

**An Investigation into How Engagement with the  
Context and Processes of Collaborative Devising  
Affects the Praxis of the Playwright:**

**A Practice-as-Research PhD**

**Volume 2**

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**Practice-As-Research:**

*The 9.21 to Shrub Hill* (Devised Production)

*Playground* (Non-Devised Production)

**and Accompanying Exegesis**

## Chapter Five

### Exegesis of the Processes of Creating a Devised Script (*The 9.21 to Shrub Hill*) and Non-Devised Script (*Playground*)

#### Introduction

The preceding chapters have created a framework for the analysis of my own experiences as a writer-deviser. Without this framework, it would be difficult to situate my practice within a theoretical context, since a similar academic discourse, placing the writer-deviser at the heart of the study, does not exist. As highlighted in the Introduction, the central query of this dissertation is how engagement with devising affects a playwright. This is a query with important ramifications for pedagogical practice and the discourses of devising and playwriting in general, but also represents a significant investigation in the development of my own artistic practice. As previously discussed, my methodological approach encompasses both research-led practice, and practice-led research.<sup>1</sup> The preceding chapters have informed the development of the two scripts contained within this volume, and the development of the two scripts directed the focus of my research. As with most PaR investigations, the findings resulting from the practice share equal weighting (if not, in the case of some researchers, more) with those discoveries made from traditional, text-based research methodologies. Whilst I explore the ramifications of devising practice on my writing, I am also placing it within the context of the previous chapters' revelations, finding resonances with the work of other writer-devisers, and testing out the theories presented of both devising and writing in my own work.

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<sup>1</sup> Hazel Smith and Roger T. Dean, 'Introduction' in *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts*, ed. by Hazel Smith and Roger T. Dean (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 7.

A reasonable query that could be asked of this dissertation is why employ a practice-as-research approach? A simplistic response is that it has never been done before, and a first-hand, reflective account of the playwright embedded within a collaborative context, investigating the long-term effects of the devising processes on non-devised work, can offer insight that is lacking in existing discourse. More complex justifications include the suspicion that most of the accounts provided by writer-devisers of their experiences are filtered through the outside eye of the interviewer/researcher, who may have a particular argument not explicitly linked to the writer-deviser experience, whilst a practice-as-research approach provides a first-hand account, closely connected to my own professional practice. My practice, as a playwright creating work for the professional theatre, interested in collaborative methodologies, is not unique, and therefore the discoveries and findings have important implications for playwrights, particularly those who feel that their training has not provided them with an adequate understanding of devising methodologies. As my survey in Chapter Two revealed, there was a significant number of those writers surveyed who fall into this category. Therefore, in undertaking a research query specifically detailing the experience of a playwright creating work in and out of the devising process, I am both exploring consequences for my own work, and starting a conversation with resonance for many other playwrights.

John Freeman writes of performance-as-research that it should be concerned ‘with application: with the ways in which research can be used to develop performance’.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, not only were my chosen methods of documenting my experience through the practice elements in this dissertation selected for the purposes of this particular study, but also to provide me (and, potentially, other writer-devisers) with tools and considerations for future work. From the beginning of work on both plays these methods included: observations and

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<sup>2</sup> John Freeman, *Blood, Sweat & Theory: Research Through Practice in Performance* (Faringdon: Libri Publishing, 2010), p. 64.

documentation of rehearsals and creative processes, with reflections after the fact in the form of journals; experimentation with practical techniques and games to develop work; examination of the redrafting process; and the inclusion of reflective feedback from collaborators and audience members, in order to introduce some degree of objectivity (though, as is discussed below, true objectivity is neither possible nor desirable in a PaR investigation). In this way, when embarking on future writing projects, I have a collection of possible exercises, observations, and suggestions for areas of exploration to draw upon when planning work. This primary evidence works with my text-based research to provide the ‘multi-mode’ approach favoured by Robin Nelson.<sup>3</sup> Following his framework for evidence within a PaR submission (which, as mentioned in the Introduction to this dissertation, includes a ‘product’; ‘documentation of process’; and ‘complementary writing’), in the case of this PaR dissertation, the product is the two scripts.<sup>4</sup> Given that the focus of this investigation is on how engagement with devising affects the writer-deviser, the most logical product to provide is a written script, as opposed to a DVD recording, as a written script is the product with which the writer is most closely identified, and elements of the script which are connected to the devising process can be easily distinguished. The ‘documentation of process’ is included in the pages of this chapter, incorporating the elements of primary notation mentioned above. This documentation is intertwined with reflective commentary, closely linked to the ‘complementary writing’ included in Volume One.

Thus, this chapter charts and considers my involvement as writer in a devised play, *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill*, placing it within the context of academic and practical discourses on devising; this discussion is expanded via commentary on the lasting effects of the devising process through an examination of my non-devised play, *Playground*. This investigation

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<sup>3</sup> Robin Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Nelson, p. 26.

considers both the context of the creation of the two scripts (a collaborative group and working on my own), and the processes involved (including development exercises and explorations, redrafting, and production), in line with Bruce Barton's distinctions between the two.<sup>5</sup> The presentation of two plays links to the central research query in that this PaR investigation does not merely detail a writer's involvement in a particular moment of devising; it considers how this experience extends out to influence writing practice generally, even in contexts when the writer has not worked with other creative artists from the beginning of the process. Though the subheadings of this chapter, based on temporal divisions, are somewhat imposed on chronologies which often overlapped (for example, writing and redrafting took place during rehearsal periods on *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill*), it is useful to place both processes side-by-side in order to make cogent links between them.

As such, the commentary on both aspects of my practice (*The 9.21 to Shrub Hill* and *Playground*) includes observations of how the plays developed, and my shifting perceptions of how, as a playwright, I fit into the frameworks of production. Backgrounds to the productions and my involvement are provided, preceded by timelines outlining the processes for easy reference. Elements of processes themselves are described, within the context of the research provided in previous chapters, concluding with an assessment of the work and my involvement. This commentary is not a review of the resulting plays, but rather an account of my development as a writer-deviser within the context of specific productions. The two playscripts are included in a separate section to allow for the connection of elements within the plays to the processes and contexts which created them, and to place the work within the greater context of this PaR dissertation. As explicated in the Introduction to this dissertation, this is not a positivist, scientific examination; the focus in this exegesis is on my own experience (within the greater context of the previous volume's research), with the suggestion

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<sup>5</sup> Bruce Barton, 'Introduction: Devising the Creative Body', in *Collective Creation, Collaboration and Devising*, ed. by Bruce Barton (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2008).pp. vii-xxvii (p. viii).

that this experience may have implications for other writer-devisers and the general discourse on devising and playwriting methodologies. Therefore, a ‘Toolkit’ of suggestions for the writer-deviser is included at the end of this chapter.

Before proceeding with the exegesis, it is important to reflect on the duality of my position as both researcher (outside observer) and creative artist (inside participant). In many ways, the PaR section of the dissertation aligns with theories of ‘action research’, a framework developed by sociologist Kurt Lewin, whereby investigations are ‘conducted upon current activity by those involved in the activity to better understand it and to develop strategies to improve current practice’.<sup>6</sup> For example, a working teacher may research pedagogical strategies by implementing them within her own classroom practice, and observing the results first hand. PaR differs from this slightly in that there is the expectation of a product — a performance, script, or work of art, for example — to be produced, which stands as a form of evidence of the research (as opposed to more qualitative and quantitative evidence-gathering methodologies favoured in disciplines such as Sociology, Anthropology, and Education Studies).<sup>7</sup> In addition, as explored in the Introduction to this dissertation, PaR research methodologies ‘are intended to be distinctive in relation to [the artist’s] work and future versions of it, if not the demands of their socio-historical situation’.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the methods of investigation employed within my practice (as opposed to the more traditional text-based research methodologies of the preceding chapters), were constructed to provide me with the information required to develop my practice.

These methods, and the association with action research, obviate the pretence of objectivity. Though those accustomed to a more positivist approach may find this

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<sup>6</sup> Ian Watson, ‘An Actor Prepares: Performance Research (PAR) in the Theatre’, in *Mapping Landscapes for Performance as Research*, ed. by Shannon Rose Riley and Lynette Hunter (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 84-90 (p. 84).

<sup>7</sup> Freeman, p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> Arthur J. Sabatini, ‘Approaching Knowledge, Research, Performance and the Arts’, in *Mapping Landscapes*, ed. by Riley and Hunter, pp. 114-21 (p. 117).

problematic, Estelle Barret and Barbara Bolt claim that the subjectivity of a PaR approach ‘is an advantage to be exploited’ as it ‘involves the revealing or production of *new* knowledge not anticipated by the curriculum’.<sup>9</sup> This new knowledge is particularly valuable as it has been produced by the artists themselves, and is therefore much more likely to impact their own future work, and that of similar artists; John Freeman argues that ‘the subjectivity of the researcher is seen as a resource for understanding the deeply problematic and deeply contentious world under investigation’.<sup>10</sup> As Robin Nelson states, ‘insider’ accounts ‘foster, in combination with other evidence, a much fuller understanding about what is at stake in creative arts practice and the experience of it’.<sup>11</sup> Nelson’s inclusion of ‘other evidence’ points to the aforementioned duality of my position as researcher; in collating non-practice based research (including my ‘outside eye’ first-hand observations of other practitioners such as Zuppa Theatre) and applying it to my own practice, I am approaching the query from an outside-in perspective. Yet, at the same time, as a participant in the processes I am also undertaking reflection from an inside-out position, looking for gaps of knowledge to be filled in order to proceed effectively with my investigation (again, aligning with the research-led practice/practice-led research dualistic approach). This, as evidenced by the theorists above, is not a methodological weakness, but rather allows for a more holistic response to stated research queries.

There is a fascinating symmetry between this dualistic methodological approach, and my own position within the collaboration documented in this dissertation, and indeed the position of most writer-devisers who are not permanently embedded within an established ensemble. Whilst undertaking my practical research, I was both participant and observer, inside the collaboration and outside of it. All collaborators were made aware from the outset

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<sup>9</sup> Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt, ‘Introduction’ *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Inquiry*, ed. by Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (London: I.B. Tauris & Co., 2007), pp. 1-10 (p. 5).

<sup>10</sup> Freeman, p. 195.

<sup>11</sup> Nelson, p. 89.

(from the first communication with directors, and auditions with actors) that the work being created had a dual purpose; it was intended to be a professional production, and form part of the research for a PhD dissertation. They were reminded of this throughout the workshop, rehearsal, and production processes, and I regularly discussed with my collaborators certain aspects of the work (for example, developmental games) which were useful for my research.<sup>12</sup> This undoubtedly affected my positioning within the collaborative ecology, and the impact of researcher-as-artistic-collaborator is not an area which has been well-considered within PaR methodological texts. However, rather than problematizing my findings, my role as researcher in many ways replicated my role as collaborative writer. As evidenced in Chapters Three and Four, the writer-deviser is often brought in for specific projects, rather than being a permanent member of the ensemble. She spends time observing, writing notes, and, at times, participating and leading workshop activities, in the same way that a researcher might. In fact, the workshop period is also known as ‘research and development’, making a clear link between the activities of the writer-deviser and an academic researcher. Writer-devisers select and develop material from their observations in much the same way a researcher does, and the subjectivity or creative vision of the writer-deviser corresponds to the subjectivity of the PaR researcher. If anything, my actions as researcher enhance my understanding of the contextual position of the writer working with a group of people who know and accept that they are being observed.

This introduction serves the purpose of underlining my intertwined approaches of researcher and artist, and outlines some of the methods involved in my research, before proceeding to consider the processes of creating the two plays. In order to place these

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<sup>12</sup> All collaborators embarked on the work with the knowledge that I would be documenting the process within this dissertation. They were made aware from the first stages of work that whilst I would not specifically name or otherwise identify actors within the exegesis, their names would be listed in the context of the part they played or job they took on.

processes within a temporal context, a timeline of work on both projects is presented for reference.

**Figure 6. Timeline of Work on *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill***

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Work Completed</b>
1	1 April – 7 May 2010	Casting; initial meetings and planning with director Ed Bartram.
2	8 May 2010 – 27 June 2010 (including a break: 16 May-19 June)	First series of research and development weekends with director and cast; train journey; developmental (non-script) writing.
3	July 2010	Break from research and development; some writing, including character development and scripting.
4	8 August 2010 – 9 September 2010	Continuing research and development; writing of first and second drafts
5	10 September 2010 – 4 October 2010	Rehearsals; writing of third, fourth, and fifth drafts.
6	5 October 2010 – 23 October 2010	Production run at the New Diorama Theatre, London

**Figure 7. Timeline of Work on *Playground***

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Dates</b>	<b>Work Completed</b>
1	May 2014-April 2015	Research; creating basic outlines; writing of the first draft; informal reading with actors (my home, 7 April 2015) and performance of two scenes at the Goldsmiths Performance Lab (27 April 2015).
2	May 2015-September 2015	Writing of the second draft; written feedback from readers.
3	November 2015-March 2016	Writing of the third and fourth drafts; preparatory producing work; casting; meetings with director.
4	March 2016-April 2016	Rehearsals; writing of fifth draft.
5	25 April-1 May 2016	Production week at the London Theatre, New Cross
6	May 2016	Collating feedback and writing of the sixth draft.

## Context of Work; Research and Development

As argued in Chapter Three, the prevalent model for writer-deviser involvement in a theatrical production is that a writer external to the core group is brought in (or asks to be brought in). Often, the director will have prior knowledge of the writer's work, and there is the assumption of at least shared interests given the collaborators' knowledge and appreciation of each other's output.

In the case of my involvement with *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill*, director Ed Bartram (of Waxwing Theatre Company) and I had not previously worked together; his training included the MA in Advanced Theatre Practice at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, a course which involves the launching of a collaborative theatre company.<sup>13</sup> Although in his professional practice he had previously only worked with non-devised scripts, he used elements of devised movement to explore (both in rehearsal and production) thematic elements of these plays. Bartram observed a performance of a short play I had written, and read one of my full-length scripts, and as a result was familiar with my stylistic approach; conversations confirmed a mutual interest in collaborative approaches, and he was keen to be involved in my academic research, particularly in exploring the integration of workshop activities into the writing of a script. Heddon and Milling argue that for

some groups, pre-existing training through contemporary dance or Lecoq-related work, as in the case of many of Complicite's performers, can stand in for a 'sense of ensemble'. Performers have experience of a shared 'physical language' prior to work on a performance, and already know the range of work that they might engage in.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> 'Advanced Theatre Practice MA/MFA', <[www.cssd.ac.uk/course/advanced-theatre-practice-ma-mfa](http://www.cssd.ac.uk/course/advanced-theatre-practice-ma-mfa)> [accessed 28 September 2017].

<sup>14</sup> Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling, *Devising Performance, a Critical History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 178.

In a similar way, our common interest in devised work ensured we had at least a basic processual vocabulary in common.

At this initial stage (Figure 6, Stage 1 in the ‘Timeline of Work’), Bartram had a general concept (that of a train journey interrupted by a toddler), and character ideas, which he shared with me in writing and conversation. He wanted each actor to play two roles, and had notes of character types he wished to explore. For example, in his casting brief, he listed some of the dual roles as: ‘Sixth-form student with lots of attitude / urbane Oxbridge student’; ‘Young executive: ambitious, arrogant / tourist’; ‘Quiet, bookish academic / blue collar manual worker.’ Bartram had invited a number of actors with whom he had previously worked to join us; however, we also had to undertake formal auditions as there were roles which could not be filled by previous contacts.<sup>15</sup> As such, the collaborative group which created *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill* could not be considered an established ensemble, particularly as (as detailed below) there were new additions to the cast throughout the process. I was invited to participate in the audition process, and we began to negotiate how I would function as a writer within the process. Although this was not precisely defined from the outset, my ongoing research suggested the most successful workshop methodology for the writer-deviser was to observe development work and write material once alone; I suggested this approach to Bartram and he agreed. This corresponds with the model set out by Joseph Chaikin for his work with writer-devisers in the Open Theatre, which was then taken up by companies such as Joint Stock, and writers such as Bryony Lavery.<sup>16</sup>

The context of this involvement, both as writer-deviser and researcher, also had certain implications for my position within the collaboration. As instigator and funder of the production, Bartram held primary responsibility for the overall vision of the play. As can be

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<sup>15</sup> In the end, only two actors who had previously worked with Bartram participated in the final production; all other cast members and collaborators were found either through personal recommendations or by advertising on casting websites, such as Spotlight.

<sup>16</sup> See Chapter One for an outline of Chaikin’s vision for the involvement of the writer-deviser in his process.

seen from the history of devising in Chapter One, the collaborative model which has proven the most enduring is that of a hierarchical group. As Bicât and Baldwin argue, a project ‘needs a leader with a firm grasp of the direction in which the work is heading’.<sup>17</sup> This meant that, ultimately, Bartram had control over the structure and content of the final production. This is not to suggest, however, that Bartram took on the role of dictator within the collaborative structure; from the outset he declared his wish to develop work based on the contributions of all the members of the collaboration.

