4. Classroom
5. Rehearsal room
6. School toilet
7. Theatre foyer
8. Burger bar
9. Kitchen
10. Cathedral

TIME AND PLACE:

Present day in a Cathedral town in the Midlands

STYLE:

Naturalistic

PUNCTUATION:

/ : Second speaker talks over the first from /

... : Unfinished sentence; either the character can't say the words or is cut off before the end of the speech.

() : Words in brackets are unspoken.

MUSIC: USE BITS OF THE FOLLOWING AND WEAVE THROUGHOUT THE PIECE AS SUGGESTED OR WHEREVER THEY SEEM TO FIT, *LOVE STORY* BY TAYLOR SWIFT, *SOMEWHERE OVER THE RAINBOW* BY ISRAEL KAMAKAWIWO'OLE, AND *HEY THERE DELILAH* BY PLAIN WHITE TS

Scene 1:

OPENING MUSIC: *LOVE STORY* – PERHAPS PLAY UNDER OPENING DIALOGUE AND FADE INTO PLAYGROUND SCENE.

VOICEOVERS STRAIGHT TO MIC

DANIEL This is the story of Death.

CHRISSY Hello God, it's Chrissy.

DANIEL I'm Daniel and it all happened last year when I was 13.

FX LOO FLUSH

CHRISSY You know Mrs Woodhouse...

DANIEL My big sister was always talking to God in the toilet.

CHRISSY ... my GCSE Drama teacher, well she wants me to be in a play she's directing.

DANIEL And she really hated a boy called Nick.

SCHOOL PLAYGROUND

CHRISSY IS WALKING TO HER DRAMA LESSON

NICK [SHOUTING FROM A DISTANCE] Oy Chrissy!

CHRISSY [YELLING BACK] Get lost Nick!

NICK [RUNNING UP BEHIND HER] How's the God Squad?

CHRISSY I'm ignoring you!

NICK You want to, but you can't! What's it like saying all those prayers?

CHRISSY I've got to get to my Drama lesson.

NICK Me too!

CHRISSY But you never come to lessons.

NICK I've been put on report. Dad says he'll kill me if I get excluded again.

CHRISSY Mrs Woodhouse will be pleased. She thinks you're good at Drama.

NICK She's really stupid. I hate Drama. It's just more of a doss than Science.

CHRISSY Why are you so anti-everything?

NICK I like some things.

CHRISSY Oh yeah – what?

NICK Hot babes and football!

CHRISSY There are more things in life than girls and football.

NICK What – like being a God Botherer?

CUT TO V/O

Scene 1a:

VOICEOVERS STRAIGHT TO MIC

DANIEL Things in our house were terrible. It was all Dad's fault. Chrissy wouldn't talk about Mom and Dad; she liked to stick her head in the sand.

FX CHRISSY WASHING HER HANDS.

CHRISSY [PRAYING] I know you won't mind because the plays are about you and Jesus and it was a way of telling Mediaeval people the Bible stories before anyone could read. The thing is – and this is the bit you might not like... but I don't want to lie to you... and anyway you know I could never ever tell a lie...

FX BANG ON THE BATHROOM DOOR

DANIEL [FROM OUTSIDE DOOR] Chrissy! Hurry up – I'm desperate!

CHRISSY Sorry God – I'll fill you in later.

CUT TO V/O

Scene 1b:

VOICEOVER STRAIGHT TO MIC

DANIEL Always telling the truth was important to Chrissy, which was funny because she was lying to herself. As for Nick the ASBO King, Mrs Woodhouse had a surprise for him too.

SCHOOL CORRIDOR

NICK SINGS A FOOTBALL CHANT TO THE TUNE OF QUE SERA SERA AS HE WALKS ALONG IN NOISY FOOTBALL BOOTS.

NICK [SINGING] John Carew Carew
He's Bigger than me and you
He's gonna score one or two
John Carew Carew

A DOOR OPENS AND MRS WOODHOUSE STOPS NICK IN HIS TRACKS

MRS W Nick! I was hoping I'd see you today. Can I have a word?

NICK I've got to get to football practice.

MRS W It won't take a second. Come in.

CLASSROOM CONTINUOUS

HE FOLLOWS HER INTO THE CLASSROOM RELUCTANTLY AND SHE CLOSSES THE DOOR BEHIND HIM.

NICK [SIGHS GRUMPILY]

MRS W [SITTING] Have a seat.

NICK [SITTING] Is this about that essay I didn't hand in?

MRS W No.

NICK What then?

MRS W You could be so good at Drama, Nick, if only you would make the effort.

NICK I'd rather play football.

MRS W I know you would, but you've got real natural talent and I would like you to be in the Mystery play I'm directing.

NICK No way!

MRS W [PASSIONATELY] The Mystery plays are a huge event in the town with lots of different groups taking part. I've been asked to direct the Harrowing of Hell.

NICK [A BIT INTERESTED] Harrowing of Hell?

MRS W Yes...

NICK [MUCH KEENER] Like Samurai Vampire Bikers from Hell?

MRS W[NOT LISTENING] ... we are bringing the community together with these plays and it's an opportunity for you to be a part of something that is bigger than that gang you're in and I ... [think you should embrace it wholeheartedly.]

NICK [EXCITED] Can I ride a Harley and fight with a sword?

MRS W [STOPPED IN FULL FLOW] I'm afraid Jesus didn't have a sword.

NICK [HORRIFIED] Jesus?

MRS W I want you to play Jesus in the Harrowing of Hell.

NICK I'm not playing Jesus!

MRS W That's a shame because the girl playing the Devil is very good and you're the only boy in the school who might be a match for her.

NICK [EXCITED AGAIN] The Devil is being played by a girl?

MRS W Yes, she's Lucy-fer. I'm trying to get some gender equality into it.

NICK When's the first rehearsal?

Scene 2:

VOICEOVER

DANIEL SINGS A FOOTBALL CHANT TO THE TUNE OF KARMA CHAMELEON.

DANIEL [SINGING] Gabby gabby gabby gabby gabby agbon-lo-hor
Hes gonna score hes gonna score-(ore ore ore)
Repeat...

I wanted to be watching Villa from the Holte End, but instead I was watching my stupid sister rehearse. She was too goody-goody to play the Devil, but at least she couldn't stand Nick, so she didn't have to act that.

FADE INTO

A REHEARSAL ROOM

A SCHOOL REHEARSAL FOR THE MYSTERY PLAY 'HARROWING OF HELL' IS IN FULL SWING. IT ISN'T GOING WELL. CHRISSY IS HAVING A FEEBLE STAB AT LUCYFER. SHE IS VERY WOODEN.

CHRISSY [AS LUCYFER] Dogs of hell make right
 To welcome on this fiery night
 The man that cometh here
 In terror and in fear.

MRS W Well done Chrissy, that's the idea, now try the next part. Ah, Nick, do join us.

NICK [APPROACHING] What's she doing here?

MRS W Chrissy is just rehearsing one of her speeches.

NICK What's she playing? Angel Gabriel?

MRS W Lucyfer.

NICK What? No!