Indeed, Bartram had chosen to engage with devising methodology for the first time with *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill* because of his interest in producing a piece of work reflective of multiple perspectives. He had developed the concept for the production from his own train journeys, and the collaborative structure seemed appropriate for a play which featured a large number of characters with different outlooks, as opposed to the vision of an individual playwright. A play set on a train necessitates the representation of a multitude of public personas. As Alan Filewood explains, ‘the fundamental difference between the individual and collective playwrights is that the individual synthesizes the objective world into a private vision, whereas the collective synthesizes it into a public vision’.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill* was Bartram’s first attempt at a devised production, and the involvement of a playwright provided him with access to a person trained in incorporating multiple creative strands and inputs into something structurally coherent, which contains the unique vision of an individual (as discussed in Chapter Two). Filewood confirms this: ‘the writer often provides a basic analysis, if not intentionally, then *de facto*, by the very act of shaping

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<sup>17</sup> Tina Bicât and Chris Baldwin, ‘Introduction: Collaborative Invention’, in *Devised and Collaborative Theatre: A Practical Guide*, ed. by Tina Bicât and Chris Baldwin (Marlborough: The Crowood Press Ltd, 2002), pp. 7-9 (p. 9).

<sup>18</sup> Alan Filewood, ‘Collective Creation: Process, Politics and Poetics’, in *Collective Creation, Collaboration, and Devising*, ed. by Bruce Barton (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2008) pp. 1-13 (p. 2).

the actors' discoveries into a structure.'<sup>19</sup> I had used devising methodology in the context of undergraduate and graduate studies and student theatre groups. However, the majority of my previous work had been generated as a solo playwright; I entered into the collaboration in order to enhance my understanding of the processes undertaken by a director, performers, and other collaborators and to experiment with how this knowledge might be made manifest within a script.

Although my involvement in both *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill* and *Playground* was instigated by the needs of my PaR query, the foundation of the former lay in the creative plans of a collaborator, whilst the latter came out of an idea entirely my own. One play cannot stand for a lifetime's body of work in terms of providing irrefutable evidence of the long-term effects of engaging with devising practice. However, in reflecting on the processes I undertook as a solo playwright, I wanted to identify the changes that occurred in my own praxis, influenced by working collaboratively (for example, the introduction of development exercises which have been adapted from games/exercises I learned through working with actors and directors). I also wanted to consider how my observations of performers' bodies at work in the development of *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill* influenced my decision-making process, particularly in terms of the inclusion of non-dialogic elements within the script. Finally, given that there were problematic elements within the process of developing *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill*, I wished to see if particular elements of more traditional, solo writing praxis could address some of these issues.

Previous experience as both playwright and producer indicated that I was unlikely to be commissioned by a theatre to write the script in a way that would suit my research, and therefore I embarked on *Playground* with the knowledge that the play would be self-produced. Additionally, I was cognizant of the fact that it would need to run in a London

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<sup>19</sup> Filewood, p. 3.

fringe venue, for both budgetary and comparative purposes, along with the impetus for undertaking this PaR investigation being rooted in my own professional development.

Though I did not have a particular space in mind whilst writing, I was aware of the spatial and technical restrictions of the majority of fringe theatres. The suggestion that the ‘framing of the play in a specific performance context inflects and transforms its meaning’ was at the forefront of my mind as I sketched out ideas:<sup>20</sup> the evidence of this can be seen in the small cast and a focus on sound and physicality to create scenes rather than elaborate (and expensive) sets.

Additionally, it was useful for the purposes of comparison to have a thematic link between the devised piece of work and the non-devised. I considered setting the play on a train to create an obvious relationship between the two productions. However, the particular experience of writing *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill* revealed that a train is a complicated setting, and the need for a high number of characters can detract from well-defined roles, so I did not replicate the approach in my non-devised script. Instead, I chose to make a link between the issues of parenting, and the performative idea of a child (represented as a puppet in *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill*) present in the action of the play, but not physically present on stage. Though the beginning and ending of the play do feature actors’ playing children, I decided to have the adult actors play these roles.

Like Dennis Potter in his television play *Blue Remembered Hills*, I was not deliberately seeking ‘novelty’ (particularly as adults playing children is no longer novel), but wanted to use ‘the adult body [...] as the magnifying glass’,<sup>21</sup> in order for the audience to reflect on the childhood foundations of adult behaviour. Moreover, as I am a parent myself, the idea for a play about mothers arose from personal observation, although it is not

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<sup>20</sup> Steve Waters, *The Secret Life of Plays* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2010), p. 52.

<sup>21</sup> Dennis Potter, *Blue Remembered Hills*, in *‘Blue Remembered Hills’ and Other Plays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), pp. 37-85 (pp. 39-40).

autobiographical. Finally, as an immigrant to Britain, I have long been intrigued by the vagaries of the class system; in writing a non-commissioned, non-devised play, I was able to concoct a story which allowed me to explore these issues in my own fashion, rather than being obligated to respond to the ideas of others, as a playwright generally is when working collaboratively. Much like Bryony Lavery, with the argument of *Frozen* that serial killers are made, not born, I was able to pursue a line of thought about class in Britain based on my own observations and personal research; in particular the leftist middle class's lack of understanding of working-class experiences. In this way, *Playground* corresponds with Micheline Wandor's assertion of the 'distinctive imaginative process' of the solo playwright, where the writer enters 'a particular mode of imaginative thought', representing her own unique creative approach to the subject matter, as discussed in Chapter Two.<sup>22</sup>

This is not to say I was unfettered. The knowledge that this would be a play which I would be producing as well as writing, and which would require an income through ticket sales, meant that I had to address a subject which would attract an audience.<sup>23</sup> The topics of parenting and class are regularly featured in national news outlets and on social media, which indicated to me that there would be a fair degree of interest. There have been recent plays which addressed matters of education: Tamsin Oglesby's *Future Conditional* (2015, Old Vic, London), dealt with issues of institutionalized privilege within the education system, as did

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<sup>22</sup> Micheline Wandor, *The Art of Writing Drama: Theory and Practice* (London: Methuen, 2008), pp. 20-22

<sup>23</sup> Although one could argue that commercial concerns are not relevant within an academic dissertation, in fact the literature on PaR methodologies refutes this. Brad Haseman and Daniel Mafe write: 'A [...] situation faces creative practitioner/researchers in the way they claim or relate to the professional frames that name or define the creative practice itself. As shared practical understandings grow, their full impact and value is necessarily marked by the professional protocols and regulations that contain or delimit them': Haseman and Mafe, 'Acquiring Know-How: Research Training for Practice-led Researchers', in *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts*, ed. by Hazel Smith and Roger T. Dean (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), pp. 221-28 (p. 216). A particular concern of the working professional playwright is what subjects and approaches will attract audiences. In addition, Robin Nelson states: 'standard professional practice is not precluded from research; it is a matter, as ever, of *identifying and articulating the specific research inquiry*.' Nelson, p. 80.

Steve Waters's *Little Platoons* (2011, Bush Theatre, London) which specifically addressed the government's academies initiative.<sup>24</sup> Both plays approached their subject in an ideological fashion, with a good deal of dialogue dedicated to specifically discussing systems of education rather than the associated stories of the various characters. Whilst I was interested in examining societal structures, and in particular class, I wanted my play to be an intimate look at how class and education form individual identities and inform specific relationships. I have rarely seen plays about mothers of young children, and, in particular, plays dealing with the connection between the ways we choose to raise our offspring and self-identity. Therefore, although I was influenced by commercial concerns, I was liberated by not having to take into consideration the need to write specifically for a particular group, and by not being beholden to including material generated by actors, as had been the case with *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill*. On the other hand, I did not have the comfort of receiving feedback at an early stage from a diverse group of collaborators, confirming that the subject would be of interest to them (and, by extension, a larger audience), even if it did not reflect their own personal experiences.

The difference between traditional playwriting methodology and devising could be identified within the freedom I had to allow the idea for *Playground* to germinate slowly (see Figure 7, Stage 1 in the Timeline of Work). This is concurrent with Bryony Lavery's process with *Frozen*. As detailed in Chapter Four, she spent a great deal of time researching and thinking before writing, describing her process as 'Read. Imagine. Write. Check'.<sup>25</sup> Unless a company is able to fund an extended development period, as is rarely the case in the United Kingdom (although more common in Eastern Europe), playwrights within the devising process rarely have the luxury to spend a great deal of time thinking about approaches to the

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<sup>24</sup> I observed a production of *Future Conditional* on 21 September 2015; Steve Waters, *Little Platoons* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2011).

<sup>25</sup> An interview with Dinah Wood in the programme notes for *Frozen*, National Theatre, 2002, p. 5.

subject before writing begins. The restraints of working on a low-budget production meant that development time on *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill* was limited; this is not atypical of fringe devised productions, yet the effects of budgetary and time restrictions upon writer-devisers and their collaborators are rarely mentioned in the literature on devising.<sup>26</sup> Although I was able to observe developmental work on *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill* for a few months before writing the script, other text-based work did occur, and I was expected to share script ideas with the director. I began character and structural work almost from the beginning of the devising process and had to respond in an immediate way to what I was observing, meaning there was less time for reflection and consideration of alternative storylines and theatrical representations.

One benefit of this time pressure within the collaborative context was that it helped me to avoid writer's block and an over-long process of development, which is something that occurred during the early stages of writing *Playground*. As my writing diary dated 28 May 2014 attests, I found it took 'quite a long time to get [the] first scene written, as [I] am feeling rather overburdened and worried about sticking to the advice given — some of it says to just write, some says to think carefully and plot [the] first scene'.<sup>27</sup> As outlined in this dissertation's Introduction, I combined the writing of the play with research for Chapter Two, so as to make the influence of the pedagogical writers obvious. The sometimes conflicting advice initially led to stasis as I struggled to decide which approach would work for me; had I been devising, the responsibility to produce work for my collaborators would have helped me to avoid writer's block and the work could have progressed more quickly. In addition, it is

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<sup>26</sup> Given that we were only able to work on weekends, spread over a few months, the development period for *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill* equated to approximately two weeks' full time work.

<sup>27</sup> Tim Fountain, one of the pedagogical writers consulted, states: 'I favour just starting to write, though I like to have some idea of the shape of the 'skin' of my drama'; *So You Want to be a Playwright?* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2007), p. 38. Aristotle instructs that the 'poet should first lay out the general structure and only then elaborate it into episodes'; Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. by Anthony Kenny (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 38.

worth exploring for future projects whether the setting out of a 'rules of play', used by devising groups such as Zuppa Theatre, would be useful applied to a solo writing context.<sup>28</sup> For example, setting out an specific amount of work to be completed, the elimination of distraction, and instructions to 'move forward' rather than stopping to analyze and (potentially) agonize about failures, may ensure a better flow of work. Similar instructions can be found in some of the pedagogical texts (for example, Tim Fountain's book), however, printing and posting rules may help to avoid writer's block by emulating the experience of the devising room within the solo writer's workspace.

The period of collaborative research and development, involving the actors, director, choreographer, designers, and myself as writer of *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill* began with a series of workshop weekends (Fig. 6, Stage 2). Not all cast were able to join in these early sessions, and a few dropped out due to schedule conflicts, so the focus was on developing some ideas of character, and physical exploration through exercises and improvisations, rather than script writing. A particular emphasis of these early workshops was using playing cards during improvisations (a technique often employed by Max Stafford-Clark), to indicate status or the amount of affection one character felt for the other.<sup>29</sup> Although these were not necessarily linked to specific character narratives as they would eventually appear in the script, it was useful for me to observe the dialogic and non-dialogic methods used by performers to suggest a particular social positioning. There was a certain degree of character development, though at this point we were predominantly working with broad portrayals of dual characters, as indicated above. Additionally, some of the improvisations were directly linked to the events of a train journey (for example, the lights of the train going off when in a tunnel), which began to suggest particular story points which I could consider within the script. At this point,

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<sup>28</sup> See Chapter Three and Appendix C.

<sup>29</sup> Philip Roberts and Max Stafford-Clark, *Taking Stock: The Theatre of Max Stafford-Clark* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2007), p. 72.

I was not writing dialogue, but did take notes and record a diary, which was later used; Bartram also recorded many of the improvisations on video. Bartram preferred these sessions to be predominantly active: he discouraged discussion as he felt, as per Clive Barker's quotation in Chapter One, that it can 'get in the way of work'.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, I gained useful insight from the actors' (sometimes informal) discussions of their personal experiences as commuters.

The improvisations generally alternated with physical exercises; Bartram used bamboo sticks extensively, both as a warm-up and to generate physicalized scenes. In the beginning, the actors struggled with the action of balancing a bamboo stick on a finger whilst trying to move around each other, and eventually create scenes, but by the end of the initial research and development period, they were much more adept, and it became clear that the focus required for balancing the stick aided in the performers' being more spontaneous and less self-conscious (as a writer, and inspired by my experience devising, I now use similar techniques when I experience a block or wish to be more spontaneous).<sup>31</sup> There was also a clear progression in the exercises, which increasingly challenged the performers and advanced their ability to communicate with each other through non-vocal methods. For example, after a few days together, the performers were able to use the bamboo sticks to create shapes and small scenes, without pre-planning; this aided in creating some sense of a shared language. However, it was not always clear to me (or the performers) how exercises such as the 'hug' game, a development of a Frantic Assembly exercise ('Person') where participants had to embrace each other for an extended period of time, were related to the

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<sup>30</sup> Clive Barker, *Theatre Games*, (London: Methuen, 1989), p. 23.

<sup>31</sup> For example, when I find writing difficult, I often attempt to exhaust myself physically (through running or other physically vigorous work) or intellectually (through exercises such as free writing, or attempting to count backwards whilst writing), in order to disable my analytical tendencies, and allow myself to write freely (editing the work at a time when I am no longer exhausted). I have developed this technique from observing, participating in, and reading about the work of devisers such as Odin Teatret, Keith Johnstone, and indeed Bartram's rehearsals.

generation of material.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, the intention seemed more to develop the performer's physical virtuosity and a sense of ensemble, which, in hindsight, was an appropriate directorial choice on the part of Bartram, though unfortunately hampered by regular changes in collaborative participants; in this sense the collaborative context concretely impinged on the processes of developing work. The exercises were useful for me in that I participated in a number of them, which allowed for emphasis of my 'insider' position within the collaborative context, particularly as participants were cognizant of my 'outsider' status, in that I was engaged in undertaking writing outside of the collaborative context. They also benefitted me in that I was able to better understand the decision-making processes the actors were undergoing, particularly as they pertained to choices about physical expression. As evidenced in Chapter Two, playwrights are generally not trained to consider the semiotics of physical movement, and an ignorance of this area has led to an over-emphasis of spoken dialogue within scripts. For example, based on some of the non-dialogic improvisations in the workshop, I developed a silent, though physically resonant, moment where the character of Joth attempts to calm himself through yogic breathing, and the Guard becomes part of this, suggesting her superhuman awareness of the passenger's inner turmoil in a way that would not have been possible through speech.<sup>33</sup>

As part of the initial research and development period, members of the ensemble undertook the actual journey portrayed in the play; the majority of participants completed the journey at the same time, but a number had to undertake it at a later date due to scheduling issues. Bartram and I brought our young children along, to observe how they responded to the train journey and how the other passengers reacted to their presence. This was useful to me as a writer, as I was able to ascertain a number of factual aspects, such as where the train

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<sup>32</sup> Scott Graham and Steven Hoggett, *The Frantic Assembly Book of Devising* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 117.

<sup>33</sup> See pp. 310-11.

stopped, and the landscape of the journey. I also gained inspiration from observing how strangers interacted in that particular setting. The actors and Bartram also took notes, and reflected on the journey, and later shared these with me. Whilst a non-collaborative playwright can also undertake such research, it was in the pooling of observations — in other words, my gathering and collating of notes and verbal feedback from all who undertook the journey — that the full benefit of the journey was seen. For example, whilst I was able to observe how passengers reacted to my child, collaborators without children were able to make notes on how people behaved when they felt unobserved, and in quiet moments such as eating or listening to music; this corresponds to the pooling of observations and reflections made by the collaborative team who made *Cloud Nine*.<sup>34</sup>

However, unlike *Cloud Nine*, which maintained a fairly consistent collaborative ensemble, we unfortunately lost the majority of the original group of performers due to various circumstances, including the offer of better-paying work.<sup>35</sup> This meant that when we re-grouped approximately a month later (second part of Fig. 6, Stage 2), there were new actors, and some roles still to be cast. It was therefore quite difficult to write any substantial passages of script, as I wanted to allow new cast members the opportunity to develop their own characters in the same way the original group had. Bartram invited a puppeteer to join us, and we began work with a basic puppet figure representing the toddler. The director and I had not discussed how the puppeteer would be integrated into the cast, but watching the actors interact with him and the puppet, combined with the puppeteer's own wish to be more than a manipulator on stage, I decided that we should take advantage of his presence to make him a character in his own right; this sparked off story ideas and writing.

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<sup>34</sup> The characters of Tessa and Myrtle eat and listen to music; these moments provide information to the audience about their relationship as grandparent and grandchild.

<sup>35</sup> Actor Dave Hill did drop out at an early stage of the development of *Cloud Nine*, due to an offer of better-paid work; *The Joint Stock Book: The Making of a Theatre Collective*, ed. by Rob Ritchie (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 67.

During this time, Bartram was using the Viewpoints gridlines system as a structure for improvisation.<sup>36</sup> I had not previously used the system; nor had the majority of actors. Though I appreciated how, like a story structure which exists before the writing of a script, the physical act of confining one's movement to a grid might allow for better focus on character development, I did not initially fully grasp the benefits of the system. However, despite my resistance, an examination of the script, particularly the opening scene (as scripted) of the characters boarding the train, reveals the fact that these exercises were influential. The first moments of the play see the characters creating the hustle and bustle of a train station; as with the Viewpoints system, they must walk following an individual line and not collide, whilst incorporating various qualities of movement to create their characters.<sup>37</sup>

We were joined by a movement director/choreographer who had training in Laban methodology; I was previously familiar with some of the basic concepts of the movement system, which uses 'physical actions as metaphorical expressions'.<sup>38</sup> Rick Kemp states that developmental and performative techniques rooted in non-verbal communication offer 'theatre practitioners a vocabulary for the ways in which we express thoughts and feelings that are implicit in a situation, but not explicitly expressed in language'. Kemp, who applies neuroscientific principles to performance contexts, argues that rather than speaking of 'subtext' in theatre practice (particularly given its associations with literary, written text), we should use the term 'non-verbal meaning' as it offers more scope.<sup>39</sup> This corresponds to my own belief, which forms part of the root of this enquiry, that playwrights must acknowledge meanings which can be transmitted to an audience more effectively through embodied performance, than through dialogue. Subtext can be easily communicated through the written

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<sup>36</sup> See Chapter One for an explanation of the Viewpoints system.

<sup>37</sup> See the opening scene of *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill*, pp. 304-06. The director later decided to include an unscripted scene which introduced the chorus and occurred prior to the scripted opening scene.

<sup>38</sup> I had undertaken Laban training as part of my MA in Text and Performance at RADA/King's College London, 2006-07; Rick Kemp, *Embodied Acting: What Neuroscience Tells us About Performance* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), p. 50.

<sup>39</sup> Kemp, p. 26.

word, and involves transmitting an understanding — sometimes conscious and sometimes unconscious — beneath the words the character speaks, which often opposes the spoken statement. The character either deliberately chooses not to reveal their true understanding, or is compelled not to by external forces, or their own psychology. Non-verbal communication goes beyond this: it allows actors (and people in general) to employ the language of the body, which can express emotions or abstract concepts more effectively than words, regardless of whether the meaning is sub-textual or not. For example, an actor portraying a parent can transmit that character's affection for a child in a more holistic way through a gentle touch, lowered tone of voice, and a particular facial expression, than through speaking the words 'I love you'. There is no subtext involved in this moment, as the parent is not hiding her love for the child, and by employing a physical language as a metaphor for emotion (as all human beings do), the audience is able to understand the specific nature of that emotion. This is an exceedingly rich seam for exploration in playwriting technique, yet one which has had very little attention, beyond the work of practitioners such as Frantic Assembly.

Kemp also argues that the 'bodymind' connection works in two directions: as physical action can exist as the metaphorical embodiment of internal thought and emotion, so can physical movement spark and shape conceptual thought.<sup>40</sup> He identifies Rudolf Laban's techniques as being effective entry points for actors into the 'way in which physical action can both stimulate and express conceptual thought';<sup>41</sup> I would argue that familiarity with Laban's approach can also be beneficial for writers. I was able to participate in some of the Laban-inspired exercises which the choreographer introduced, and immediately saw the application of his theories in terms of character development, beginning to make notes on characters' particular qualities of movement and how this would translate into speech styles and interactions with other people. For example, the actor playing the character of Myrtle had

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<sup>40</sup> Kemp, p. xvi.

<sup>41</sup> Kemp, p. 50.

decided, via the exercises, that her character's core Laban effort was 'flicking', which indicates that her movement has the qualities of being flexible, sudden, and light. As Jean Newlove explains, 'flicking is a movement with obvious free flow, it is crisp and light and always brief and is quite unlike the action of relaxed shaking'.<sup>42</sup> The actor's choice of effort strongly influenced the speech style I used for the character, as well as her stage directions. She occasionally sings her lines, and her dialogue contains sentences of differing length and erratic flow.<sup>43</sup> This is a methodology I now use when developing characters (as explored below in my commentary on *Playground*); in this way, my experience on *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill* has had a long-lasting impact on my writing.

On the other hand, although the movement director and I spoke in the workshop, there was little joint planning or discussion outside of the workshop between us; Bartram held meetings and communicated with us separately, emphasising the traditional (and, arguably, unhelpful) dichotomy between movement and text. Rather, the movement-based activities were organised through discussion with the director. Bartram had decided in advance that certain moments of the play would be explored physically rather than through dialogue; this is akin to Bryony Lavery's work with Frantic Assembly, where she leaves 'space' for physical moments, although Frantic Assembly's directors also develop the movement for their work, so there is a closer relationship between the writer and the choreographer(s) than I experienced. For example, Bartram decided that he wanted a dream sequence included, which would be developed with the choreographer.<sup>44</sup> Although I was present during some of the development of this scene (as a passive observer), beyond thinking strategically how it could be placed in the narrative, I had little input. In retrospect, although my writing was strongly influenced by my observations of the work developed by the choreographer, a more formal

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<sup>42</sup> Jean Newlove and John Dalby, *Laban for All* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2004), pp. 132-33. There are eight Laban 'efforts' which describe the qualities of movement.

<sup>43</sup> For example, see *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill*, p. 328.

<sup>44</sup> See p. 356.

structure of communication and a closer working relationship with her may have led to a more holistic integration of movement and narrative.

As we approached the final stages of the research and development period (Fig. 6, Stage 2), I wrote basic character outlines, and discussed these with the performers, taking note of objections, and identifying which characters I needed to know more about. Following this discussion, I found improvisations more focused, and the actors were engaged in working through story and character arcs I felt had been previously neglected. Additionally, I had asked the actors to come up with ten formative incidents from their characters' lives, both as an aid to my own character development and to inform their performances. This exercise is a technique developed from my training as a playwright, aligning a naturalistic approach to character development favoured by the majority of pedagogical writers (with the exception of Paul Castagno) with variants of Stanislavski-derived exercises actors use to develop psychologically realistic characters. This corresponded to Bartram's desired approach of realistic character speech (in speaking style, if not in content), contrasted with moments of non-realistic movement. Such an emphasis is not unusual in devised theatre; to place the type of psycho-sociologically-based exercises which have developed in the wake of Stanislavski strictly within the realm of dramatic theatre is to ignore the fact that many devised productions contain moments of realism (for example, Caryl Churchill and Frantic Assembly's devised work). On the other hand, feedback from my previous (non-collaborative) scripts consistently indicated that I needed to focus more on character development; in collaborating with the actors I was able to be more expansive in defining personalities. The writing exercise did, however, generate a great deal of material as we were working through the development of sixteen characters, without much consideration as to how they would fit into the action of the play. As Joan Schirle writes: '[t]he playwright faces

the problem of the blank page; with group devising, the problem is compounded by the number of opinions about how to fill it.<sup>45</sup>

I also identified the ‘facts’ of the story (for example, Joth was on the way to his father’s funeral, and Myrtle is travelling with her granddaughter, a troubled teenager), and what information needed to be filled in (for example, what was Joth’s relationship with his father, and what was bothering Emily whilst she was boarding the train). Again, the actors and Bartram responded positively through discussion and focused improvisations, although some actors did choose to ignore previously-determined facts and take their character in a different direction. For example, the actor playing Richard (who had come in late to the process) decided to make his character more misanthropic than had been originally envisaged, without considering plot implications. Rather than rejecting the actor’s choices, I spoke to him and together we reached a compromise which encompassed the plot points already determined. Had I been writing the script on my own, these negotiations would not have taken place, but, as recorded in my workshop diary, the complicated character which resulted was ‘better than what I would have come up with on my own’. Unfortunately, due to the actor eventually dropping out of the production at a late stage, the onstage action of this character had to be significantly reduced.

A fascinating factor which emerges from an examination of my diary notes of the research and development weekends, which is rarely dealt with in the literature on devising, is the effect of the physical circumstances of the workshop room on the work produced. For example, because of budgetary restrictions (a common issue with work devised for fringe theatre) we did not have a space which we could use consistently; we moved between various rooms in the Jerwood Space, and the Rosemary Branch Theatre, and the Dance Research Studio. The rooms in the Jerwood Space and Dance Research Studio are bright, with large

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<sup>45</sup> Joan Schirle, ‘Potholes in the Road to Devising’, *Theatre Topics*, 15 (2005), 91-102 (p. 91).

windows, air conditioning, and a good deal of space for movement. The Rosemary Branch, on the other hand, involved cramped rooms, which were generally full of set and costumes from other productions, and temperatures were high. As my notes reveal, the enthusiasm and focus of the group, as well as our ability to accomplish physical work, waned when we were in the Rosemary Branch.<sup>46</sup> Whilst similar physical circumstances would also affect the rehearsal process of a non-devised play, these effects would occur after the act of script creation. A solo writer can, in most circumstances, control the environment of script development. A writer-deviser cannot, which is probably a factor in the decision of most playwrights who work collaboratively to write away from the workshop room. The space a collaborative group occupies whilst working can affect the amount and quality of work that is accomplished, thereby impacting upon the material with which the writer-deviser has to work. The amount (and quality of) notes I took at the Jerwood Space and Dance Research Studio is significantly higher than those from the Rosemary Branch, and are better represented within the script.

At the end of the research and development period, we took a four-week break (Stage 3). Bartram did not set specific goals for writing, but it was mutually agreed that I would come back after this break with written material, though there would still be development work occurring afterwards. As we were still not fully cast, I was reluctant to do a large amount of script-writing. During this time, I was dependent upon video recordings of the workshops, written information from the actors, and my personal notes.<sup>47</sup> We received news

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<sup>46</sup> Observations from my diary include: 8 May (Rosemary Branch), 'slightly restricted [in our movement exercises] by the size of [the] room'; 19 June (Rosemary Branch), 'had to work in the main theatre amidst an existing set [...] which meant we were quite limited for physical work'; 26 June (Rosemary Branch), 'the actors really struggled [with a task identifying conscious/unconscious desires]. Perhaps it was the heat'.

<sup>47</sup> As noted in my diary dated 16 July 2010: 'I'd say a video camera is pretty much an essential tool in the devising room, as I get so absorbed in the action I tend to be a bit remiss in writing notes — or when I do write them, they are just short lines of things someone has said that I quite like, without the context. The videos are also really helpful because I can pause and rewind and get a proper sense of how a particular actor speaks in character.'

that one of the actors had received funding for another project and had to drop out, which was troubling, as we had developed characters which were strongly linked to her cultural background (Catalan), including some dialogue in her native tongue. It was not likely that we would be able to cast another actor with a similar background, which made writing particular scenes problematic. Over the course of the original research and development period, there had been significant losses of cast members, which impacted the sense of ensemble within the group, particularly as actors arriving at different stages in the process would not have experienced some of the earlier exercises designed to create a shared language within the collaboration. Not only did this affect group morale, but it made it difficult for me to construct a text that allowed for the particular physical vocabularies of the group, as its constituent parts were ever-shifting. This situation was somewhat ameliorated by having a shared sense of purpose with Bartram, developed through regular conversations, which helped to provide direction in the structural construction of the narrative.

However, this did allow me to take an approach to writing which differed from my previous efforts. Rather than writing without a good deal of planning, I used this time to create detailed outlines of the characters which had been developed in the workshop; those still to be cast were provided with basic written descriptions. Additionally, during this time, I created a list of plot events that must or could happen; some of these came out of research and development work, and some were my own creations. These were then organized into three sections/acts, which represented three sections of the train journey: London to Slough; Slough to Reading; Reading to Oxford. This plotting work represents the consolidation of my previous writer training (organizing action into a clear structure) combined with observations from the devising room and train journey.<sup>48</sup> Conversely, what had not been apparent in the

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<sup>48</sup> As noted in my diary dated 20 July 2010: 'It was very helpful to have already worked out when the various characters get on and off.' See Appendix G for a 'Character Map' I created to aid in structuring the play; it is indicative of the difficulty of organizing many different roles.

devising room (because of the nature of improvising scenes in an unconnected fashion) was the difficulty of physically structuring scenes on a train journey. For example, in order for passengers to encounter and react to other passengers, I had to compose scenarios that would require frequent movement, whereas most train journeys involve largely static passengers. This situation was further complicated by the fact that I was unable to compose a sequential script (which was my usual methodology as a writer); I could write dialogue only for characters we had developed in the preceding months and not for characters which we had not yet cast or developed extensively.

Falling back on previous practice, and using some of the character and physical work done in rehearsal (in particular the Viewpoints grid approach), I was able to construct an opening scene, establishing the characters and train setting. This mainly consisted of stage directions with limited dialogue; a clear result of physical work done without speech in the workshop room, combined with personal observations of the rush of bodies when a train platform is announced. I also wrote a scene between the characters of Elise (a character who was cut from the final script) and Richard, relying heavily on video recordings of improvisational work. It was a comic moment which had worked well in the workshop, and I used a number of lines verbatim, although a good deal was also cut out in order to give the scene a more solid structure. Finally, I wrote a scene for the character Emily, the mother of the toddler who gets on at Slough, partially based on improvisations, although the dialogue was entirely of my own construction. In retrospect, I realize that, as the character of Emily was much closer to my own experience and the actor playing her came in late to the process, I attempted to take greater control of her development, and relied less on workshop observations. I did, however, make changes to the character's given circumstances (for example, the name and job of her husband), to acknowledge the preparatory work the actor had done.

In comparison to the collaborative context of the research and development period for *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill*, the corresponding period of development for *Playground* was predominantly spent in a solitary context. The formal writing of the script began five months after my initial diary entry (Fig. 7, Stage 1). Previously, I had outlined a number of what I termed ‘loose scenarios’ and characters, in a similar fashion to the early work on *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill*, with the exception that the ideas were generated by me, rather than by collaborators. The influence of the pedagogical writers from Chapter Two was strong at this point, in particular Tim Fountain’s advice about just ‘*getting to the end*’.<sup>49</sup> Additionally, I was influenced by a number of writers’ observations about developing believable characters, which, as noted, is not my forte. For example, Steve Waters’s suggestion that it is useful ‘to think of characters in a play as being equivalent to instruments in an orchestra — they bring with them colours, textures and effects’ aided in thinking about how, in carefully differentiating characters, they must still work together within the overarching structure of the story.<sup>50</sup> In addition, Robert McKee’s advice on disposing of characters who have the same attitude led to the elimination of one from the script and a focus on ensuring all four central characters were distinctive.<sup>51</sup> Had this been a collaborative production, I would not have been able to dispose of a character (apart from doubled roles, as was the case with *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill*), as that would have entailed the elimination of an actor; an example of the effect of necessarily matching character numbers to actors involved is the somewhat redundant role of Maud in *Cloud Nine*.

As discussed in Chapter Two, many of the pedagogical texts focus on the classic Aristotelian structure of a single protagonist. The nature of devising work means that there is rarely a leading character and multiple perspectives are explored; this, as identified in the

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<sup>49</sup> Fountain, p. 3; his emphasis.

<sup>50</sup> Waters, *The Secret Life of Plays*, p. 108.

<sup>51</sup> Robert McKee, *Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting* (York: Methuen, 2014), p. 184.

commentary on Paul Castagno's theories, is often known as polyvocality. My personal preference, derived from my encounters with devising and/or work which could be identified as postdramatic, is to provide equal weighting to the stories of more than one character, without the existence of an obvious protagonist or antagonist. Thus, I rejected much of the advice about an identifiable central character and decided to give equal emphasis to the stories of all four women. In so doing, it was essential that they represented obviously differing perspectives, otherwise (and as indicated in the majority of pedagogical texts), there would be a lack of the essential ingredient of drama: conflict.<sup>52</sup> Because of the axiom I had learned from writing training at RADA, that every scene must contain its own central conflict, even if it is the internal conflict of a character, along with Lajos Egri's entreaty that 'every scene is obligatory', I built my structure on both the development of a major conflict (between the characters of mothers Bobbi and Coral, in regards to their reactions to an incident between their children) and the minor conflicts each woman faced.<sup>53</sup> Despite my dislike of the type of formulaic structure espoused by Robert McKee, I decided to follow some of his advice. For example, I placed the 'inciting incident' (when Bobbi's child exposes himself to Coral's daughter) within the first quarter of the play.<sup>54</sup> Following a rough formula did make writing less laborious, as I was able to plan how to arrive at certain points of conflict. In the literature on devising, structural plotting in this way is rarely mentioned; the implication seems to be that stories are developed in a more organic way, without consideration of Aristotelian norms.<sup>55</sup> However, when working on *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill*, I did identify areas of conflict and turning points for characters early in the process, and, in

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<sup>52</sup> John Howard Lawson states: 'The essential character of drama is social conflict'; *The Theory and Technique of Playwriting and Screenwriting*, 2nd edn (New York: Hill and Wang, 1960), p. 168.

<sup>53</sup> Lajos Egri, *The Art of Dramatic Writing* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1946), p. 232.

<sup>54</sup> McKee, p. 200. However, the audience does not find out the specifics of the inciting incident until the end of Act One.

<sup>55</sup> Bernd Kessler states that for writers who engage with devising, 'it is surprising how little we need to know before work can begin'; Bernd Kessler, 'Playwriting', in *Devised and Collaborative Theatre: A Practical Guide*, ed. by Tina Bicat and Chris Baldwin (Marlborough: The Crowood Press, 2002), pp. 63-74 (p. 65).

many ways, used improvisations to create material to fill in the gaps; this is evidence of my writer's training being used to make the writing-devising process more efficient in terms of structural development.