CHRISSY [AS LUCYFER – STILL WOODEN] Jesus that is the son of God
 With careful steps to us he trod
 And you may do your worst.

NICK Is that the best you can do?

MRS W Well it needs a bit of work.

NICK It's rubbish.

CHRISSY Do you have to be so rude?

MRS W Try not to be negative Nick, we all have to improve.

CHRISSY Please tell him to go away Mrs Woodhouse. I can't rehearse with him here.

MRS W Nick's in the play, Chrissy.

CHRISSY What!?

MRS W He's our Jesus. Now have another try with more feeling.

CHRISSY [AS LUCYFER – FURIOUS, SO BETTER] Jesus that is the son of God
 With careful steps to us he trod
 [YELLING IT AT NICK] And you may do your worst.

MRS W Yes, well I think it's improving.

FADE INTO

Scene 2a

VOICE OVER

DANIEL Nick was right though. I didn't see why Chrissy should get to be a star while I had to sit around and watch her rubbish performance. Why should she be the only one who got to take her mind off Mom and Dad? I invented a character of my own and tried to persuade Mrs Woodhouse to let me be in the play.

CUT TO

REHEARSAL ROOM

MRS W I'm sorry Daniel I haven't got time to see you today.

DANIEL Please Miss, just let me do a bit for you.

MRS W But there isn't a character called Death in the Mysteries. What exactly does he do?

DANIEL He's the Devil's assistant – a sort of junior Grim Reaper. Please Miss.

MRS W [RESIGNED] Alright, but hurry up; I'm late for a staff meeting.

DANIEL [AFFECTING DEATH VOICE] I am Death the Devil's Disciple and ... (I collect souls)

MRS W [HURRIEDLY CUTTING HIM OFF] Yes, that's very good Daniel.

DANIEL But there's more Miss; I've written a whole speech.

MRS W I've got to go now, but I'll think about it.

DANIEL Please say I can be in it Miss; I could help round up the souls in Hell.

MRS W Why do you want to be in it so much anyway?

DANIEL I don't like it at home any more Miss.

MRS W Why ever not?

DANIEL My Dad's having an affair with his boss and my mum cries all the time.

MRS W Oh dear!

DANIEL I think they're going to get divorced Miss.

MRS W I'm very sorry to hear that Daniel. Chrissy's never mentioned it.

DANIEL She keeps pretending it's not happening Miss.

MRS W I see. [RELENTING] Alright, you can be in Harrowing of Hell, but you can only say one line.

FADE OUT INTO NEXT SCENE

Scene 3:

VOICE OVER

DANIEL It wasn't easy being the Grim Reaper – no one expects a Villa fan to drag them off to Hell - well not unless they support the blues. Anyway Chrissy wasn't getting any better at playing the Devil and Nick was about as far from being the Son of God as you could imagine.

REHEARSAL ROOM.

NICK AND CHRISSY ARE REHEARSING. MRS WOODHOUSE STANDS AT A DISTANCE.

MRS W [LOUDLY DIRECTING] Okay Nick, begin with Jesus on page 4.

NICK [AS JESUS] Let me in
To this place of sin
I am God's son and I will win
[AS NICK] Who wrote this?

CHRISSY Mrs Woodhouse wrote it.

MRS W [APPROACHING] I've re-written Harrowing of Hell to make it more contemporary. [MOVING AWAY] Do it again please, Nick.

NICK [AS JESUS, BUT REALLY AGGRESSIVE] Let me in
To this place of sin
I am God's son and I will win

CHRISSY Are you going to do it like that?

NICK Like what?

CHRISSY Like a football hooligan.

NICK So?

CHRISSY Jesus was kind.

NICK Like I care about some ancient bloke who did miracles.

CHRISSY If you knew more about Jesus you might not be so angry.

NICK The only thing I'm angry about is being in this play!

CHRISSY Perhaps if you researched your role you might do it better.

NICK Get lost God Botherer!

MRS W [FROM A DISTANCE] Can we just get on with the rehearsal please.

CHRISSY [AS LUCYFER] What is this light
 That is so bright
 Such a spell
 Was never before seen in Hell.

MRS W [FROM A DISTANCE] Very good Chrissy. Well done for learning you lines.

NICK You don't sound anything like the Devil. You're more like a nun!

CHRISSY Shut up!

MRS W [FROM A DISTANCE] Okay; do the same lines again please.

NICK I'm dying for a fag. Have you got any Sister Christina?

CHRISSY No.

MRS W [FROM A DISTANCE] From the same place please Nick.

NICK [AS JESUS, MUCH BETTER] Let me in
 To this place of sin
 I am God's son and I will win.

MRS W [FROM A DISTANCE] Good!

NICK What about your little brother over there? Does he smoke?

CHRISSY You'll have to ask him!

MRS W [FROM A DISTANCE] Concentrate please, Chrissy!

CHRISSY Sorry Miss. [AS LUCYFER, STILL FEEBLE] What is this light
 That is so bright
 Such a spell

Was never before seen in Hell.

NICK [LAUGHS NASTILY] Pathetic! So has Dan-the-Man got any fags? [CHRISSY DOESN'T REPLY] That means he has. Now I know who to get them from!

CUT TO

Scene 4:

PRESENT DAY: VOICE OVER

DANIEL Nick thought he could throw his weight around just because he was second in command of the Friary Fighters.

FADE INTO

THE SCHOOL PLAYGROUND

NICK IS KICKING A CAN AS HE SINGS A FOOTBALL CHANT

NICK [SINGING TO THE TUNE OF AYE AYE YIPPY YIPPY AYE] Singing aye aye Ashley, Ashley Young!
Singing aye aye Ashley, Ashley Young!
Singing aye aye Ashley, Ashley Young!
Aye aye Ashley, Ashley Young!

[SPOTTING DANIEL AND RUSHING OVER] Oy! Dan-the-Man! Giz a fag!

DANIEL I don't smoke.

NICK Chrissy says you do! [MIMICS CHRISSY] 'Daniel, God knows you're a smoker and you won't be allowed into Heaven.' She'd be quite fit your sister if she didn't keep banging on about God.

DANIEL I haven't got any cigarettes.

NICK Come here!

NICK GRABS DANIEL AND SEARCHES HIS POCKETS

DANIEL [STRUGGLING]_Ow! Pack it in! I said I haven't got any!

NICK [FINDING FAGS] What are these then, eh? [HE SHOVES DANIEL AWAY] They're mine now. [WALKING OFF] Thanks Dan-Man! Next time just give them to me when I ask.

Scene 6:VOICE OVER

DANIEL They didn't call him Nasty Nick for nothing! Like I needed him tapping me for fags with what was happening at home and everything. And how could anyone fancy my sister?

SNAP TOREHEARSAL ROOM

MRS W Okay, let's get started.

DANIEL Can I say my line today Mrs Woodhouse?

MRS W If we get time Daniel.

DANIEL But I haven't practised it yet.

MRS W Right everyone, take it from Jesus' entry into Hell

NICK [AS JESUS] I am God's son.