As such, plotting the moments of conflict aided in creating an overall architecture for the play, and also made for a quicker writing process. I decided to use the three-act structure popular with filmmakers, and frequently seen on contemporary stages, although I had not consciously used it before; this was also an attempt to mirror the structure of *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill*, although the three-act structure in that play was somewhat artificial in that it was dictated by the three stages of the journey.

Upon further reflection, the popular three-act structure is as artificial a framework as a three-part train journey, and in many ways the development of structure according to the subject matter of the play (as generally occurs in devised theatre) is a more sensible strategy. The plotting of Act One in *Playground* was fairly straightforward, but I found it difficult to decipher where Act Two should end and Act Three begin. I decided to choose an ending point for Act Two where the character of Elaine makes a decision to write an accusatory blog, combined with a 'Workers' Scene' which suggested impending disaster on the building site, which then set up the final conflict and resolution. Having seen this in production and re-reading the script, I now think a two-act structure would have been more appropriate, and would have felt more natural without the imposition of a climactic scene signposting the end of an act.<sup>56</sup>

I was cognizant of my previous experience of devising throughout the writing of the first draft. The majority of pedagogical texts, with the exception of Paul Castagno's *New Playwriting Strategies* (and to a lesser degree Steve Waters's book), direct the aspirant

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<sup>56</sup> Feedback from an audience member commented that there were a number of 'false endings'. Draft Six (see Stage 6) has been edited into two acts.

playwright towards realism.<sup>57</sup> It is possible that a devised production may be realist, but the collaboratively-produced work I have seen suggests that this style of performance (and writing) is now rare within devised theatre, although, as previously indicated, realistic speech is common. My previous experience with devising and preference for more postdramatic forms mean that I tend to avoid realist/naturalist styles when writing. I had chosen a subject which seemed to suggest a naturalistic approach, but resisted this by incorporating scenes focusing on construction workers which employed an artificial style of language. I wrote these incorporated scenes with greater ease than other, more naturalistic, passages. In addition, as the practicalities of a low-budget production and my own desire for a physical approach demanded that the setting and the children were realized on stage without child actors, and predominantly through the adult actors' bodies, I often wanted to be writing in a workshop setting, where I could try out some of the physicalized moments and more conceptual passages with performers before committing to them in the script. This corresponds with Bryony Lavery's experience whilst writing *Goliath*, and playwright Christopher Durang's comment cited in Chapter Two that the critical analysis of his writing by actors was more helpful than feedback from other writers.<sup>58</sup>

My inclination to have the input of performers was strong enough to provoke me to arrange an informal reading of the first draft (Fig. 7, Stage 1). I made an audio recording, and had a discussion immediately following the reading. Following on from the discussion in Chapter Two of the limitations of the playwrights' workshop methodology, where fellow

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<sup>57</sup> For example, David Edgar and William Archer frequently draw on examples from the (more naturalist) work of Henrik Ibsen: David Edgar, *How Plays Work* (London: Nick Hern, 2009), pp. 4, 27, 30, 31-3, 43-5, 72, 100, 103-4, 106, 109, 147, 156, 184-5, 192, 204; William Archer, *Play-Making, A Manual of Craftmanship* (Boston, MA: Small, Maynard and Company, 1912), pp. 11, 40, 45, 59, 67-68, 74-79, 85-87, 91, 98-101, 103-04, 106, 108-11, 127, 129, 143, 145, 147, 153-54, 194, 196, 207, 219, 230-31, 253, 256-57, 283, 299, 337, 363, 373, 377, 393, 396-97.

<sup>58</sup> Marsha Norman and Christopher Durang, 'Juilliard's Nick and Nora Charles', in *Playwrights Teach Playwriting: Revealing Essays by Contemporary Playwrights*, ed. by Joan Harrington and Crystal Bain (Hanover, NH: Smith and Kraus, 2006), pp. 69-90 (p. 88).

writers read scripts out loud, and having experienced this type of class myself, I find reading with actors more beneficial as they tend to focus less on how one should write and more on character presentation and issues requiring clarification. In addition, I have found performers' training allows for a more immediate interpretation of dialogue, which in turn helps me to hear if a line sounds awkward. Like Lavery and Churchill, and influenced by my previous work in devising, which has given me insight into how actors can use rhythm, pace, and pause to add layers of meaning to text, the layout of my dialogue on the page is somewhat unusual. It structurally reflects both individual speech strategies for characters, and my allowance of 'space' (akin to Bryony Lavery's work with Frantic Assembly) for actors to develop physical interpretations. Additionally, I followed David Edgar's advice (profiled in Chapter Two) about using redundant phrases to provide information about a character.<sup>59</sup> For example, Elaine's repetition, unconscious blocking, and pauses in certain situations indicate to the audience that she is extremely uncomfortable and nervous, and Coral's more confident speech pattern reverses the stereotype of working class inferiority. However, it is not always easy to know, when writing alone, if these strategies will have the desired effect in performance and/or sound appropriate.

The reading of the first draft was an attempt to replicate the collaborative context. However, unlike the devising room, the actors had only just encountered the characters and had not developed any sense of ownership; their commentary could, in this sense, be considered more objective as there was no sense that they were trying to suggest changes in order to give themselves more to do on stage, or to have the character more reflective of their own vision.<sup>60</sup> Comments included notes on phrasing or vocabulary which did not ring true to

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<sup>59</sup> David Edgar, *How Plays Work* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2011), p. 155. For an example of redundant phrases, see *Playground*, p. 421.

<sup>60</sup> This is not to say that actors do not allow personal bias to intervene in table reads of early drafts, but they have less at stake when providing commentary on a script which they may not eventually perform themselves.

British ears; questions about the effectiveness of foreshadowing; and the validity of character decisions. The comments were mainly phrased as questions rather than imperatives. This step in the process was highly constructive, yet reading an early draft with actors is not something generally recommended within pedagogical texts.

In addition, I had the opportunity to stage two scenes as part of Performance Lab, a showing of work for practice-as-research doctoral students at Goldsmiths (Fig., 6, Stage 1). The rehearsal process was extremely useful, as I was directing, and therefore able to specifically focus on the physical aspects of the script, such as the mimed playground scene and a scene split between two moments in time.<sup>61</sup> Working as both director and writer can alter one's status within the group context; for example, actors may be not as comfortable offering critical commentary on, or resist experimentation with, the script, as compared to processes where the director was not also the writer (however, this has generally not been my experience). Again, this corresponds to the outside-in/inside-out dichotomy of my PaR methodological approach. In order to avoid an overly-faithful approach to the text, I asked the actors to offer critical commentary, assuring them they would do so in a supportive environment, and designed the workshop process so that I was able to try different approaches and rewrite as we went along. For example, I realized, with the staging of the scene in the headmaster's office (in which the Head discusses — separately with each woman — the violence that occurred between Bobbi and Coral in the playground), that the actor playing the Head needed clear motivation to switch his focus from one woman to another. I was able to amend lines so that the women led the changes, which also helped to increase tension in the scene. Without having observed this scene on its feet I would not have been aware of the need for these changes. The performance of the scenes (at the Performance Lab evening) was less successful, mainly due to the fact that it was a first draft which was not

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<sup>61</sup> The scenes rehearsed and performed were early versions of Act One, Scene 6, and Act Two, Scene 3.

ready for performance. It was, however, helpful in that I could see the manner in which the dialogue had been written led to stereotyped performances, particularly of the characters of Bobbi and the Head; I had desired more nuanced portrayals and understood after watching the scenes on their feet that my character depictions within the script therefore had to be more complex. This showing of work, along with my experience of presenting what was essentially a first draft in the final production of *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill*, and the exhortations of the majority of the pedagogical writers, emphasized the importance of the next stages of writing: rewriting.

### **Redrafting and Rehearsals**

As indicated in the introduction, the subdivisions of this chapter are somewhat imposed upon the two projects, in that the process of devising does not necessarily line up in a temporal way with that of solo script writing. The majority of the redrafting of *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill* took place whilst rehearsals were ongoing, whereas the redrafting of *Playground* took place before rehearsals began. It is, however, useful to place these stages in the same section, so as to highlight the effect of the particular working context on the rewriting process.

My focus whilst undertaking the second draft of *Playground* (Fig. 7, Stage 2) was character development, filling in necessary information, and introducing elements to the action which would raise tension; although this had been influenced by the feedback from the readings, the solo context of the writing of *Playground* meant that redrafting decisions were determined by me alone. Specifically, I wanted to ensure that the individual voices were distinctive and characters became more than lightly-drawn stereotypes. In doing so, I followed pedagogical advice such as Alan Ayckbourn's: 'Characters may well have developed their distinctive speech patterns gradually over the course of the play. Now [whilst

redrafting] is the time to go back and standardise the earlier pages.’<sup>62</sup> Upon examination of the first draft, I realized that speech patterns had changed from the beginning to the end of the play — in particular Bobbi, who transitioned from a halting, nervous style of speech in the early scenes, to a more confident, rapid style of speaking by the final scenes — and I made an effort both to standardize the speech for each character and ensure it was distinctive from other characters. Ayckbourn also advised that one should confirm the ‘tiny pre-plants’ are in place ‘for things that are to happen later’;<sup>63</sup> following this, I ensured there was mention of unsafe conditions, specifically an unstable wall, at the building site, and suggestions of Elaine’s blogging activities.

At the same time, I realized that there were aspects of the first draft which were not essential to the overall story, and needed to be cut.<sup>64</sup> These cuts were not the result of suggestions by actors or a director, or observations of performance, but were based on my own assessments. It was also clear that the central issue of the play — how the British class system affects the lives of everyday people — had to be well-defined through the intertwining of action and character. I therefore rejected much of the pedagogical literature (with the exception of Paul Castagno) which alternatively argues that action should dominate over character or vice versa, and employed a strategy closer to the standard devising ‘compositional’ approach of ensuring equilibrium amidst multiple dramatic concerns, where ‘the spectator’s attention is held by the fascination with spectacle and the experience of the whole’.<sup>65</sup> Thus, I decided to introduce a new opening scene, which tied in with the previously-written final scene of the central characters’ reverting to children, in which we watch the characters emerge from four-year-olds to adults via the structure of a school sports

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<sup>62</sup> Alan Ayckbourn, *The Crafty Art of Playmaking* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), p. 95.

<sup>63</sup> Ayckbourn, p. 95.

<sup>64</sup> For example, a minor storyline, involving a breastfeeding ‘sit-in’ organized by Elaine, was deleted.

<sup>65</sup> Dymphna Callery, *Through the Body: A Practical Guide to Physical Theatre, Exploration and Exercises in Devising, Mask-work, Play, Complicite and Total Theatre* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2001), p. 193.

day. I had learned from my work devising that a good deal of expository information can be delivered via stylized scenes, using the actors' movement and reactions rather than dialogue. It also introduced the theme of class in a concrete way, as the audience would watch the characters being formed in accordance to societal expectations.

Before I began the second draft, I developed character outlines, including Laban qualities of movement, following a line of influence from my devising work. Using the process of thinking about Laban qualities in this solo-writing context was useful in that I was able to consider how to write speech patterns for each character in accordance with these qualities, which would help to differentiate characters on stage. This also aligns with Kemp's argument, outlined above, that employing physical movement (I often enacted the various Laban qualities whilst engaging in written character work) helps to provoke emotion and spark ideas. In addition, I created a list of things which 'needed to happen'; this was not a plot outline as such, as it was not in sequential order, but reminded me of what needed to be accomplished in order for one scene to feed into another. This corresponds to the developmental work on *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill*, when I listed the events that must or should happen in order to move the narrative forward.

After the ground work for the second draft was completed, I began rewriting, but employed a different process from previous (solo) rewrites. As suggested by Tim Fountain, I did not work directly from my first draft. He states: 'One thing I always try to avoid is writing the second draft with the first one next to me [...]. I believe that any passage that is good enough will come back to me, and what gets forgotten should probably stay forgotten.'<sup>66</sup> Hence, I rewrote predominantly from scratch, using my notes and what I had retained in my memory. I was aided in this by the decision to name scenes. The intention was not to use these titles in performance, but to help me pinpoint what was essential about a

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<sup>66</sup> Fountain, p. 70.

particular scene, and to tie it to the larger themes of the play.<sup>67</sup> The influence of Bryony Lavery's work was also palpable in the naming of scenes, for this is something she has done in the majority of her published plays; in some ways, it was a message to my future collaborators who would come on board in later stages, as the scene titles were intended for their (and my) purposes, and not the audience's benefit. Writing in this way also helped me to focus on structure, in that I had to have the overall action of the scene plotted in my head before I began writing dialogue. Having a specific goal to achieve (the necessary action for a particular scene), but the freedom to write dialogue as it occurred, in some ways replicated the improvisations of written scenes which Ed Bartram used in rehearsals for *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill* (see below). However, as a solo playwright, I was liberated by the ability to go over lines immediately and edit what I had written. I also had the disadvantage of not being able to rely on collaborators when I experienced a block; instead, I turned to my original draft and used sections of dialogue (momentarily departing from Fountain's advice). Thus, the second draft consisted mainly of newly-written dialogue with a few excerpts from the first draft.

I sent this second draft to six readers (Fig. 6, Stage 2), all known personally to me and with extensive experience in the theatre. Seeking feedback in this way can stand in for the response a writer might receive in the devising room when presenting work to collaborators. In particular, I sought the advice of an experienced director (Sue Dunderdale) and commercial producer (Nicole Martorana), because their practical knowledge meant that they would provide feedback that was rooted in the functionalities of staging, rather than in literary analysis. There are advantages to written feedback, as opposed to the immediacy of devising-room reception: the respondent has had time to digest the play fully, re-read certain scenes, and consider their response before sending it on. Again, if the reader is not personally

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<sup>67</sup> Though I did not create the scene titles with the intention of their usage in performance, the director incorporated them by using projections.

involved in the production, there is less inclination to shape feedback in a way which will advantage them personally, though bias is inevitably invoked. Although it is impossible to obtain a fully objective response from readers, there is a lessening of subjectivity when scripts are read by individuals who do not have a personal stake in a particular production. In collating and comparing the written responses, I noticed that, whilst the majority of respondents wished to see more character development, individual readers pinpointed different characters for further development. Often, these were the characters with whom they were the most closely aligned class- or experience-wise. One disadvantage to having individual readers provide feedback, which, again, is not mentioned within pedagogical literature (or texts about devising), is the lack of dialogue between respondents. In a devising room, individual collaborators will present their editorial comments in front of other participants and will be challenged to defend their point of view. This can benefit the writer-deviser, as editorial advice is therefore more likely to be balanced. This relates to the case study of *Cloud Nine*, where Anthony Sher's continuing objections to the second act (which he later admitted were probably due to being given a small role) were nullified by the rest of the group.<sup>68</sup>

Thus, I used the observations which recurred throughout the various responses to shape the third draft, though particular comments which stood on their own were also useful. Often, the common observations corresponded to my own concerns. For example, the majority of respondents objected to the killing of a child in the end; I had also felt uneasy about this, but had previously seen it as an inevitable conclusion. The feedback allowed me to take a different approach, and I realized that it would be more thematically potent if the character of Coral was killed or injured, due to the lasting repercussions of a vulnerable child losing a parent.

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<sup>68</sup> *The Joint Stock Book: The Making of a Theatre Collective*, ed. by Rob Ritchie (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 141

I developed a list of action points and embarked on the third draft (Fig. 7, Stage 3), working more closely from the second draft than I had from the first, but allowing myself to write new material as well, rather than simply finessing what was already established. Identifying the central action for each scene, I carefully pinpointed what each character wanted to achieve, checking after I had written the scene that this information had been clearly presented. As David Edgar explains, we ‘learn about characters [...] through their pursuits of an objective, and [...] their success or failure achieving it’.<sup>69</sup> This led to a third draft in which the characters were much better defined and differentiated, and the action more coherent. Had I been given the opportunity to revise the script for *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill* in such a manner, I believe the script (and production) would have benefitted greatly. On the other hand, as I was working on my own, without the benefit of editors in the form of a group of collaborators, my attempts to respond to the individual proclivities of the written feedback resulted in a script which ballooned to 27 000 words. Although cuts were eventually made, I struggled at this stage to identify repetitive or unnecessary action; the length of *Playground* provides a telling contrast to the brevity of *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill*, in a similar fashion that Bryony Lavery’s solo-written play *Frozen* is significantly longer than her devised scripts. The restriction of having to create material within the limited time scale of a devised production (along with the wishes of my collaborators) meant that the script of *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill* was necessarily lean; without these constraints I did not give enough consideration to the length of *Playground*. Within the pedagogical literature on writing plays, following the general absence of commentary on devising, there is scant mention of redrafting with the aid of actors who can perform early drafts (although this practice is often deployed by theatres with commissioned writers). It is not always easy to gauge the length of a play on paper, especially when there is an emphasis on movement within the script. A simple read-through

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<sup>69</sup> Edgar, p. 44.

is not enough; to understand where cuts need to be made (or areas which require clarification) it is helpful to have actors put an early draft on its feet, similar to what would occur when working through scenes in the devising room. This is a methodology which should be considered within future playwriting guides.