CHRISSY [AS LUCYFER] Get thee hither [SHE PRONOUNCES IT 'HI THERE'] from this place.

MRS W Chrissy, it's hither like slither.

CHRISSY [AS LUCYFER STILL FEEBLE] Dogs of hell make right
 To welcome on this fiery night
 The man that cometh here
 In terror and in fear.
 Jesus that is the son of God
 With careful steps to us he trod
 And you may do your worst.

NICK [AS JESUS] Open these gates and let me through
 I have much to do
 In liberating a chosen few.

MRS W That's very good Nick. Perhaps you could try Chrissy's speech and give her some inspiration.

NICK LAUNCHES INTO A BRILLIANTLY DEVILISH VERSION OF LUCYFER'S SPEECH

NICK [AS LUCYFER] Dogs of hell make right

To welcome on this fiery night
 The man that cometh here
 In terror and in fear.
 Jesus that is the son of God
 With careful steps to us he trod
 And you may do your worst.

MRS W Brilliant! Thank you Nick.

FADE INTO

V/O

DANIEL It was the same at every rehearsal, I waited for my turn to speak, but Mrs Woodhouse never got round to me. She just kept going on about Nick's genius. I got more and more bored, and then suddenly Mrs Woodhouse was saying my name.

CUT TO

REHEARSAL ROOM

MRS W Daniel! Daniel, wake up!

DANIEL [SLEEPILY] I am the grim reaper and I've killed my teacher!

MRS W What did you say?

DANIEL Nothing Mrs Woodhouse.

CHRISSY Hurry up and say your line.

DANIEL What?

NICK It's your line! Get on with it Dan-Man!

DANIEL [DOING DEATH VOICE] Death is here, so all must fear!

MRS W No, that's not the line.

DANIEL Um...

CHRISSY Say your line Daniel!

DANIEL I can't remember it!

MRS W You've only got one!

NICK [LAUGHS NASTILY]

MRS W It's "I am Death the Devil's disciple". You'll have to do better in future Daniel.

FADE INTO

Scene 7:

V/O

DANIEL So I got my big chance and blew it because Nick and Chrissy were so boring! I hated my sister for all her prissy praying and hymn singing. She just came home one day and said she'd found Jesus. I don't think Nick was quite what she had in mind. But even I had to admit that he was a good actor. Chrissy, on the other hand, just couldn't do it.

CUT TO

REHEARSAL ROOM

MRS W I don't understand why you're having such a struggle with this part.

CHRISSY Neither do I, Miss.

MRS W You don't seem to be putting as much effort into it as you usually do. I thought perhaps there was something bothering you.

CHRISSY Like what?

MRS W Well [HESITATES] Daniel seems very worried about your parents.

CHRISSY Whatever he's told you... It's not true!

MRS W Right, well, if it's not that what is it?

CHRISSY I think it's playing the Devil, Miss. I don't know how to be evil.

MRS W No one is expecting you to be evil, Chrissy.

CHRISSY But I need to be bad so that I can be good.

MRS W You don't need to actually be bad, you just need to act being bad. Just like Nick is acting being good. Do you see?

CHRISSY I think so, Miss.

FADE INTO

Scene 8:

V/O

DANIEL I suppose Chrissy had her own problems. But even so, talking to God in the toilet was a weird thing to do. And it wasn't just the toilet at home; she'd talk to him in any old loo she could find, even at school.

SCHOOL TOILET

FX A GROUP OF GIRLS GIGGLING AND CHATTING AS THEY LEAVE,

CHRISSY [WHISPERING, SO'S NOT TO BE OVERHEARD] Hello God! I think Daniel's told Mrs Woodhouse about Mom and Dad. I said it wasn't true, but I don't think she believed me. I thought if no one knew about it then it might not happen. That's not a lie is it? I mean they might stay together. I don't know what to do. And Mrs Woodhouse says I've got to be better in the play, but I know you can't help with that because of the part I'm playing, and I don't want anyone to know but I think Nick is a really great actor...

FADE INTO

SCHOOL CORRIDOR

CHRISSY EMERGES FROM THE LOO AND SEES NICK

NICK Hello Sister Christina. Are you coming to rehearsal?

CHRISSY Like you care.

NICK Wouldn't want to have to do your lines as well as my own.

CHRISSY Get lost!

NICK Why don't you wear something else instead of that tablecloth dress? You might look more like Lucy-fer.

CHRISSY Why don't you mind your own business?

NICK Just trying to help. You could probably be quite sexy if you tried.

FADE INTO

CLASSROOM

MRS W Nick, you know that we don't allow smoking in school.

NICK They're not mine!

MRS W Then whose are they?

NICK They must be Chrissy's.

CHRISSY They're not mine!

MRS W Chrissy doesn't smoke Nick.

NICK How do you know?

MRS W [HESITANT] I'm sure she doesn't.

CHRISSY I don't!

NICK [MANIPULATIVE] Because I'm not as goody goody as Chrissy so it must have been me that was smoking!

PAUSE

MRS W [ASHAMED] That was very wrong of me. I'm sorry.

CHRISSY It wasn't me Miss!

MRS W It must have been someone else. You can go. Don't be late for tomorrow's rehearsal.

THEY OPEN THE DOOR AND GO TO LEAVE

MRS W Can I just have a quick word, Nick?

NICK See you tomorrow Sister Christina!

CHRISSY Worst luck!

CHRISSY GOES

NICK [SULKY] What now?

MRS W I think you've got a real future.

NICK Yeah right. [PAUSE] Doing what, Miss?

MRS W As an actor. In the theatre of course.

NICK I've never been to the theatre.

MRS W There's a production of Romeo and Juliet next week. I'm taking a school trip. Why don't you come along? Chrissy's coming.

NICK I can't afford it, Miss. My dad won't pay for anything like that.

MRS W I'm sure I can find a spare ticket.

FADE INTO

Scene 9:

V/O

DANIEL Nick could wrap Mrs Woodhouse round his little finger. His ears must have been burning every time Chrissy went to the loo!

CUT TO

BATHROOM

FX BRUSHING HAIR AND SPRAYING PERFUME

CHRISSY I know you don't like me talking about Harrowing of Hell rehearsals, but I'm so confused. You know I've got to play opposite this boy, Nick, well he's been telling lies about me smoking and you know how much I hate liars! Anyway, I'm going to the theatre tonight on a school trip. I think I might wear that skirt I bought in Top Shop. I know it's a bit short, but it might make me feel a bit more like Lucy-fer. I'm not doing it because Nick said...

FADE INTO

THEATRE FOYER

FX PERHAPS THE FIVE MINUTE BELL AND ANNOUNCEMENT

NICK It's Sister Christina!

CHRISSY [ANNOYED] What are you doing here?

NICK Same as you – seeing Romeo and Juliet.

CHRISSY You needn't think I'm sitting next to you.

NICK That's a nice skirt.

CHRISSY Thank you.

FADE INTO

THE SAME AFTER THE PLAY

FX AUDIENCE LEAVING

NICK It was awesome. Romeo is part of this gang called the Montague's...

CHRISSY I know what it's about numbskull, I've just seen it.