The rehearsal period of *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill* provided me with these opportunities to test out material directly with actors and redraft when necessary. The group reconvened in August to rehearse thrice weekly (Fig. 6, Stage 4), with the addition of two cast members, and the loss of our puppeteer. I provided the new cast members with character outlines, based mainly on discussions with Bartram and my own ideas, although some of my collaborators' ideas were influential.<sup>70</sup> Given the difficulties of establishing a coherent structure with so many characters, I successfully argued that the actor playing the business man should be limited to one character only. At this stage, there were still two actors who had not yet joined us.

During these rehearsals, sections of script I had written were read out in rehearsal; I found this to be an uncomfortable experience since they were first drafts and I had not previously allowed anyone to read my material at such an early stage (although, following this experience, I did, as indicated above, use this approach with a read-through of the first draft of *Playground*). Additionally, Bartram had the group read the script by changing reader with every line (a technique some directors use to avoid premature line interpretation). Whilst I understand the motivation of this technique, as a writer it is difficult to hear if the lines flow properly or sound disjointed. Following this, the actors improvised what had been written. Again, this is a directorial technique I have witnessed in the rehearsal of non-devised plays, with the intent of observing what the actors understood about the scene and their initial

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<sup>70</sup> For example, one character was the teenage daughter of Myrtle (a character already well-developed); the actor playing Myrtle had suggested some details such as a name (Tessa) and family background.

physical approaches. Though I felt resistant to this exercise, as the specificities of my dialogue were ignored, I can now see its usefulness; I was able to gauge what the actors had understood and what had been missed. On the other hand, there is a danger with this technique that an actor can wilfully ignore a writer's choice with which they disagree, or attempt to draw more attention to their own performance than the scene warrants. In some instances, it became clear that the actors were diverting a great deal from the written structure, so Bartram reverted to using the script.

Intriguingly, the scenes which I had taken directly from improvisations did not seem to work once scripted, as observed in my diary entry for 4 August 2010:

[I am] not sure if it's just that the actors are reading them for the first time, but it's quite frustrating that lines that were so brilliant when they came out of the actors' mouths in improvisations, sound so awkward when they are being read. The bits that weren't taken directly from the video tapes seem to work better.

This is telling of the difference between the spontaneity of improvisation, and the careful crafting of dialogue, and resonates with Clive Barker's comments in Chapter One of the difficulty of repeating in (scripted) performance what has been created instinctively in improvisational rehearsal tasks.<sup>71</sup> Once scripted, what worked in an improvised scene can feel forced and unnatural. For example, a scene which involved Elise smelling dog faeces on the shoe of Richard, which revealed a great deal about their individual eccentricities, was very humorous in improvisation. However, after a reading of the first draft and a further second draft (which had been written with consideration of input from actors and the director) it was agreed that the scene did not work once scripted, as the spontaneous humour of the improvisation was difficult to recapture, and the scene felt uncomfortable to watch.

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<sup>71</sup> Barker, p. 3.

This may be aligned with Rick Kemp's observation that the 'brain processes written language in a different way than speech', which creates challenges for actors 'converting the words of a script to apparently spontaneous action'.<sup>72</sup> In focusing on the interpretation of written words, physical spontaneity, which created much of the joyous humour of the original scene, was lost. Following Kemp's argument, actors (consciously or unconsciously) may physically signal to an audience what is improvised and what is not. It is therefore extremely difficult for a writer working within traditional methodologies of writing (using the standard methods of assigning lines and stage directions within the formal parameters of a script) to capture the feeling of improvisation on paper. This is an area for further exploration, by way of practical investigation and experimentation with alternative forms of scripting observed rehearsal work.

By mutual agreement, the scene was cut.<sup>73</sup> After the initial failures of adapting scenes from video, combined with the necessity of creating a coherent through-line, I began to write scenes only loosely based on improvisational work, working from my observational notes. Although I found the video recordings to be an important reminder of rehearsal processes, attempting to write using this format of documentation has certain limitations, in that video can only capture work from one perspective, and obviates a holistic encounter with the work by making it no longer live performance. A writer's notes can capture an affective response to work, marking not only what was said and done, but sensations, and tangential ideas sparked by the work. It is in these moments where the important role of the writer-deviser is emphasised; the writer uses her observations to inspire original writing, applying her specific skills to craft a script which contains traces of the research and development work of the actors, but does not try to produce a precise replication. This brings to mind Caryl Churchill's work on *Cloud Nine*, where the innovative structure she

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<sup>72</sup> Kemp, p. xvii.

<sup>73</sup> See Appendix H for the cut scene.

created was inspired by the developmental work of the actors and director, rather than a replication of improvisations.

One such scene, which was spurred by my observations of the workshops, and resulting reflective consideration away from the rehearsal room, was the ‘mobile phone symphony’; I developed the structure (overlapping telephone conversations, written and performed like a musical score) in response to the need to include a great deal of expositional information about characters in a short amount of time.<sup>74</sup> It was also inspired by observations of the amount of time commuters spend on the telephone, and what can be learned about an individual by eavesdropping. Additionally, it suited the combination of naturalistic speech and non-naturalistic approaches to movement which were being developed in rehearsal. Though the structure was my own, I used character material from improvisations and developmental writing by the actors. It was time-consuming and complicated to write, and whilst constructing it I recorded in my diary (12 August 2010): ‘it’s [...] the kind of thing I need to see/hear in rehearsal.’ Had I not been working collaboratively at this point in the development of the script, I would not have been able to put this experimental approach on its feet and see if it worked. In the rehearsal room, it did appear to be quite challenging for the actors, but they embraced the structure and encouraged me to keep it. I was able to see that it was too lengthy and there were more potential avenues to develop the rhythm of the language. Without the opportunity to try it out and re-write it, I may have given up on the idea altogether, or it may have been poorly executed.

Sundays were dedicated to developing physical sections and creating material for the chorus, as well as focusing on puppetry. This temporal separation of days to focus on script work, and days to focus on movement, further emphasises Bartram’s directorial choice to

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<sup>74</sup> See pp. 212-27.

keep these two aspects distinct. Despite the fact that little text-based work was being done on these days, I attended so that I could understand how the more physical scenes could fit into the action, and indeed the work done on these days was highly influential for script development. The new puppeteer was female, and also a trained actor, whose improvisations suggested that she should have a greater role within the action. Rather than acting solely as the invisible best friend of Archie (the toddler), I reconfigured her into the omniscient character of 'The Guard', with a controlling hand in the action: thus, some of the complications of character movement could be resolved. This also allowed for a closer link between the Guard and the Chorus, who could flexibly shift characters between train employees, passengers, and pseudo-Shakespearean sprites, who aided the Guard in her interference with the character's lives. Bartram's original idea had been for the Chorus to function as supernumeraries, creating the sensation of a full train and enhancing the more physical, abstract scenes, but, after viewing the Chorus actors in rehearsal and their engagement with the production, I wanted to give them more to do.

Aided by rehearsal observations, and written and verbal notes from the actors and Bartram, the script was redrafted; I typically redraft scripts at least three times before production, which can be a time-consuming task. In this case, because of being able to observe what worked and what did not, I was able to complete the second draft in a number of days. At this point (Fig. 6, Stage 5), the structure of rehearsals shifted away from devising new material and towards the rehearsal of existing text and movement sequences. I limited my involvement in rehearsals so that I would have time to redraft and write, but also due in part to my concern that the actors were relying on me for script interpretation rather than looking to the director for guidance or making their own discoveries. Upon reflection, I now see that this withdrawal was unnecessary, and led to changes to the script being made which I would not have approved had I been in the room; a writer-deviser should remain a

consistent presence within the devising room throughout the process and be an ongoing participant in the dialogue about the development of the play in the same way an actor or director would.

Additionally, we lost a further two actors within a fortnight of the beginning of the production run. At this stage, the loss was highly problematic as two characters each had been developed specifically for the actors (Randolph and Richard, and Charlie and David). Given the previous difficulties in casting, along with my uneasiness with the number of stories being presented, I proposed to rewrite the script almost completely, cutting out or significantly reducing a number of characters. This meant that only one actor needed to be replaced, and the recast role (Richard) was minor enough that it could be easily learned by a new actor. The nature of this production, with a large cast of people who did not have a previous relationship with each other, nor a paid contract, meant that writing conditions were difficult. This was not the well-made collective identified by Bruce Barton and the discourse on ensemble practice in Chapter One, with a long-standing and trustful relationship with a director, and therefore many of the actors brought in were not able to withstand 'periods of uncertainty and abstraction'.<sup>75</sup> Though I was able to work quickly, the version of the script rehearsed and presented was essentially a first draft because of the large scale of changes necessitated by the loss of actors, and the focus at that point had to be on rehearsing. I was not able to finesse the new version as I would have liked, or, alternatively, argue against some of the significant changes made by actors. These conditions were specific to this particular production, and therefore my experience as a writer-deviser on *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill* cannot be treated as an exemplary model for all writer-devisers, although, in line with the majority of PaR investigations, the discoveries made through the specific parameters of my own practice, have ramifications for other writer-devisers and the

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<sup>75</sup> Bruce Barton, 'Mining "Turbulence": Authorship through Direction in Physically-Based Devised Theatre', in *Collective Creation, Collaboration and Devising*, ed. by Barton, pp. 136-51 (p. 145).

discourse in general on the practice. Within the low-budget/fringe sector, actor withdrawals and hasty rewrites are not uncommon; this goes unrecognized by the majority of texts on devising, which tend to provide examples of companies with reasonably secure funding, where the majority of problems stem from difficult interpersonal relations and challenges to the collaborative hierarchy.

My experience of rehearsing *Playground*, particularly the cohesion of the group context in which I was working, was different, and, in many ways, more positive. As producer of *Playground*, I was able to choose the majority of my creative team; in particular I was the sole decision-maker in hiring a director. In this way, my role as instigator of the project, and the person responsible for ‘hiring’ within the group context of *Playground* was very different than being a ‘hired hand’ in *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill*; this brings to mind Kate Cayley’s comments on her position within the collaboration with Zuppa Theatre on *The Archive of Missing Things*.<sup>76</sup> It is important, however, to note that, like the collaborative context of *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill*, the group I formed to work with on *Playground* was not an ensemble (in the traditional understanding of the word). Whilst we had a shared purpose in producing the play, I had not previously worked with any of the group, and there was the sense within the rehearsal process that the context of production was for this particular piece of work only (although I would be happy to work with all members of the production group again).

Jack Paterson was chosen as director because: I had previously seen his work; he had devising experience; and we had common aesthetic interests (we discussed these in a preliminary interview). He proposed eliminating the male actor (who would play the Head, Fergie, Terry, and the Foreman). I initially resisted the idea as it would cause complications for scenes in which five characters were present. However, the idea of an all-female cast

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<sup>76</sup> I did give the director, once on board, casting responsibilities, though we ran auditions together, and consulted closely about actors brought in on the basis of being personal contacts of Paterson’s.

appealed to me as a female theatre-maker cognizant of the rarity of plays which do not feature male actors. My openness towards trying out the ideas of collaborators, heavily influenced by my previous experience devising, also influenced my agreement to try it out without a male actor for one week of rehearsals (Fig. 7, Stage 4), after which we would make a decision on including a male performer. Unfortunately, due to health reasons, one of the cast had to withdraw before rehearsals began, which resulted in a re-shuffling of assigned roles and an actor who joined when we were already two weeks into the process. Given my experience with *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill*, I had expected at least one drop-out, although in this case it was far less problematic, since the roles had not been written for specific actors, and I was not reliant on actors' being present to develop material. Paterson also brought in a movement director (Roman Berry) who worked closely with the cast from the early stages of rehearsal. Interestingly, I worked much more closely with the movement director on *Playground* than I had with his counterpart of *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill*, due to the fact that Paterson, Berry, and I regularly had post-rehearsal meetings, and I was able to discuss my intentions with Berry, and how these intentions could be explored physically. This, again, emphasises how the particular context of relationships within the group, whilst separate from the actual working processes of rehearsing a theatrical production, directly affects the work produced. However, as the script was mostly in place by the time rehearsals began, the movement work influenced the staged interpretation of my writing, rather than the original writing itself (in opposition to the way that my observations of the choreographic development work on *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill* had been incorporated into the script), with the exception of a revised concluding, and heavily physicalized, scene to *Playground*. On the other hand, my experience of working with Berry on *Playground* has led to plans for joint research into the possibilities of incorporating dance and movement methodologies into playwriting training, thus having a likely influence on future writing projects.

I was present at the majority of rehearsals for *Playground*, and Paterson often requested that I take part in some of the physical development of scenes, along with filling in for missing actors. Like Ed Bartram, Paterson used the Viewpoints system, and taking part in these activities provided insight into his directorial processes, which I would not have had if I had sat passively in the corner. This directorial approach of having the playwright not only in the rehearsal room, but actively involved, corresponds to the examples of both Bryony Lavery and Caryl Churchill who worked with Frantic Assembly and Joint Stock respectively, rather than the dominant model of the absent (or quiet) playwright within non-devised processes. Whilst it had the advantage of allowing me to develop a good working relationship with the actors, it had the disadvantage of embedding me within rehearsals (making me more of an ‘insider’) when it may have been more productive for me to observe, and write, from a more objective (‘outsider’) position.

Following the first week of rehearsals, I had a discussion with Paterson, and agreed that we could maintain the cast as it stood, without the addition of a male performer. I did not agree with some of his directorial decisions: in particular duologues where he proposed a single actor played both roles, and an approach which emphasized aesthetically that the women were themselves creating secondary characters, influenced by their own existence. I felt this approach had more to do with Paterson’s desires to explore a directorial initiative which focused on the empowerment of women through the control of their own stories, which, whilst admirable, was not reflective of the emphasis in the play on the disempowerment of women within the class system. This tension between a writer’s and director’s aims would not generally occur at so late a stage of development within the devising process; as evidenced in *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill*, an agreed thematic approach was established from the earliest stages. In this way, devising can avoid time wasted within the final rehearsal stage.

As a result of our discussion, I decided to cut or alter a number of scenes and Paterson agreed to amend his approach to the secondary characters. At this stage, I felt better able to insist on certain aspects of script interpretation than I had with *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill*, in particular as I only had to compromise with one individual — the director — as opposed to a room full of collaborators with varying ideas and desires. Paterson made directorial suggestions, and I was able to view these suggestions as experiments in the rehearsal room before agreeing to the approach; again, my willingness to do this was closely tied to my experiences devising, and the understanding derived from it that often directors and actors can offer perspectives which enhance a script, rather than detract from it. For example, he suggested the usage of toy puppets for the Workers' Scenes, to emphasize the childlike nature of the building site interactions. I was able to observe the actors try it out in rehearsal, and agreed to the approach (which was not suggested in the script).

As the rehearsals continued, and with the full complement of actors, I reverted to a more traditional writer's role, observing and answering questions about the text, rather than being involved with performative work. The schedule, including what was rehearsed, was determined by Paterson in accordance with his commitments and that of the actors. Three out of four actors had day-time jobs, and Paterson had other work commitments, which meant that rehearsals were restricted to evenings and weekends. As a result, scenes were rehearsed in accordance with who could be present, and not in a particular order. I did not see a full run-through until the day of our preview, which made it difficult to gauge the length of the play, as well as spot areas which needed cutting or alteration. At the same time, although actors did ask questions and offer suggestions for the script, they did not appear as eager as the actors involved in *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill* to demand cuts or changes; all major edits, including cutting a secondary character, were mine. However, after considering an actor's comments that the portrayal of class issues within the final moments of the play did not ring

true to her, I did make significant changes to the structure and speech of the closing scene. My previous experience in devising made me more open to the suggestions of actors, and appreciative of their individual insight.

The script itself, along with Paterson's directorial approach, which meant the actors never physically left the performance space, was demanding for the performers. Although my style of writing, with a reliance on the actors' bodies to create the setting, has been heavily influenced by devising, it did not take into account the time necessary for actors to develop movement which would transmit the necessary information to the audience. On the other hand, this physical work did allow for the actors to develop their characterization in a holistic way, not just focused on the intention of spoken lines, but on a physical representation of the character.

As rehearsals progressed and it became apparent that we were short on time, Paterson emerged as a more authoritative voice, and I felt less able to interject and challenge directorial decisions. Although I was in the main satisfied with the direction of the piece, I did feel uncomfortable with certain physicalized 'emblems' (for example, the wide, unrealistic embrace used by all four mothers to denote the presence of the children), but decided that this was a directorial, rather than a writing, issue. This corresponds closely to the final stages of *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill*, where I was cognizant of stepping back to allow the director more authority.

Indeed, in the case of both plays (though significantly more for *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill*), what was eventually staged for an audience contained significant differences from the script I had written. Some of these changes were instigated by me, particularly scene and line cuts, but other changes were directorial choice. For example, the final scenes of *Playground*, moments heavily reliant on movement, were different from what was written. The stage

directions indicated that Coral was injured/killed by a falling wall, but it was presented as the children being injured. Additionally, the final scene of the play was a scaled down version of what I had written, mainly because the director ran out of time to rehearse it. Thus, the thematic intent was somewhat lessened, although given the length of the play, it was the correct decision to make this scene shorter. My previous devising experience had both a positive and negative influence in this respect: it allowed me to feel less of a need to control the directorial process since I viewed myself as a collaborator rather than the central figure. Yet, this impulse also meant that I was not as likely to intervene when direction veered from my authorial intent. This extended to design issues such as sound and set; although I was consulted, set, lighting, and costume were determined by Paterson and the designers with little input from myself beyond the original stage directions. The designers came into the process much later than is typical with a devised production, and, as a result, design elements were not as congruent with the production as other aspects, such as movement. For example, the lighting design served a basic function of illuminating the actors, rather than adding to the atmospheric resonance of the action.