NICK You should play Lucy-fer more like Mercutio, you know, be more devilish.

CHRISSY What would you know?

NICK I know how to be the Devil.

CHRISSY You mean you know how to be evil! You tried to blame me when Mrs Woodhouse found your cigarettes. You're a liar!

MRS W [APPROACHING] What's going on?

NICK Nothing Mrs Woodhouse.

CHRISSY Nick keeps telling me how to play Lucy-fer.

NICK I was just trying to help.

MRS W [MOVING AWAY] Yes – well that's very good.

CHRISSY I hate you.

NICK That's not very Christian is it?

CHRISSY You're a liar!

NICK Didn't Jesus forgive liars?

[PAUSE]

CHRISSY You need to be nicer as Jesus.

NICK How?

CHRISSY I don't know! Try smiling more

PLAY OUT ON *HEY THERE DELILAH* (THE BIT THAT GOES '... WHAT YOU DO TO ME...' ETC) AND FADE INTO NEXT SCENE

Scene 10:

V/O

DANIEL [REVOLTED] Ergh! Chrissy and Nick were like Romeo and Juliet! That was all I needed – something else to distract Chrissy from the situation at home.

CUT TO

BATHROOM

FX SOUND OF RUNNING TAP

CHRISSY [WASHING HER HANDS] God, it's Chrissy. I know I can't talk about the play, but there's something funny going on with Nick. I mean yesterday at rehearsal he smiled. He actually smiled. I'll never forgive him for lying of course, but it's like playing Jesus is making him nicer.

Scene 11:

CLASSROOM

MRS W So, how did you enjoy Romeo and Juliet, Nick?

NICK It was brilliant.

MRS W What was brilliant about it?

NICK It was all about gangs.

MRS W Yes, amongst other things. Well spotted.

NICK There's a lot of killing and being killed though. I've never thought about gangs like that before.

CUT TO NEXT SCENE

Scene 12:

V/O

DANIEL It wasn't long after that something really strange happened. [SLIGHT PAUSE] I was crossing the playground on my way to yet another Harrowing rehearsal when I suddenly found myself surrounded by the Friary Fighters.

FADE INTO

SCHOOL PLAYGROUND

FX THREATENING VOICES

VOICE 1 Give us your money!

DANIEL I haven't got any!

VOICE 2 We're going to be here again tomorrow, so you'd better have some money or you'll really get it.

FADE INTOV/O

DANIEL I still went to rehearsal and said my line, but I didn't tell Chrissy or Mrs Woodhouse. Nick just ignored me. I thought he'd probably put them up to it. The next day I wore my villa shirt, just like I always did when I needed to feel tough.

FADE INTOSCHOOL PLAYGROUNDFX THREATENING VOICES

VOICE 1 Where's the money?

DANIEL I haven't got any!

VOICE 2 What did we tell you yesterday?

VOICE 1 You're going to get it now!

FX SOUND OF DANIEL BEING KICKED AND PUNCHED TO THE GROUND.

DANIEL [CRYING] Leave me alone!

NICK [APPROACHING WHILE SINGING TO THE TUNE OF KARMA CHAMELEON]
Gabby gabby gabby gabby gabby agbon-lo-hor hes gonna score, hes gonna score-ore-ore-ore.
[SUDDENLY SEEING WHAT'S HAPPENING] Oy leave him!

FX SOUND OF FIGHT ESCALATING AS NICK DEFENDS DANIEL

NICK [WINNING THE FIGHT] I said leave him!

FX PUNCHING KICKING AND CRIES OF PAIN

VOICE 1 What you doing Nick?

FX MORE PUNCHES AND CRIES OF PAIN

VOICE 2 I thought you were one of us.

FX KICKING

NICK I've had it with your gang! Now clear off unless you want more where that came from!

FX GANG RUNNING OFF

VOICE 1 [RUNNING AWAY] You haven't heard the last of this!

FADE INTO

Scene 13:

CLASSROOM

CHRISSY IS TRYING TO EXPLAIN TO MRS WOODHOUSE.

MRS W Have you seen Nick today, Chrissy?

CHRISSY He was here this morning.

MRS W I thought he was going to give up hanging about with that gang, the way he was talking last night. Who will play Jesus if he lets me down?

CHRISSY I'm sure he won't do that, Mrs Woodhouse. Um... [MAKING IT UP] I think I heard him say he was going to the dentist's after school.

MRS W He didn't mention it to me.

CHRISSY I'm sure he's not with the gang.

MRS W I hope you're right, Chrissy.

CHRISSY He's got a lot more into the play now, hasn't he Miss?

MRS W I've certainly noticed the change in him, and you seem to be getting into the play more too.

CHRISSY I am Miss. I'm feeling much more like Lucyfer.

MRS W Good. Well, as Daniel doesn't seem to be here either, we will just have to rehearse the devilish new you without them.

FADE INTO

Scene 14:A BURGER BAR.

FX PERHAPS A VOICE SAYS 'DO YOU WANT FRIES WITH THAT?' DANIEL AND NICK ARE EATING A BURGER.

DANIEL Why did you help me?

NICK I saw your Villa shirt.

PAUSE

NICK [SINGS TO QUE SERA SERA] John Carew Carew

DANIEL [SINGS] He's Bigger than me and you

TOGETHER He's gonna score one or two
John Carew Carew

THEY LAUGH

NICK It's a good job you're a Villa fan, or I'd have left you for dead.

DANIEL Thanks!

NICK I wouldn't really. I've had enough of the Fighters picking on little kids.

DANIEL Are you going to leave the gang then?

NICK Yeah. I'd rather do acting.

DANIEL Is it because of Chrissy?

NICK No!

DANIEL You and my sister are so funny.

NICK What do you mean?

DANIEL You fancy her like mad and she really likes you so... (you should ask her out.)

NICK Get lost! [CHANGING THE SUBJECT] So why were the Fighters picking on you?

DANIEL I used to be able to keep out of their way, but since I started walking home it's been harder. Well you know. I mean what about when you took my fags?

NICK Oh yeah. Sorry about that. Here, have mine.

HE HANDS OVER FAGS TO DANIEL

DANIEL [SURPRISED] Thanks! Why did you do stuff like that?

NICK I dunno really. I thought it looked cool in front of the lads. But then I saw all that killing in Romeo and Juliet.

DANIEL Don't you think the Fighters will come after you?

NICK I'm not scared if they do. [PAUSE] So why do you have to walk home now?

DANIEL Dad always used to give me a lift, but he's started coming home later and later...

FADE INTOVOICEOVER.

DANIEL I told Nick all about my dad and how he might be having an affair with his boss at work. How Mom got sadder and sadder. And he really listened.

PLAY OUT ON SOMEWHERE OVER THE RAINBOW AND FADE INTO NEXT SCENE**Scene 15:**REHEARSAL ROOMCHRISSY AND NICK ARE ABOUT TO BEGIN REHEARSALS.

MRS W Okay! I'm pleased to see everyone at rehearsal today. [MOVING AWAY]
From the top please.

CHRISSY [HISSING] Where were you yesterday?

NICK [UNDER BREATH] Sorry.

CHRISSY [UNDER BREATH] I said you were at the dentist's.

NICK [UNDER BREATH] Couldn't you think of anything better?

CHRISSY [UNDER BREATH] No – it was bad enough having to tell a lie as it was.

NICK [UNDER BREATH] Thanks.

CHRISSY [UNDER BREATH] Mrs Woodhouse made me work on my big speech over and over again because you weren't here.

MRS W [FROM A DISTANCE] Okay guys – let’s make a start. Chrissy, why don’t you show Nick what you’ve done with Lucyfer’s big speech?

CHRISSY [AS LUCYFER] Dogs of hell make right
 To welcome on this fiery night
 The man that cometh here
 In terror and in fear.
 Jesus that is the son of God
 With careful steps to us he trod
 And you may do your worst.

FADE OUT ON CHRISSY’S DEVIL SPEECH GOING MUCH BETTER.

Scene 15a:

THE SAME AFTER REHEARSAL

CHRISSY Why weren’t you at rehearsal yesterday, Daniel ?

DANIEL I was busy.

CHRISSY Doing what?

DANIEL Stuff.

CHRISSY You’ve got to take it more seriously. We’re doing the show in a couple of weeks.

DANIEL I’ve only got one line!

CHRISSY That’s not the point. You’ve got to be on stage for the other characters.

DANIEL Alright!

CHRISSY When I got in last night Mom said you’d gone to bed early and then you’d disappeared by the time I came down for breakfast.

DANIEL So?

CHRISSY You never used to be this weird.

DANIEL And you’re normal I suppose, with all that talking to God in the toilet stuff!

CHRISSY Get lost!

DANIEL If you took more notice of Mom and Dad getting divorced... (and less of God)

CHRISSY [CUTTING HIM OFF] They’re not getting divorced!

DANIEL They soon will if we don't try and stop them.

CHRISSY Don't talk rubbish!

DANIEL We should do something or Dad will leave Mom for that woman he works with.

CHRISSY Shut up, Daniel!

[PAUSE]

DANIEL Can I walk home from school with you?

CHRISSY [SUSPICIOUS] Why?

DANIEL [EVASIVE] Dunno – I thought we could talk.

CHRISSY I don't want to hear any more of your stupid nonsense about Mom and Dad!

CUT TO

V/O

DANIEL I couldn't tell her the real reason of course. I wanted her to concentrate on getting Mom and Dad back together not start making a fuss about me being bullied. Then Nick had to go and put his foot right in it. He was taking this do-gooding Jesus thing too far.

Scene 16:

A CORRIDOR OUTSIDE THE REHEARSAL ROOM

CHRISSY IS LEAVING REHEARSAL AND NICK RUNS AFTER HER.

NICK [APPROACHING] Chrissy! Chrissy wait!

CHRISSY What?

NICK Thank you for lying for me.

CHRISSY You needn't think it's because I like you.

NICK Oh.

CHRISSY I want the play to be a success, that's all. Mrs Woodhouse was going to replace you.

NICK Thanks anyway. [HESITANT] That was a better rehearsal.

CHRISSY Well thank you Mr De Niro.

NICK No, I mean it. You were much better – much more devilish.

CHRISSY Thanks. [PAUSE] You were good too. More like I think Jesus would be.

NICK Yeah? Thanks.

CHRISSY [MOVING AWAY] I've got to go. Daniel will be waiting – he's such a brat. I don't know why he wants to walk home with me.

NICK [FOLLOWING HER] Wait. I've got to tell you something about Dan.

CHRISSY [WAITING] What?

NICK There's this gang...

CHRISSY Everyone knows you're in with the Friary Fighters.

NICK I was, but not anymore. They've been bullying him.

CHRISSY Why should I believe you?

NICK I thought you might help him.

CHRISSY How?

NICK You could just be nice to him.

CHRISSY What would you know about being nice to anyone?

NICK It's weird – I just feel different.

CHRISSY [SUDDENLY EXCITED] It's Jesus isn't it?

NICK What do you mean?

CHRISSY He's making you be good!

NICK [FLIRTY] So, is playing Lucy-fer making you be bad?

PLAY OUT ON *HEY THERE DELILAH* (THE BIT THAT GOES '... WHAT YOU DO TO ME...' ETC) AND FADE INTO NEXT SCENE

Scene 17:

BATHROOM

THE LOO FLUSHES.

CHRISSY Hi God, sorry I'm late, I've been rehearsing for ... you know... that play we can't mention. Anyway Nick has been behaving like he's almost human and I know that can only be down to you. I know you must know about Daniel being bullied, I mean you know everything before I know, right? Anyway, I didn't believe Nick at first, but Daniel has been acting even weirder than usual. Do you think I should try being a bit nicer to him? I mean, I know I don't usually take much notice of the little oik. Sorry about the language. Perhaps Nick's right.

FADE OUT OVER HER TALKING.

Scene 18:

V/O

DANIEL Nick wasn't the same person. He kept being really nice. As for Chrissy, she was beginning to realise that sometimes you've got to be bad to be good.

KITCHEN.

'LOVE STORY' PLAYS ON THE RADIO IN THE BACKGROUND. DANIEL AND CHRISSY ARE EATING BREAKFAST. CHRISSY CRUNCHES BRAN FLAKES WHILE DANIEL SLURPS LEFTOVER NOODLES.

CHRISSY I don't know how you can eat leftover Chinese takeaway for breakfast.

DANIEL [SLURPING] It's better than oh-so-healthy bran flakes.

CHRISSY I've been talking to Nick.

DANIEL [SING-SONG VOICE] You lu-urve him.

CHRISSY Daniel!

DANIEL [SLURPING] Dad didn't finish these last night; they're lovely.

CHRISSY Nick told me something.

DANIEL [MIMICKING] 'Oo I lu-urve you, Chrissy'.

CHRISSY No. He said you're in trouble.

DANIEL Singapore Noodles are the best.

CHRISSY Dan, you're not listening to me.

DANIEL Dad's always late these days.

CHRISSY I know what's been going on, Daniel.

DANIEL Mom and Dad are splitting up and you're not bothered.

CHRISSY Stop changing the subject.

DANIEL You're the one changing the subject; you don't want to talk about Mom and Dad.

CHRISSY Nick said you're being bullied by the Friary Fighters.

DANIEL He shouldn't have said anything!

CHRISSY He thought I should know.

DANIEL I don't want to talk about it

CHRISSY Is that why you wanted to walk home with me yesterday?

DANIEL Yes. Mom and Dad are more important.

CHRISSY Okay, but you have to tell me if the Fighters try anything else.

DANIEL Okay.

CHRISSY Tell me if they do, Daniel.

DANIEL I will. Now what are we going to do about Mom and Dad?

CHRISSY I don't see what we can do.

DANIEL You don't care!

CHRISSY I do.

SNAP TO

Scene 20:

V/O

DANIEL I reckon Chrissy was as upset about Mom and Dad as I was, she just didn't want to admit it. And then Nick had an idea...