Although, as indicated above, designers are often involved in the early stages of collaboration in devised theatre, offering opportunities for discussion with writers and consideration of design elements, in the case of *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill*, I had no contact with designers at all, apart from brief introductions while they were visiting the theatre.<sup>77</sup> Upon reflection, working with the set designer from an early stage could have offered solutions to the problems of having to find ways of moving the actors around the space of a train. As it was, my first encounter with design elements (apart from the puppet) was in the dress rehearsal. The implications of these particular issues in production, and my assessments (and

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<sup>77</sup> As with the actors, there were a number of designers who dropped out and had to be replaced.

those of others) of the strengths and weaknesses of both performances are examined in the next section.

### **Production and Feedback**

There were a number of unexpected moments when I watched the first full dress rehearsal of *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill* in the New Diorama Theatre — most significantly the addition of a physicalized opening sequence where the Guard and her spirit assistants came to life — which had not appeared in the script. Furthermore, two speeches had been significantly rewritten by actors in ways I felt to be incongruous with the overall structure.<sup>78</sup> Although I was unhappy with these changes, as a member of a collaborative group, rather than a playwright with contracted rights to approve changes, there was little I could do.<sup>79</sup> On the other hand, the simplified script, with fewer roles and overlapping conversations, allowed for clearer delineation of characters, making it easier for the audience to follow.

Audience feedback, though limited, was mainly positive; many respondents mentioned that they found it funny and well-observed.<sup>80</sup> The majority of respondents identified the work as a devised production, although a number would have known this

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<sup>78</sup> For example, the actor playing Emily objected to a speech I had written for her and, with the agreement of Bartram, replaced it with a speech of her own, using colour as a metaphor for her outlook on relationships. From my writer's perspective, the style of the new speech and its dramatic imperative did not blend dramaturgically with what had been established for that character within the script. The scene where Tessa calms Archie was also altered to include a more active, physicalized role for the Chorus, who joined in with the singing.

<sup>79</sup> A speculative thought is that some of the desire on the part of actors to write their own sections of text may have resulted from the cuts necessitated by the rewritten script. There was some unease about the significant amount of character work which had to be discarded, though this is not unusual, even in optimum devising conditions, as was observed in the case of *Cloud Nine* in Chapter Three.

<sup>80</sup> See Appendix I for audience questionnaire. There were ten respondents. Questionnaires were distributed to audience members at four performances as they left the auditorium, and were also sent by email to contacts of the director and cast who had attended. The questionnaires were designed to investigate further aspects of the research questions of this dissertation, by including the observations of individuals who were external to the research and development process. Email respondents who wished to remain anonymous were given the option to send responses to my PhD supervisor. As respondents were guaranteed anonymity, and responses provided may at times identify respondents, transcripts cannot be provided.

previous to viewing the work, due their acquaintance with the cast or crew. Three found the multiplicity of voices confusing and/or problematic. As one respondent commented, '[i]t sometimes felt fragmentary [...] some of the voices not evenly expressed'. The 'physicality of the piece' was an aspect mentioned as enjoyable, whilst the set was a common feature of complaint, in that it did not resemble a train and the materials (mainly boxes) were not of a professional calibre. Another comment, which could be interpreted positively or negatively, was that it was 'too short'; a respondent wanted to 'know more about certain characters'.<sup>81</sup> Otherwise, the comments were diverse in what respondents found enjoyable or disagreeable; this is arguably reflective of a piece of work where multiple perspectives and approaches (including the literary approach of the playwright alongside the physical interpretation of the choreographer) are presented.

A number of actors also responded to a questionnaire I distributed, commenting on the process and their impressions of the final product.<sup>82</sup> Within the dominant discourse on devising, the voice of the actor is underrepresented; directorial approaches seem to receive the most attention, yet it is actors who not only contribute a large amount of material, but embody the artistic contributions of the collaborative team through their performance. Their insight into the devising process is therefore highly valuable. The majority of performers on *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill* responded that they did feel a degree of 'ownership' of their particular character, rather than of the play itself. To some degree, this corresponds to the Peter Hanrop and Evelyn Jamieson's statement, discussed in Chapter One, that group members should feel ownership of the processes involved in the creation of a character and

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<sup>81</sup> All quotations are from audience responses to the questionnaire. The production was seventy-five minutes long.

<sup>82</sup> See Appendix I for collaborators' questionnaire. Actors (including the Chorus) were emailed the questionnaire after the production closed (and were given the option to send responses to my supervisor, if they wish to remain anonymous, though none chose to do so). Five responded.

production<sup>83</sup> (and not, by omission, the actual product). For example: ‘I feel a sense of ownership of my character, having been there at its inception, and having helped develop it via improvisation and my own written monologues. [...] I do not feel ownership of the play.’ This is a recognition of the individual work each performer undertook in the development of their particular character, even if ‘circumstances beyond our control [including the dropping out of actors] changed the possibility’ of fully realizing the character as they wished. It is also recognition of my efforts to use the material generated by performers in the workshop within the script, even if some aspects of the text were created without the input of collaborators. As one actor described it: ‘as we know we make stuff, the writer takes what is useful and adds stuff and then back in the process stuff is taken away.’ The quotation is also telling of the fact that, in the end, I held the same status as the actors within the collaboration: when ‘stuff’ was ‘taken away’ (or indeed added in), especially in the final weeks, it was mainly due to decisions made by director and cast without my consultation. For example, I felt the opening physicalized sequence, which appeared in the production but not in the script, did not fit into the overall narrative, in that it added unnecessary and distracting detail about the provenance of the Chorus figures (whose origins should have, in my opinion, remained a mystery). Given the opportunity, I would have argued against its inclusion. I recognize that it was probably devised to provide more stage time and character development for members of the Chorus, who voiced concerns about not being as central to the process, and feelings that they should have been ‘part of the play at an earlier stage’. At the same time, my experience as a writer, and my position as someone who was somewhat outside of the process at this stage, would have allowed me to cast a dramaturgical eye on this particular moment and make suggestions for alternatives.

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<sup>83</sup> Peter Harrop and Evelyn Jamieson, ‘Collaboration, Ensemble, Devising’, in *Encountering Ensemble*, ed. by John Britton (London: Bloomsbury Methuen, 2013) pp. 167-69 (p. 169).

Much of the feedback focused on usage of time within the workshop room and the suitability and clarity of certain exercises. For example, '[t]here was too much time spent on experimenting with Laban walks and random movement which, in reality, was never used'; and '[I] felt on several occasions that whole days had been wasted'. These comments echo some of my own concerns, yet, as previously mentioned, many aspects of the script (such as my opening sequence at the station and the telephone symphony) were inspired by the combination of physical exercises and improvisation. Indeed, as a solo playwright, it is often the case that a great deal of developmental material, including characters, is discarded; actors who work with a writer's late drafts will be unaware of what has been left out. In the case of *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill*, a large amount of material, including approximately half the characters, was discarded, often because of cast changes; it is natural that actors will feel disgruntled when they have spent time working on material which never emerges in the final product, yet they are perhaps not as cognizant as a writer might be of the less tangible ways the material is used. For example, various elements of discarded characters were incorporated into the character of Chelsea, including that she was late, had the wrong ticket, was from a foreign country, and was forced off the train. This is an important observation for future work, in that it is important to communicate my own processes as a writer from the beginning, so that actors understand that a large amount of material generated in the research and development period, even that which has great value, may go unused.

Another recurring comment (echoed by audience feedback) was that some of the characters should have 'been explored in a deeper way' and were 'underdeveloped', and that there might be 'a longer play in there'; this corresponds to some of the criticisms generally levied upon devising, as identified in Chapters One and Three.<sup>84</sup> I concur: I was especially disappointed that the story between Richard and Joth was not as well developed in the final

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<sup>84</sup> See, for example, the commentary on *US* in Chapter Three.

production as it had been in earlier drafts, due to the dropping out of the actor playing Richard. Additionally, I was instructed by the director (with the support of some actors) to keep the play to seventy-five minutes; this particular constraint made it difficult to realize every character fully. Finally, it was the case within the collaborative context of *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill* that certain voices were more insistent than others, and I was instructed to include material generated by actors in order to avoid performers' leaving. Because of the precarious nature of this particular collaborative group, the actors did have some degree of Gooch's 'whip hand', as discussed in Chapter Two.<sup>85</sup> As a result, the expositional material provided for characters was imbalanced. For example, the character of Myrtle reveals much of her back story whereas other characters do not. This is the result of the circumstances of development, rather than my own structural choices. Had this been a non-devised piece of work, I would have attempted to create a more proportional portrayal of characters. Indeed, from my perspective, one of the strengths of the non-devised *Playground* was a balanced representation of the four central characters; it was important to me that there was no central protagonist, and Paterson's direction, alongside the actor's performances, ensured this vision was achieved.<sup>86</sup>

*Playground* ran for four nights (including a preview) at the London Theatre (Fig. 7, Stage 5);<sup>87</sup> I was very satisfied with the portrayal of the four women on stage. The development process, along with the actors' performative skills, created four (main) characters with individual idiosyncrasies and clear objectives. In particular, the redrafting of the script, which involved work on determining specific character traits and speaking styles, combined with the focus on the physical portrayal of each woman developed in the rehearsal room, led to nuanced portraits of characters who were recognizable to the audience yet

<sup>85</sup> Steve Gooch, *Writing a Play*, 2nd edn (London: A&C Black, 1995), p. 53.

<sup>86</sup> My rejection of the need for a central protagonist has been influenced by my observation of devised and postdramatic work, which also often eschews the idea of one dominant character.

<sup>87</sup> A five-night run had been planned, but one performance had to be cancelled due to cast and crew illness.

unique in their outlook and actions. In comparison to *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill*, where character development was limited because of time and the demands of writing for a large cast, the personalities in *Playground* were far better realized. On the other hand, when I watched the first full run-through, it became immediately apparent what changes needed to be made in order to tighten up the performance. The running time of the preview was three hours; this was significantly longer than anticipated. Although I suggested making cuts for the rest of the run (and the actors seemed amenable), Paterson did not agree as he argued he did not have time to rehearse changes. At this point in the process, such decisions were director-led; a devised production may have had a different outcome, as the participants typically feel more empowered to demand changes.

Given the satisfaction I felt about character development in *Playground* (where I had a considerable amount of time to reflect and redraft) versus that of *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill* (where the developmental time was short), future literature on devising must recognize the detrimental effect upon the writer-deviser of the (standard, British) limited development period of a collaboratively-made piece of work, particularly in fringe theatre. A contrast to this experience is that of Kate Cayley, Zuppa Theatre, and *The Archive of Missing Things*, which is being developed over at least four years. Although it has not yet (as of 2016) been fully produced, and cannot therefore be assessed in terms of artistic quality, Cayley's comments in Chapter Three attest to the production as a positive experience for her, and the length of the development period has meant she is able to take time to cultivate the text-based aspects of the play without the pressure of an immediate production.

An audience questionnaire was distributed for all performances of *Playground*, focusing on reactions to the writing.<sup>88</sup> Responses were, again, limited, but do give an indication of the strengths and weaknesses of the production. Positive comments include: 'it

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<sup>88</sup> See Appendix I for audience questionnaire. Questionnaires were distributed after the show; twelve responses were collected.

was a good mix of humour and tough truths.’; ‘the good structure of the script helped a lot in the [physical] construction of the scenes’; ‘good concept [...] in the different points of view’; ‘astute observations of class conflict [...]. Fluent dialogue’; ‘each character gets a different individual way of speaking. Naturalism nicely done’; ‘Characters and places recognizable [...]. Both funny and serious, tonally well-measured.’ Though diverse, these comments recognize the particular skills of the playwright. In particular, comments about dialogue are linked to the work undertaken in the various drafts to ensure speech was character-specific and moved the action forward. Amendments to dialogue within the rehearsal room were limited to minor line changes; therefore, this positive aspect can be linked to my particular training and skills as a writer, rather than the collaborative process. Basil Hogarth argues: ‘although on the surface [dialogue] appears extremely natural, it is [...] precisely the contrary, the height of artificiality.’<sup>89</sup> The difficulties experienced when trying to script dialogue based on improvisations in *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill* confirm this statement. This irony is something which emphasizes the need for a playwright within the devising process who has the technical fluency to precisely craft speech, so that it realizes its necessary functions.

The most commonly cited negative aspect was the length: ‘message could have been made in half the time’; ‘it could be tightened up a bit for further development and cut down to no longer than 120 minutes’; ‘This play is overlong and should be reduced to a short, sharp ninety minutes.’ These comments echo the complaints of the broadsheet critics (detailed in Chapter Four) about the length of *Frozen*. As previously indicated, I concur with these criticisms; further development of the script (Stage 6) has seen it cut significantly, with the elimination of a number of scenes.<sup>90</sup> In this particular respect, the advantages of the devising

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<sup>89</sup> Basil Hogarth, *How to Write Plays: A Guide to Successful Playwriting* (London: Pitman & Sons, 1933), p. 50.

<sup>90</sup> Following the production, the script was requested by a number of theatres, including the Soho Theatre, Theatre503, the Finborough and the Marlowe Theatre, Canterbury. I therefore decided to edit the play for these submissions, based on my own observations and audience feedback.

process are clear, because collaborators are liberated to make editorial suggestions, and the pressures of producing material collaboratively can restrict a playwright's ability to overwrite.

Audience members seemed divided on whether the play was devised or not (again, some would have had prior knowledge of this due to an acquaintance with the creative team). One response stated: 'An authorial voice kept surfacing but there seemed too many targets being addressed [...] not obvious which [*sic*] has been devised.' Another stated, 'It's hard to tell actually!', whilst one respondent decided that the 'knowledge of children and observation of mums seemed more obvious than collaboration'. Yet another argued: 'I think it was a collaboration because of all the different scenes in the play — many different aspects.' This disagreement is suggestive of the fact that, whilst the play was written by one person addressing the subject of class in a personal way, I had taken the influences of devising into the writing, including the inclination to focus on a number of characters' stories, rather than a single protagonist.

To complement the research undertaken for *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill*, actors were also given a questionnaire.<sup>91</sup> Again, and even more so than is found in the literature on devising, the voice of the actor is largely absent from pedagogical playwriting texts, yet their reflections on the process, as those who perform the words the playwright writes, are highly relevant. Some of the respondents had previous experience with devising, and were able to make a comparison between methodologies for play writing, which is useful for an examination of the writer-deviser:

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<sup>91</sup> See Appendix I for actors' questionnaire.

I think one of the big advantages of devising is the ability to shape and guide the piece as you go. When working with the right group of people, ideas can bounce around and be given life and energy without the constraints of the text; the needs of the growing thing that is the play takes precedence. When working with a script these ideas can still take flight, but do so to further what is on the page. [...] with devising ideas become the play, whereas with a script, we infuse the play with our ideas.

Another actor identified the benefits of devising: '[...] you get to shape the play even further. I think once a play is up on its feet, you can see better what is superfluous, what works, how things are communicated in their full form', although there may be the 'possible dilution of objectives'. These comments align with my own observation about the editorial benefits of working collaboratively; actors are able to use their expertise in communicating with an audience to identify unnecessary text and repetition.

Other comments relevant to a discussion on writer-deviser methodology include: 'I find blocking and practical elements of staging frustrating [when working with a non-devised script] — it's an unavoidable technical aspect of theatre but one I constantly struggle to reconcile with trying to live as truthfully as possible as the character.' One could argue that blocking and movement may arise more organically from the actors' own developmental work within a devised production, in comparison to a performer's attempts to respond to a solo playwright's stage directions. This has implications for my own writing in that my efforts to incorporate physicality into the script (influenced by my devising experience and the research for this dissertation, particularly on Bryony Lavery, which indicated the importance of 'leaving space' for physicalized aspects of the story) may be ironically hampering the actors' own efforts to discover truthful movement for their characters. Additionally, from another actor: 'I find unclear instruction very frustrating. Whether this is from the playwright, director or SM [stage manager], I think it can lead to misunderstandings and ineffective use of

time.’ As observed in the context of Bryony Lavery’s work on *Origins of the Species*, playwrights who work collaboratively will often develop written ‘instruction’ (stage directions or dialogue) in the context of developmental work with actors, and, as a result, less time needs to be spent discussing and interpreting a playwright’s intentions. On the other hand, the actors recognize the particular skills and knowledge of a writer. As one actor stated, ‘I like the structure given by a playwright’ and another said that she appreciates that playwrights are ‘an expert [*sic*] on what they’ve written’.