CUT TO

REHEARSAL ROOM

CHRISSY That was a good rehearsal

NICK Yeah, it's getting there [PAUSE] How's Dan?

CHRISSY Okay. I did what you said and took more interest in him.

NICK Good.

CHRISSY I asked him about The Friary Fighters, he says they are leaving him alone now.

NICK How are things with your mom and dad?

CHRISSY Okay.

NICK That's not what Dan says.

CHRISSY [RESIGNED] What's he told you?

NICK That your dad's seeing another woman.

CHRISSY [SIGHS] Yeah... I suppose that's true.

NICK He's pretty upset.

CHRISSY So am I!

NICK What are you going to do?

CHRISSY I don't know.

NICK Have you thought of trying to split them up?

CHRISSY How would I do that?

NICK I dunno.

CHRISSY Fat lot of use you are!

NICK I know!

CHRISSY What?

NICK You have to ring the woman he's having it off with.

CHRISSY No way!

NICK What's your mom's name?

CHRISSY Annie.

NICK And what about Dad's tart?

CHRISSY Sandra.

NICK And Dad's name is?

CHRISSY Tom.

NICK Ok – this is what you do: ring the bimbo, pretend to be your mom and say, [DOING A POSH WOMAN'S VOICE] 'Hello Sandra, I'm Annie, Tom's wife.' Have a try.

CHRISSY I can't!

NICK Yes you can – go on.

CHRISSY [UNCONVINCING] Hello Sandra, I'm Annie...

NICK [PATIENT] Make her older.

CHRISSY [BETTER] Hello Sandra, I'm Annie, Tom's wife.

NICK Good.

CHRISSY Why is she ringing?

NICK You've found Sandra's text on the phone and you're warning her off.

CHRISSY [AS ANNIE] I've just found a text on Tom's phone from you. It seems like you think you're going out with him, but he's married to me. [YELLING] So stay out of his life.

NICK Fantastic!

CHRISSY Do you think it will work?

NICK It's worth a try.

CHRISSY Thanks.

NICK What for?

CHRISSY Everything. Daniel... the Friary Fighters... helping me be bad... I mean be Lucyfer and stuff.

NICK No problem.

CHRISSY I'd like to help you... um... you know you're a bit behind with your GCSE'S...

NICK I want to catch up, now I'm not in the gang anymore.

CHRISSY Well I could help you with them.

NICK Even Romeo and Juliet?

CHRISSY Especially Romeo and Juliet.

FADE OUT ON THEM LAUGHING AND PLAY INTO NEXT SCENE
WITH *SOMEWHERE OVER THE RAINBOW*

Scene 22:

V/O

DANIEL With Aston Villa set to start the new season things were looking up. My sister actually managed to convince stupid Sandra that she was Mom!

KITCHEN

DANIEL AND CHRISSY ARE EATING BREAKFAST. FX SOUND OF BUTTERING
AND TEA BEING POURED.

CHRISSY You're eating toast.

DANIEL There had to be a downside to Dad splitting up with Sandra – no more Chinese for breakfast.

CHRISSY Just as well.

DANIEL How are you getting on with Nick?

CHRISSY What do you mean?

DANIEL Has he asked you out yet?

CHRISSY We're just friends.

DANIEL I never thought he'd get you to lie like that.

CHRISSY It was an emergency.

DANIEL I haven't heard you talking to God as much.

CHRISSY I still talk to him.

DANIEL What do you say?

CHRISSY I ask him to get Mom and Dad back together.

DANIEL It will take forever if we wait for God to get involved.

CHRISSY What do you suggest then?

DANIEL I'm sure he still loves Mom, we've just got to make him remember.

CHRISSY How?

DANIEL I don't know yet.

Scene 23:

V/O

DANIEL I didn't tell Chrissy what my idea was, but I was lying when I said I didn't know. I'd got a plan.

THE CATHEDRAL

FX CHOIR SINGS A GREGORIAN CHANT THEN FADE INTO SM'S VOICE: "RIGHT THAT'S IT FOR THE CRUCIFIXION – HARROWING OF HELL NEXT"

MRS W [LOUDLY ADDRESSING THE HARROWING CAST] Okay everyone, we're nearly there. Remember that this is your show and you're a part of something important. This historic cathedral is going to be home for the next few days. [OVERWHELMED] Good luck everyone!

NICK [UNDERBREATH] Wow! Is this where God lives?

CHRISSY [UNDERBREATH] Only on Sundays!

NICK [UNDERBREATH] Well, it's got to be better than a caravan in Rhyll.

CHRISSY [GIGGLING] Sh-sh

MRS W [LOUDLY] Beginners please! Beginners please everyone! [PAUSE] Where is Archangel Michael?

DANIEL The Dean wouldn't let him in with his ice cream Miss.

MRS W [EXASPERATED] Well go and get him Daniel! We need him for the descent into Hell!

NICK [UNDER BREATH] That'll melt his Cornetto.

CHRISSY [GIGGLING] Stop it.

FADE OUT

Scene 24:

THE CATHEDRAL.

THE END OF THE DRESS REHEARSAL.

NICK [AS JESUS] And so to all thy progeny
That were good on earth in life.
You will stay with me forever.
In heavenly happiness together,
As a reward for your sweet sympathy
Michael will lead you singing,
[HESITATES] To sunlit perfect weather.

THERE IS AN AWKWARD SILENCE FOLLOWED BY SOME NERVOUS COUGHS.

NICK [WHISPERING] Where's Archangel Michael!

CHRISSY [WHISPERING] He's forgotten to come on. Why are you saying all that stuff about the weather?

NICK [WHISPERING] I can't remember what it's meant to be.

CHRISSY [WHISPERING] But Jesus doesn't mention weather in the script!

NICK [WHISPERING] Well he should. Who would want to go to Heaven if it's raining.

MRS W [APPROACHING AND LOUDLY HYSTERICAL] Stop! Stop! Stop! This won't do at all. Why hasn't Archangel Michael come on? Well done Nick, that was brilliant improvisation about the weather. [MOVING AWAY] Will someone go and find our Archangel please.

DANIEL [PIPING UP] I'll go Miss!

MRS W [FROM A DISTANCE] Thank you Daniel.

NICK [WHISPERING] Told you!

MRS W [LOUDLY] What's that Nick?

NICK [LOUDLY] Nothing, Miss.

CHRISSY [WHISPERING] Alright, Clever, don't let it go to your head!

DANIEL [RETURNING] I've found him, Miss!

MRS W [FROM A DISTANCE] Well, where is he?

DANIEL Just finishing a Big Mac, Miss. He says he won't be a minute.

MRS W [FROM A DISTANCE] Give me strength!

NICK [WHISPERING] He must be the fattest angel ever!

CHRISSY [WHISPERING AND GIGGLING] Shh...

MRS W [FROM A DISTANCE AT THE END OF HER TETHER] Your performance may be very good, Nick, but that doesn't mean there isn't room for improvement. And Chrissy, you still need to be more evil. At the moment we're just not convinced that Lucyfer has ever done anything bad.

FADE OUT

THE CATHEDRAL

IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE DR

CHRISSY I thought Mrs Woodhouse was going to explode!

NICK And when she said you didn't sound like you would do anything bad!

CHRISSY I know! LOL!

PAUSE

NICK You're really good now you know.

CHRISSY What? At being bad?

NICK Yeah. [PAUSE] Shall I show you how to be even worse?

CHRISSY How?

NICK KISSES HER

CHRISSY Oh!

SNAP TO

Scene 25:

BATHROOM

CHRISSY FINISHES CLEANING HER TEETH

CHRISSY I know I haven't been in touch for a while, but I've been so busy with the play and everything [IN AN EMBARRASSED RUSH] and I was just wondering what you thought about me kissing Jesus last night. Well it wasn't really Jesus, it was Nick who's playing Jesus. You see I really like him and I don't know what to say if he asks me to go out with him.

CUT TOV/O

DANIEL Later that night just as the performance was about to start I had a look out into the audience and I could see Mom and Dad sitting at opposite ends of the same row. It was time to put my plan into action. [SINGS] Gabby Gabby Gabby... etc

FADE INTO**Scene 26:**CATHEDRAL.THE PERFORMANCE IS UNDERWAY AND EVERYONE IS ONSTAGE.

CHRISSY [LOUDLY AS LUCY-FER] Such a spell
 Was never before seen in Hell.

NICK [WHISPERING] Dan, what are you doing? Where's Archangel Michael?

DANIEL [WHISPERING BACK] I left a bag of Wotsits in the Vestry – he never stood a chance. [LOUDLY AS DEATH] I am Death and I shall harrow Hell...

CHRISSY [WHISPERING] What's he doing in his Villa shirt?

NICK [WHISPERING] Dan was wearing that shirt the day I rescued him from the Friary Fighters.

DANIEL [LOUDLY AS DEATH] I am Death the Devil's Disciple. I've come to collect you! I'm not what you expect. I'm not a skeleton and I don't carry a scythe.

CHRISSY [WHISPERING] You rescued him?

NICK [WHISPERING] Yeah. I had a fight with the gang instead of coming to rehearsal. That's why they don't bully Dan anymore and I'm not in the gang.

CHRISSY [WHISPERING] Awesome! What's he saying now?

DANIEL [LOUDLY AS DEATH] Tom and Annie Walters this is it – your – time – is - up! [SLIGHT PAUSE] It's no good protesting, you had plenty of opportunity to do the right thing, but you were too busy yelling at each other to notice the effect you were having on your poor son, Daniel, who has been bullied at school, and your daughter, Chrissy, who prays all the time. You could have done something to help your children, but you didn't, so now you'll have to pay! [SLIGHT PAUSE] Your time is nearly up, but it isn't too late to make amends...

FADE INTOCATHEDRAL.AFTER THE PERFORMANCE. NICK AND CHRISSY LAUGH EXCITEDLY AND TALK OVER EACH OTHER.

CHRISSY ... stealing the Archangel's place and making up the lines like that...

NICK ... and that weird voice he used...

CHRISSY ... and when he started going on about how you should show people how you feel about them before it's too late...

NICK Your Mom and Dad got a right shock!

CHRISSY I wished he hadn't mentioned me praying though.

NICK The audience thought it was all part of the play – it's religious!

PAUSE

CHRISSY Did you really rescue Dan from the Fighters?

NICK Yep.

[PAUSE]

CHRISSY THROWS HER ARMS ROUND HIM AND KISSES HIM. HE LAUGHS.

NICK Will you go out with me now you know I'm a hero?

CHRISSY I might...

FADE OUT SLOWLY ON THEM LAUGHING AND PLAY INTO NEXT SCENE WITH LOVE STORY.**Scene 27:**CLASSROOM.A FEW DAYS AFTER THE PERFORMANCE

MRS W It was a huge success despite Daniel's intervention.

NICK Were you pleased then Mrs Woodhouse?

MRS W Yes, Nick very pleased.

NICK Good.

MRS W What are you doing now that it's all over?

NICK Working for my GCSEs and on my acting, Miss.

MRS W I knew you would! It's all been worth it then?

CUT TO NEXT SCENE.

Scene 28:

BATHROOM.

PERHAPS PLAY SOMEWHERE OVER THE RAINBOW UNDER THE FOLLOWING

CHRISSY Dear God, I'd like to say thank you for letting me be the Devil and for falling in love with Jesus. Please bless Mom and Dad now that they're getting on better and my brother Daniel, who I almost like. Oh, I might not be able to say a prayer tomorrow because I'm going with Nick to see Hamlet. Amen.

V/O

DANIEL So that's it then. No more Death. Chrissy's still talking to God, but I reckon it's Mrs Woodhouse who pulled off a miracle. If only she could get Villa into the top four then things would be almost perfect.

FADE OUT ON ASTON VILLA FOOTBALL CHANTS AND THE ROAR OF THE HOLTE END.

EXTRA DIALOGUE AND SCENES**Scene 28****INT. THEATRE FOYER AFTER THE PLAY. AUDIENCE LEAVING**

NICK It was awesome. Romeo is part of this gang called the Montague's...

CHRISSY I know what it's about numbskull, I've just seen it.

NICK You should play Lucy-fer more like Mercutio, you know, be more devilish.

CHRISSY What would you know?

NICK I know how to be the Devil.

CHRISSY You mean you know how to be evil! You tried to blame me when Mrs Woodhouse found your cigarettes. You're a liar!

MRS W [APPROACHING] What's going on?

NICK Nothing Mrs Woodhouse.

CHRISSY Nick keeps telling me how to play Lucy-fer.

NICK I was just trying to help.

MRS W [MOVING AWAY] Yes – well that's very good.

CHRISSY I hate you.

NICK That's not very Christian is it?

CHRISSY You're a liar!

NICK Didn't Jesus forgive liars?

 [PAUSE]

CHRISSY You need to be nicer as Jesus.

NICK How would you do it then Christ - ina?

CHRISSY You need to be gentler as Jesus. You're too aggressive.

NICK What do you mean?

CHRISSY You're always shouting!

NICK [SHOUTING OVER NOISY AUDIENCE] At least I can be heard.

CHRISSY [SHOUTING TOO] Come outside with me!

NICK Now there's an offer!

CHRISSY Shut up and come with me!

FADE INTO

Scene 28A

EXT. OUTSIDE THE THEATRE.

NICK Oo. What are we doing out here?

CHRISSY You wanted my opinion on your acting, so I'm going to give it to you.

NICK Well, get on with it. It's freezing.

CHRISSY You always say your lines like you want to kill someone.

NICK Right.

CHRISSY Jesus didn't yell at people.

NICK [GOING TO LEAVE] Like I'm going to listen to you.

CHRISSY [STOPPING HIM] You should because I can help you. You're always telling me how to say my lines, but you don't take any notice of what anyone else says. [PAUSE] Try that stuff about leading the souls out of Hell with a softer tone. [PAUSE] You know the bit that goes 'And so to all thy progeny...'

NICK [IRRITATED] I know the bit you mean!

CHRISSY Well go on then.