As a final observation, *Playground* will likely have a future life in an amended form. *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill* will not, although, unlike the majority of devised scripts, it will be available for public consultation within the form of this dissertation. This is reflective of the problematic issues surrounding ownership of devised work as outlined in Chapter One (particularly as, in the case of *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill*, contracts were not issued stating who holds the copyright), along with the general difficulties of reproducing devised work outside of its collaborative context. Although efforts, such as Anna Furse’s anthology *Theatre in Pieces*, are being made to document devised productions, the short production life of devised work is a concern for writer-devisers, particularly as they are often reliant on income from published texts and the restaging of work. Following on from the requirement for a greater recognition of the methodologies and significance of the writer-deviser within academic discourse, there is an urgent need to address the financial and professional implications for writers who choose to engage with devising.

## Conclusions

John Freeman writes, in regards to practice-as-research: ‘Absence of certainty is our only given and what we do not yet know is the thing that drives us on.’<sup>92</sup> Although my research inquiry began with the suspicion that engaging with devising would have an effect on how I approached the craft of writing a play, there was no certainty as to what the particular effects would be, and, indeed, the particular working contexts of both plays mean that it is impossible to come up with positivist ‘laws’ for writers who wish to engage with devising. Rather, I can offer observations gained from these two experiences in the hope that my insights will hold resonance for other writer-devisers; the one absolute I can derive from this experience is that my writing processes have been influenced by both the text-based research undertaken for this dissertation and the practice elements, and that I will continue to refer back to the observations made in this chapter to guide future work.

As my first full-length theatrical production written using devising methodology, the development of *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill* was a formative experience. The fact that I was not satisfied with many aspects of the final performance is in itself influential; Robin Nelson argues that recognizing failure within PaR projects ‘can promote new insights in research terms where a failed practice might just disappear without trace’.<sup>93</sup> I am able in retrospect to identify which facets of the devising process were problematic for myself as a writer and should be reconsidered for future work (both devised and non-devised), and, more importantly, consider the *why* of the failure or success. *Playground* was the child of both my training as a playwright and my experience as a deviser. In this way, documenting the process of its creation allowed me to reflect on how the experiences of devising affected the particular circumstances of writing a non-devised script. Very little (if anything) has been written on the effects of devising methodology on non-devised work, and, as previously argued, this first-

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<sup>92</sup> Freeman, p. 62.

<sup>93</sup> Nelson, p. 79.

hand account is particularly informative as it comes without the filter of secondary analysis, or a desire on the part of the writer-deviser to provide a uniformly positive assessment of the experience. In exploring areas of weakness for the solo playwright which can be addressed by devising methodology, this practice-as-research chapter conversely also serves to reinforce the argument that writing training and pedagogical advice, although flawed in that they rarely address collaboration, can be beneficial for writer-devisers and their devising collaborators.

It should be clear, given the regular reference to information contained in Chapters One-Four, that the research undertaken for those chapters not only provided a context for the examination of my practice, but strongly influenced that practice. Working in both a collaborative and solo-writing context meant that I was able to test out some of the theories identified by those engaging in the discourse on devising and those examining writing praxis, and reflect upon their relevance for my work. This relevance is, naturally, context-dependent, and what was or was not helpful for me in the particular situations of writing the two plays may differ for other writers. However, it is possible to offer insights as a way of concluding this particular PaR project, with the understanding that the research, including continuing text-based research, will never actually conclude, as it forms a fundamental aspect of my development as a writer.

As indicated in the Introduction, the usage of ‘how’ in my query rather than the more positivist ‘does’ is strategic; though the experience of writing these two plays cannot stand for a broad collection of work, insights have been gained which will influence future work: my own, and, hopefully, that of other writer-devisers. These insights have been collated into a ‘Toolkit of Observations for Writer-Devisers’, which follows this conclusion. They are, however, not just for writers; many of the observations provide a justification for including a writer within the devising process, and make suggestions about how aspects of the devising process and the solo-writing process can be incorporated to address respective weaknesses.

My intention is that this is a document which can be extracted from this dissertation to use as a reference sheet when embarking on future projects. In addition, throughout this chapter (and dissertation) areas of interest for further exploration have been identified. In the interests of reinforcing these avenues, they are listed in the Conclusion to the dissertation, so that they can be easily accessed by myself and other scholars who may wish to pursue these lines of inquiry.

## TOOLKIT OF OBSERVATIONS FOR WRITER-DEVISERS AND COMPANIES

Based on the experience of developing material collaboratively and writing the script of *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill*, along with research conducted for this dissertation, the following observations, suggestions, and insights can be made about the involvement of the playwright in the devising process:

1. The role of the writer within the process should be determined from the early stages of work.
2. A research and development schedule with clearly defined objectives should also be put in place from the early stages, in order to avoid feelings of frustration about time wastage.
3. The processes of the writer, including the fact that a great deal of material may be discarded, should be explained to other collaborators from the outset.
4. All participants should be paid a fair wage and sign a contract outlining their responsibilities, including their ability to alter text and receive future income from the development of the production.
5. Optimal physical circumstances should be sought for development and rehearsal work.
6. The writer should work closely and communicate regularly with all members of the devising team, including choreographers/movement directors and designers; these elements should not be treated as separate interests, but dealt with in a holistic way.
7. As with Open Space, and Zuppa Theatre's 'The Rules of Play', operational rules for workshops and rehearsals should be identified and signposted.

It is important to note that the aspects identified above pertain to Barton's context of collaboration, rather than particular rubrics for the creative production of devised work, as each specific devising project requires a different methodological approach. However, as my experience on *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill* displays, process and context are necessarily intertwined: the resulting script is reflective (in positive and negative ways) of the particular collaborative context in which I was operating. It should be clear from this commentary that the effect of losing cast throughout the process was a profound one, and indeed determined the shape and quality of the final script.

Notwithstanding the negative aspects of this collaborative experience, there are many positive outcomes for writers engaging with devising methodology, which echo those discussed in Chapter Three and the case study of Bryony Lavery in Chapter Four. These positive outcomes can be translated into suggestions for writers, which include:

1. Observe exercises undertaken in development work by actors (for example, Laban exercises and Viewpoints grid work) in order to instigate holistic character development, and suggest possibilities for adapting these exercises for solo writing practice.
2. Use your collaborators as resources to help undertake research and generate ideas and material for usage when developing a narrative and structure for the production.
3. The need to produce work quickly for a collaborative group can be a tool to help overcome writer's block.
4. Observe your actors in physical action in development and rehearsals; in keeping with Rick Kemp's argument about the link between cognition and movement, actors may suggest physicalized methods of communication which are more effective than dialogue.

5. In so following, be less reliant on dialogue as the dominant source of semiotic meaning.
6. Utilize the collaborative group as editors; they are already knowledgeable about the work and can therefore offer significant suggestions. Do, however, keep the overall structure and tone of the production in mind, and consider editorial suggestions in the context of whether they are for the actor's personal benefit, or the benefit of the production as a whole.
7. Consider the usage of a printed and posted set of rules, similar to Zuppa's 'Rules of Play' or the Open Space rules, in order to avoid distraction and psychological blocks.

Additionally, my involvement as a writer on *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill* highlights the following benefits for devising companies who employ experienced writers:

1. A close focus on narrative integrity.
2. The incorporation of writer-directed exercises into the development period specifically designed to generate written material, chosen (or created) by an expert in writing.
3. The presence of an individual who can shape the raw material generated by actors into something dramatically viable.
4. The inclusion of an individual whose experience in writing means that drafts and redrafts can be generated quickly.
5. The application of a writer's distinctive structural vision (for example, the mobile phone symphony in *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill*).

Although, like *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill* (and all theatrical productions), the quality of the final production of *Playground* is reflective of the particular circumstances of its

development, some general principles can be derived from the experience, which are useful for writer-devisers when they are not working collaboratively. The development of *Playground* revealed that utilizing the methodologies and experience of devising whilst working as a solo playwright can:

1. Reinforce the need for a more holistic approach to text, including physicality and consideration of actors' speech strategies.
2. Provide strategies for overcoming writer's block through the adoption of practices similar to those employed within performers' preparatory work.
3. Create tendencies towards non-naturalistic scriptural approaches.
4. Emphasize the benefits of having actors involved in the early stages of script development.
5. Allow for a better understanding of the director's processes.
6. Provide useful information for character development through the observation (and adaptation, when working as a solo playwright) of particular performative methodologies, such as the Laban system of movement.

On the other hand, the particular areas of strength connected to traditional script-writing approaches are revealed, which can benefit the devising process via:

1. An extended development period, which allows for more research and reflection.
2. The ability to restrict the number of characters as appropriate for the narrative, thereby allowing for well-considered and differentiated portrayals.
3. A structured redrafting process, free from both the time pressures associated with the quick turnaround often necessary in devised productions, and the input of

collaborators who may wish to influence the development of the script in order to enhance their roles.

4. The employment of a writer's unique vision, structural approach, and dialogic techniques.
5. An increased likelihood of an extended life for the play.

As a side note, in both the devised and non-devised productions, there was a decrease in my influence as writer towards the final stages of production. This is reflective of the director-dominant hierarchy, as indicated in Chapter One, which exists in both collaborative and non-collaborative contexts. Of the examples of writer-devisers explored in Chapter Three, only Mike Leigh and Anthony Neilson retained a high degree of control over the text; both also operate as directors within the collaborative structure, and both are, significantly, men. Caryl Churchill's comments within her email correspondence with me (detailed in Chapter Three) reveal a frustration with demands for rewrites following workshops, which has led her to move away from collaborative script development. This corresponds to my experience as a female (non-directing) writer-deviser, which, though mainly positive, has at times involved having my questions, intentions, and desired outcomes ignored. The role of gender in production development is most certainly an area for further academic query, and is worth signposting at the beginning of every rehearsal process so that participants can be more aware of the often problematic relationship between status and gender.

# PLAYSCRIPTS

*The 9.21 to Shrub Hill*

Written by Karen Morash in collaboration with Waxwing Theatre

Performed at the New Diorama Theatre, London

5-23 October 2010

*The 9.21 to Shrub Hill* was first produced by Waxwing Theatre at the New Diorama Theatre, London on 5 October 2010 with the following cast:

<b>Guard/Puppeteer/Lurker</b>	Lesa Gillespie
<b>Joth</b>	Toby Hughes
<b>Dean</b>	Darren Benedict
<b>Myrtle</b>	Norma Cohen
<b>Richard</b>	Alistair Scott
<b>Chelsea/Meredith</b>	Holly Walters
<b>Tessa</b>	Sarah Winn
<b>Emily</b>	Nikki Squire
<b>Chorus/Lurkers</b>	Claire Chard, Joan Plunkett, Merika Vine

<i>Directed by</i>	Ed Bartram
<i>Choreographed by</i>	Alexandra Green
<i>Designed by</i>	Nicki Martin-Harper
<i>Produced by</i>	Lucy Jackson

**Performers who contributed to the development of *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill* include:**

Richard deLisle, Mercé Ribot Bermejo, Rob Witcomb, Zoilo Lobera, Rory McCallum, George Cocovini, Lara Wilkes Sloan, and Olivia Frances.

## Characters

### Guard/Puppeteer

**Joth** – male, 30s-40s

**Dean** – male, 20s-30s

**Myrtle** – female, 60s-70s

**Richard** – male, 60s

**Chelsea** – female, 20s, American

**Tessa** – female, teenager

**Meredith** – female, late 20s-30s

**Emily** – female, 30s

**Chorus/Lurkers** – male and female

**Archie** – toddler, male, a puppet

**Note:** A slash (/) indicates a point of interruption; a space in the text like this     indicates a pause (the length of which is proportionate to the size of the space); a dash (—) indicates the speaker has been cut off; an ellipsis (...) indicates a trailing off of thought/unfinished sentence OR someone else speaking if it is in a phone conversation. The mobile phone symphony has a separate layout (landscape) and notation.

Dialogue and action often overlap: *instructions regarding this are written in bold italics.*

## ONE

### London-Slough

*Monday morning, late November/early December. Platform 9 of Paddington Train Station.*

*The **Guard** is overseeing the cleaning the platform by the **Chorus**; they collect the detritus from the last journey, and the **Guard** complains audibly about the mess people make.*

*There is no one else on the platform, though there is an air of expectancy. The sounds of the train station – announcements, people, electronic noises etc. – can be heard at a distance. It is peaceful. In a different voice the **Guard** makes the announcement:*

Announcement        The 09.21 to Worcester Shrub Hill will depart from platform 9. Calling at Slough, Reading, Oxford, Hanborough, Charlbury, Kingham, Moreton-in-Marsh, Evesham and Worcester Shrub Hill.

*After a few seconds the **Guard** blows her whistle and the people burst through, crowding the platform, rushing to find seats, dropping things. There is general chaos and mild panic, which goes on **as the following action occurs, overlapping:***

**Joth**, looking as if he is on his way to a festival, with a big backpack, is on a mission to find a seat. He carries a two-day-old issue of *The Times*, open at the obituary pages. When he gets to a seat, he puts his backpack on a seat opposite him, takes his shoes off and puts his feet on the seat. He closes his eyes, and does some deep inhalations, trying to calm himself and empty his mind.

**Dean**, laden with a workbag, gadgetery, and a coffee, rushes down the platform. He holds on open laptop in one hand, mentally going over a presentation. His head hurts and when he

*gets to his seat, he takes out a pill bottle and downs two with his coffee and continues to work.*

***Myrtle** is not happy in the crowd. She stops, much to the annoyance of the people behind her, and turns around, as if she's looking for someone. She looks anxiously at the clock and back down the platform.*

*The seats on the train have now been filled by people and their possessions.*

***Richard**, an obviously affluent man, is dressed for a funeral. As he gets on the train, one of the **Chorus** bumps into him.*

**Richard**                    I'm so sorry.

*(At the sound of **Richard**'s voice, **Joth**'s eyes snap open and there is a horrified look of recognition. **Richard** starts looking for a seat and **Joth** hides behind his newspaper. Seeing that the only seat available is the one with **Joth**'s bag on it, he goes to him.)*

**Richard**                    Is this seat taken?

*(**Joth** stays behind his newspaper.)*

**Richard**                    *(a little louder)* Is this seat taken?

*(Still no reply from **Joth**. **Richard** decides to give up and goes back to standing.*

***Joth** looks down at the paper, puts it in his lap protectively and goes back to deep breathing.*

***Chelsea**, an attractive American tourist dressed in designer gear and pulling a huge suitcase, is not really sure where she is going.)*

**Chelsea**                    Is this train going to Oxford?

*(Another passenger nods curtly. **Chelsea** is not really sure if this means yes or no, but she decides to chance it and gets on, struggling with her suitcase. No one offers assistance. Once on, she stays by the doors and inspects the train: she has never been on a train before and is not impressed. She takes out a guide book and starts flipping through.*

**Dean** loses the signal on his dongle and moves the laptop about trying to get it back. This spills his coffee [or one of the **Chorus** spill it?], much to the annoyance of other passengers, and he apologetically attempts to clean it up.

*Silence.*

*The **Guard** makes final preparations for the train's departure. She is about to blow her whistle when **Tessa** comes running up the platform.)*

**Myrtle**        Tessa! Hurry up, your mum'll have my head if I don't get you on this train.

**Tessa**        Nan! What're you doing? You was supposed to be getting us seats.

**Myrtle**        Where were you?

**Tessa**        *(in a mood)* I told you, I had to do something.

**Guard**        All aboard!

*(**Tessa** stops for a moment and looks back towards the station. The **Guard** blows her whistle.)*

**Myrtle**        Please love, we gotta get on.

*(Finally resolute, **Tessa** helps **Myrtle** onto the train. The doors shut, trapping **Tessa**.)*

**Guard**        I said, ALL ABOARD!

*(The **Guard** kicks her, shuts the door and sends the train on its way, riding along. **Tessa** glares angrily.)*

*The train starts to move and everyone shifts in response. **Myrtle** is thrown against **Chelsea**. She steadies her.)*

**Chelsea** Do you know if this train goes to Oxford?

**Tessa** It goes to Reading. C'mon Nan, let's get you a seat.

*(This is not the response **Chelsea** wanted. **Dean** picks up on her anxiety from his position on the floor.)*

**Dean** It stops in Oxford.

*(**Chelsea** is relieved.)*

**Tessa** *is having no luck finding seats.*

**Dean** *receives a call as he is still on the floor mopping up coffee. The ringtone is something akin to Darth Vader's theme and it is clear that **Dean** does not want to talk to the caller.)*

**Dean** Hi Gary... Yes, I made the train this time... Well, barring any delays I should be there on time... I know, I'm really sorry about that. I've put time-keeping on my self-assessment as one of my objectives to be addressed in this quarter... Yes, I can add in market knowledge... okay, and creative problem solving... and spelling... Yes, I'm just going over the presentation now. The numbers are good. Did you read the report?... You didn't? Stacey was supposed to send it to you... She didn't...

**Tessa** *(to **Dean**, struggling to be polite)* Can we have that seat please?

**Dean**           *(ignoring her)* Yes, I'll address her objectives as well... Sorry, the entire board? *(This is very bad news.)* You didn't tell me—... okay, I must have forgot. *(He didn't forget – Gary did not tell him)*... Gary, I'm just about to go through a tun— *(He is not about to go through a tunnel; other passengers look around, aware of the lie.)*

*(Dean sits in his seat and rubs his temples.)*

Announcement *(somewhat garbled)* This is the 09.21 First Great Western service from London Paddington to Worcester Shrub Hill, calling at /Slough, Reading, Oxford, Hanborough, Charlbury, Kingham, Moreton-in-Marsh, Evesham and Worcester Shrub Hill.