NICK [AS JESUS ANGRY] And so to all thy progeny
That were good on earth in life.
You will stay with me forever.

CHRISSY I said use a softer tone.

NICK [SOFTER] And so to all thy progeny
That were good on earth in life.
You will stay with me forever.
In heavenly happiness together,
As a reward for your sweet sympathy
Michael will lead you singing,

CHRISSY See – you can do it!

NICK Okay, okay – I'll do it like that.

CHRISSY Good!

NICK Any other directions for me?

CHRISSY Yes...

MRS W [FROM A DISTANCE] Come on Chrissy – the mini bus is waiting.

CHRISSY [CALLING BACK] Coming! [TO NICK] Aren't you getting on the bus?

NICK I walked here.

CHRISSY Right. See you at school then.

NICK Yeah. Oh what was your other direction?

CHRISSY [LAUGHING] Try smiling more.

MRS W [FROM A DISTANCE] Chrissy!

PLAY OUT ON *HEY THERE DELILAH* (THE BIT THAT GOES '... WHAT YOU DO TO ME...' ETC) AND FADE INTO NEXT SCENE

Scene 29A
VOICEOVER

DANIEL And something weird was happening to Nick. He was reading Shakespeare before rehearsals when he thought no one was around!

FADE INTO

Scene 29B
INT. CLASSROOM

NICK [HESITANT AND QUIET] O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!
It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night
[REPEATS LOUDER] O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!
It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night
[READING ON BEGINNING TO UNDERSTAND IT. SOMETIMES STRUGGLING WITH THE WORDS] As a rich jewel in the Ethiop's ear –
Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear!
So shows a snowy dove trooping with crows
As yonder lady o'er her fellows shows.
The measure done, I'll watch her place of stand,
And, touching hers, make blessed my rude hand.
Did my heart love till now? Forswear it, sight;
For ne'er I saw true beauty till this night.

PAUSE

[A REVELATION] So that's what it means! [DREAMILY] For ne'er I saw true beauty till this night! [HE LAUNCHES INTO A CELEBRATORY CHANT] Gabby, Gabby, Gabby, Gabby, Gabby Agbon-lo-hor ...

FADE INTO LOVE STORY THEN SCENE 30 AS RECORDED.

Scene 31INT. CLASSROOM

NICK [READING TO HIMSELF] I fear, too early for my mind misgivs
Some consequence, yet hanging in the stars,
Shall bitterly begin his fearful date
With this night's revels and expire the term
Of a despised life clos'd in my breast,
By some vile forfeit of untimely death.
But He that hath the steerage of my course
Direct my sail.

MRS W That was very good.

NICK [EMBARRASSED] I didn't hear you come in.

MRS W Did you enjoy Romeo and Juliet, Nick?

NICK It was brilliant.

MRS W What was brilliant about it?

NICK It was all about gangs.

MRS W Yes, amongst other things. Well spotted.

NICK There's a lot of killing and being killed though. I've never thought about
gangs like that before.

MRS W Do you understand that speech you were reading?

NICK I think so.

MRS W What do you think it means?

NICK Romeo is saying that something bad is going to happen.

MRS W Yes, he's having a premonition, 'I fear too early; for my mind misgivs some
consequence yet hanging in the stars'

NICK I know how he feels.

MRS W Do you?

NICK I keep thinking something bad might happen.

MRS W Like what?

NICK Like what happens in the play when Mercutio gets stabbed.

MRS W Do some of the lads in your gang carry knives Nick?

NICK I don't know. They talk about it sometimes.

MRS W You read about these things happening don't you?

NICK I don't want anything like that to happen.

MRS W No... well... Anyway, what did you think about Romeo?

NICK He's a bit wet. I mean all that falling in love with Juliet stuff.

MRS W Wouldn't you like to fall in love one day?

NICK Who with?

MRS W Well I think someone might be in love with you.

NICK Who Miss?

MRS W Mmm... a certain devilish person...

NICK What? No...

MRS W I don't think she likes gangs though Nick.

CUT TO NEXT SCENE

Scene 47

AS WRITTEN THEN ADD AT THE END INSTEAD OF LINE 9 P48

CHRISSY [SHOWING OFF] Wilt thou be gone? It is not yet near day;
It was the nightingale , and not the lark,
That pierced the fearful hollow of thine ear,
Nightly she sings on yonder pomegranate tree.
Believe me, love, it was the nightingale.

NICK [SHOWING OFF] It was the lark, the herald of the morn,

No nightingale. Look, love, what envious streaks
 Do lace the severing clouds in yonder east;
 Nights candles are burnt out, and jocund day
 Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops.
 I must be gone and live, or stay and die.

CHRISSY [DELIGHTED] You know it!

NICK Yeah... But I need more direction.

FADE OUT AS WRITTEN

Scene 51

AS WRITTEN BUT ADD THE FOLLOWING

MRS W [ADD AT THE END OF SPEECH 1 P51] I'm so proud of you for achieving what you have with this play. It's been all about community. Our Harrowing of Hell is just a small cog in the huge machine that is the Mysteries Cycle. This week you will be mixing with people of all age from all walks of life. This is about a community expressing itself. You will see people walking around the town in costume and talking to complete strangers. Old age pensioners will perform in plays with primary school children. Bankers will work with the unemployed. Prisoners and ladies from the Women's Institute will all play their part. No one is excluded from this great event.
 (OVERWHELMED) Good luck everyone!

Scene 52

AS WRITTEN BUT ADD THE FOLLOWING

P52 NICK [ADD END OF LINE 6] Anyway it's hardly Shakespeare!

P53 WHISPERED BETWEEN LINES 6 & 7

NICK What was all that stuff Mrs Woodhouse was spouting before we started?

CHRISSY I think she believes in drama bringing people together.

NICK Well I suppose it does.

CHRISSY What do you mean?

NICK Well look at us.

CHRISSY [COY] I don't know what you're talking about.

Scene 59:

INT. CLASSROOM.A FEW DAYS AFTER THE PERFORMANCE

MRS W It was a huge success despite Daniel's intervention.

NICK Were you pleased then Mrs Woodhouse?

MRS W Yes, Nick very pleased.

NICK Good.

MRS W What are you doing now that it's all over?

NICK Working for my GCSEs and on my acting, Miss.

MRS W I knew you would!

NICK I want to go to drama school.

MRS W Good for you.

NICK My dad won't like it. He says acting is for puffs.

MRS W Well we know he's wrong don't we.

NICK I don't care what he thinks anymore.

MRS W What about the Friary Fighters?

NICK I'm not going back to the gang.

MRS W That's very good news.

NICK Shakespeare's better than being in a gang.

MRS W Of course he is.

NICK But I still like football.

MRS W You can still support Villa and work on your acting.

NICK I'll always support the Villa. You were right about the Mystery plays bringing people together.

MRS W Have you asked Chrissy out yet?

NICK She's thinking about it.

MRS W I hope she says yes.

NICK So do I Miss.

CUT TO NEXT SCENE.

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APPENDIX ONE

APPENDIX TWO

APPENDIX THREE