**Chelsea**       What? Did she say Oxford?

**Tessa**           *(to another passenger, playing on a phone)* Could you let my nan have your seat?

*(The passenger does not respond. Tessa looks around and realizes no one is going to get up.)*

**Tessa**           *(Loudly)* So none of you is going to give up your seats for my nan. No one?

**Myrtle**         It's alright Tess/ I can-

**Tessa**           No! It's not alright. None of these rude fuckers/ is getting up for you.

**Myrtle**         Tessa! Your language...

**Tessa**           *(to passengers)* Don't pretend you can't see her. She's the little old lady, standing RIGHT HERE!

**Myrtle**         Tessa. Remember what we agreed...

**Tessa** But none of these people will let you sit down. And they're all younger than you, except for maybe him (**Richard**). And you told me that you're sposed to respect your elders and all but none of these people is respecting you.

**Myrtle** Calm, Tessa, think what that/ therapist man said...

**Tessa** Look at this one (*member of Chorus*), hiding behind his computer probably because he's looking at PORN, and this one (**Joth**) with green feet. You some kind of crusty gardener?

**Myrtle** Count Tess, 1, 2, 3...

**Joth** (*terrified*) It's a... fungus.

**Tessa** So you can't stand up? And what about your bag? Does it got a fungus? Move it!!

*(She attempts to grab the bag. He stops her.)*

**Tessa** (*Tugging at Joth*) Get up! Get up! GET UP!!!

*(Myrtle starts singing something fairly implausible in a music hall style and doing a little tap dance, getting bigger and louder until everyone starts watching. Tessa melts.)*

**Tessa** Nan! Everybody's looking.

*(Myrtle grabs Tessa's hands and starts dancing with her until Tessa laughs. Joth moves his bag and holds it defensively, still a bit terrified. Myrtle sits down. Tessa stands beside her.)*

**Tessa** Nan. You're mental.

**Myrtle** (*looking around*) Think they all liked my little song and dance. (*To Tessa*) Got some music love?

*(She does.)*

**Myrtle** (to **Joth**) Sorry. She gets a bit (*mimes crazy*) sometimes, but she's a good girl really, aren't you Tess?

*(Tessa rolls her eyes. Joth is not so sure.)*

**Tessa** takes out an ipod and puts one earphone in **Myrtle's** ear and one in her own and they listen together.

*The Chorus start playing games, coughing, rustling newspapers, and opening windows. The passengers are annoyed by the noise and disruption, but do not seem to take notice of who is causing it. Dean is especially annoyed and is having a hard time concentrating. He types something into his phone. The Guard becomes an over-the-shoulder lurker and reads for our benefit.)*

**Lurker** Via Twitter for iPhone4: On train to huge presentation in Worcester.  
*(Pronouncing spelling mistake.)* Split coffee everywhere. Annoying cougher!!  
 Boss is a w-star-star-star-er. I hate my job.

*(Dean goes back to his notes, practising his presentation in his head, muttering words like 'eliminate negative space', 'synergy', and 'CRM'. His headache is still bothering him.)*

**Myrtle and Tessa** move a bit to the music, enjoying each other's company. They share an issue of 'Heat' or similar.

*Everyone gets on with their lives, totally absorbed in the minutiae of their own existence and unaware of what else is happening around them.*

**Joth** takes out an eastern spirituality book and looks at it briefly. He closes his eyes and starts deep breathing. Through small gestures we see that he is doing a sun salutation

*mentally. Gradually, **Joth**'s breathing becomes out of sync and his movement becomes frenzied; his mind has lost its focus and he has entered a dark place. He opens his eyes in panic. No one notices except for the **Guard**. She starts breathing, and uses the pattern of her own breath to calm him down until he is able to close his eyes and be still again.*

*The **Guard** then steps up to an invisible podium and raises her baton. A phone rings, and another, and another, and the mobile phone symphony has begun...*

***Myrtle** listens to the iPod happily throughout. When **Tessa** finally answers her phone she puts her earphone into her nan's ear.)*



**b.**

**Tessa**      Jamie.                      Crap.                      On the train!

**Chelsea**              Dad!                      Okay.                      On the train.

**Dean**                      Dean                      Fine.                      On the train.

**Joth**                      Joth.                      Well.                      On the train.

**Chorus**                      How are you?      Where are you?

c.

**Tessa**

I don't!

**Chelsea**

**Dean**

On my way to the presentation.

**Joth**

**Chorus**

Why have you got the hump with me?

Then why didn't you stay?

d.

**Tessa** I *told* you. I can't leave my nan like that. It's not fair.

**Chelsea** It's... okay here. What?

**Dean** I told you. Stacey? Stacey?

**Joth** I'm afraid I have to cancel today.

**Chorus** I can't hear you.





**g.**

**Tessa**                                Yeah. Besides you.

**Chelsea**                              Okay.

**Dean**                                 Yes. It's Dean. Can you hear—     *(Hangs up and dials.)*

**Joth**                                 No. Sorry.

**Chorus**                            Besides me.                                We're never going to see each other if you're not in London.

**h.**

**Tessa**                      Are you chucking **me**?

**Chelsea**

**Dean**                      Stacey? I can hear some— (*hangs up and dials.*)

**Joth**                      It's a family thing.

**Chorus**                  I don't see the point. (*Changes voice.*)                  Are you having a good time?



**j.**

**Tessa**      I dunno – Slough?      Jamie, you know I can't do that.

**Chelsea**      I hate England.      Mom, I'm trying!      I just hate it.

**Dean**      Just left London.      Gary didn't get the presentation.

**Joth**

**Chorus**      That can't be true. (*Voice changes.*)

**k.**

**Tessa**

**Jamie!** That's

**Chelsea**

**Mommy!**

**Dean**

You were supposed to send it last night.

**Gary.** He was

**Joth**

**Chorus**

You don't love **me.**



**m.**

**Tessa**      like for me at home.

I can't!

**Chelsea**      I want to go home.

**Dean**                      Can you send it now and cc me in?

**Joth**

**Chorus**                      No you don't! (*Voice change.*) Get off the train.

Why not?

**n.**

**Tessa**        I just can't!

**Chelsea**                It's really cold here. Everyone's rude.

**Dean**                      Now please.

**Joth**

**Chorus**                                If you can't be bothered, neither can I.



**p.**

**Tessa** *(Speaking to herself.)* I love you. Bye.

**Chelsea** to do there? I love you. Bye.

**Dean** Fine Bye.

**Joth** Bye.

**Chorus** Enjoy yourself. You'll be fine. I'll see you soon. I love you. Bye.

*(End of overlapping dialogue.)*

(**Tessa** struggles against tears, as does **Chelsea**. **Chelsea** hides behind her guide book.)

**Myrtle** (very loudly as she still has the earphones on) You hungry?

(**Tessa** takes the earphones out of **Myrtle**'s ear.)

**Myrtle** Here, have a sandwich.

(She hands **Tessa** something mysterious in foil. **Tessa** unwraps it and eats pensively. **Myrtle** kisses **Tessa** on the forehead.)

**Myrtle** Don't worry about that boy darling, (*singing*) there's plenty of fish in the sea.

(**Tessa** is quiet, then:)

**Tessa** I don't want to go home.

**Myrtle** I know love.

**Tessa** Can't I stay with you?

**Myrtle** You've got to go back to school.

**Tessa** I don't care about school. The teachers hate me.

**Myrtle** Well you did hit one of em, but you've done your time away for it. They'll get over it. You gotta try, love. I'm scared've what might happen to you **Tessa** if you don't.

**Tessa** Nan, I'm not Auntie Nora. I'm not going to run off and get killed or something.

**Myrtle** I know that, you got far more sense than Nora did. You wouldn't go off with some fellah just because he told you to, would you? Course you wouldn't. But

if you don't take care of your future you're gonna end up like me. You wanna live alone, singing all day to yourself, going doolally waiting for your blooming husband to come back from god knows where?

**Tessa** Granddad will come back.

**Myrtle** Not any time soon love. You belong with your parents.

**Tessa** But—

**Myrtle** —no Tess. You're so close to finishing. You can't stop now. When you've got your GCSEs, you can come back and stay with me. We'll find you a good college in London so you can do your course.

*(She wrestles a ring off her finger and puts it in **Tessa**'s hand.)*

**Myrtle** Here. Grandma's ring. You were going to get it anyhow when I... *(Draws a death-mime line across her neck.)* Use it as a good-luck charm for your exams.

**Tessa** I'll lose it.

**Myrtle** No you won't lose it, because it's important. When something's important, you hold on to it for dear life.

*(**Tessa** puts the ring on her finger and admires it. They return to reading and listening to music.)*

**Joth** goes back to his spirituality book, but is bored. He looks around for someone to talk to.

He tries to catch the eye of **Chelsea** and smiles at her, but she purposefully avoids his gaze.

The **Guard** passes by and takes some of the food, unnoticed by **Tessa**.

**Dean** *has received the emailed report, but something is very wrong. He fiddles, taking his annoyance out on the keyboard. He is hot and bothered and opens a window. Joth closes it. Dean notices, and a moment passes between them, but Dean decides not to take further action and makes a phone call.)*

**Chorus**       *(unseen, as Stacey's voicemail)* Hiiiiiii! This is Stace. I'm busy! Leave me a message! Love you! MWAH!

**Dean**           Stacey, it's Dean. The report you forwarded has the wrong CRs. Call me.

*(Myrtle takes out some more sandwiches.)*

**Myrtle**        Here love, eat up.

*(Joth, bored, decides to take part in the conversation.)*

**Joth**           Mmmmm... looks delicious.

**Myrtle**        *(Not sure why he's talking to them)* You want one?

*(Joth leans in and sniffs.)*

**Joth**           What is it?

**Tessa**         *(aggressively)* Tuna.

*(Joth is still a bit scared of Tessa, so he only addresses Myrtle.)*

**Joth**           Is it ethically-caught?

**Myrtle**        *(not understanding)* TU-NA.

**Joth**           I'm a vegan.

**Myrtle**        *(to Tessa)* What's he on about?

**Tessa**           *(thoroughly unimpressed)* He don't eat meat.

**Joth**            Or milk, or eggs, or cheese or really any kind of foodstuff that's tainted with toxic fear chemicals.

*(Myrtle looks to Tessa for clarification.)*

**Myrtle**        What?

**Tessa**        Never mind Nan.

**Joth**            Where are you ladies off to on this lovely day?

**Tessa**        *(sarcastic)* Have you looked outside lately?

**Myrtle**        I've got to give my granddaughter here back to her parents in Reading. I don't want to!

*(Tessa smiles a bit at Myrtle. Joth speaks whilst still trying to catch the eye of Chelsea, who is looking at her ticket and desperately flipping through her guide book.)*

**Joth**            Surely she's not your granddaughter! You're far too fresh-faced. What's your secret?

**Myrtle**        Tuna.

**Joth**            *(not really listening)* Aha. I think that young lady (**Chelsea**) up there needs a bit of help. Enjoy your sandwiches.

*(He goes.)*

**Myrtle**        Git.

*(Tessa laughs. They listen to more music.)*

**Dean** *decides to write an email, which is read out loud for our benefit by an over-the-shoulder Lurker.*)

**Lurker** Stacey, I need the CR numbers from (all caps) THIS YEAR, i.e. 2010, as I originally included with the report you were supposed to have sent Gary last night, (all caps) NOT the 2008 numbers, as you sent.

(new paragraph) Please resend the report with (all caps) THIS YEAR'S numbers to Gary, and (*pronouncing the error*) explain your mistake to him. Cc me in.

No complimentary closing.

Dean.

*(He waits for the reply.)*

**Joth** (*to Chelsea*) The fair maiden looks as though she's in distress. Might I offer some assistance?

*(Chelsea has no idea what he is saying, plus he looks like a homeless person. She ignores him and taps Dean on the shoulder.)*

**Chelsea** Did that announcement say there was an inspector coming to look at our tickets?

**Dean** (*Curt, annoyed with the interruption.*) I didn't hear.

**Chelsea** It said something about Rovers and Rangers.

**Dean** I don't know what that means.

*(Chelsea is very concerned. She looks for help, but besides the homeless person speaking some foreign language [Joth], no one is interested in helping her.)*

**Dean's reply comes:)**

**Lurker** Dear Dean, I am finding your use of all caps very intimidating. The conversion rate numbers I included were the ones you told me to use. I just thought you wanted to use 2008's, which was pretty weird because you weren't even in charge of Taverner's marketing then, but I didn't want to annoy you so I didn't ask. Plus 2008's numbers are way better than 2010's, so I thought maybe you wanted to use them instead. If you really wanted (all caps) THIS YEAR'S CR numbers, maybe you should have used (all caps) THIS YEAR'S CR numbers in your report. Love, Stacey, X X.

*(Furious, he rings her again.)*

**Chorus** *(unseen, as Stacey's voicemail.)* Hiiiiiii! This is Stace. I'm busy! Leave me—

*(He utters a strangled sound of frustration. He writes another email, read by the Lurker.)*

**Lurker** Dear Stacey, I am getting *(pronouncing)* increasingly frustrated with your lack of attention to best practice. If you look at the original report I sent you, which you were supposed to have forwarded to Gary, you will see that the CRs which I included are clearly those form...

*(He looks at his original report, and realizes he did indeed use 2008's figures.)*

**Dean** 2008. *(Mouthing)* FUCK!!

*(He panics, and starts going through his computer files and notes.)*

**Overlapping Dean's dialogue/action above, Chelsea approaches one of the Chorus.)**

**Chelsea** Excuse me?

**Chorus** What.

**Chelsea** I don't know if I have the right ticket.

**Chorus 1** (*sighing*) Let me take a look.

(**Chelsea** hands it over. **The Chorus** decides to make things even more confusing.)

**Chelsea** It's a Go England pass. My mom bought it for me. I'm supposed to be able to use it everywhere, but that announcement just said/ something about—

**Chorus 1** You can't use this.

**Chelsea** What?

**Chorus 1** (*reading the back.*) It says only for non-peak travel. This train left at 9.21 – peak time.

(**Tessa** takes her earphones off to listen.)

**Chorus 2** No, it's all about when we *arrive*. The train arrives in Oxford after 9.30, so it's not peak time.

**Chorus 1** That only counts for stations *beyond* Oxford. If you're travelling to Oxford you have to pay full fare.

**Chorus 3** But that's only for Super Saver or Cheap Day Returns.

**Chorus 1** Look, I know how the system works. I paid the right fare so everyone else should have to pay the right fare.

**Chorus 2** (*to Chorus 1.*) Maybe *you* paid the wrong fare!

**Tessa**           *(with glee)* You're going to get kicked off the train. You can see the beautiful sights of Slough!

**Myrtle**           Leave the poor girl alone. Go ask her if she wants a sandwich.

**Chelsea**          *(to Chorus 2)* Are they going to make me get off of the train?

**Tessa**            Yes!

**Joth**             They'll probably just make you pay the difference.

*(Chelsea still does not understand what he is saying.)*

**Joth**             Just go and hide in the loo until the inspector goes by. They'll never know.

**Chorus 3**        Is that what you do?

**Joth**             Well, no, I paid full fare...

*(Everyone, bar Dean, starts discussing the situation (improvised), talking over top of each other.)*

**Dean** *receives a phone call in the midst of the furore: it is the Darth Vader theme.)*

**Dean**            *(nervous)* Gary? Sorry, you're going to have to speak up. This is a bit of a... crazy train.

*(Discussion gets louder.)*

**Dean**            I know, I've just spotted that. I'm really sorry, it was        Stacey being useless again.

*(And louder. Dean has to shout.)*

**Dean** I know... I know... I'll fix it. I promise. I've got the right CRs now... Perhaps not as strong as we were anticipating. There's been issues with the redefinition of our USP... Yes, that probably is my fault. Or maybe the fault of the children who for some reason don't want to eat our food... No, you're right, I shouldn't blame the children. Gary, I'm just about to go through a tun— *(He is not about to go through a tunnel.)*

*(As soon as he hangs up his phone rings again; different ring tone this time.)*

**Dean** *(to himself.)* What? *(Answering the phone, forced jollity.)* Terry, hi... Yeah, I'm great. Looking forward to seeing you all at the presentation... Wonderful. Listen Terry, you know how I asked you to forward copies of my annual report to all the managers coming today? Did you do that?... You did... No, no, that's fine. I thought maybe you might have forgotten, but no that's fine. Thank you for doing that... Terry, the reception's really bad, so I'm going to go. See you in about *(Looks at his watch and panics)* two hours... Okay, bye.

*(He doesn't know where to begin to fix this situation.)*

*The noise of the passengers' talk reaches a peak, until...)*

**Guard** Tickets please!

*(Everyone goes silent, showing the **Guard** their tickets and watching until she gets to **Chelsea**. The train starts slowing down for its approach to Slough. **Chelsea** hands her ticket over nervously. The **Guard** looks at it for a moment, hands it back and all seems fine momentarily until the **Guard** says:)*

**Guard** Where are you travelling to?

**Chelsea** Oxford.

**Guard** Oxford? You can't use that ticket.

**Chelsea** But I was told that—

*(The **Guard** holds up her hand to silence her.)*

**Guard** As it says on the reverse of this ticket, passes can only be used outside of peak time. Peak time ends at 09.30, and this train departed at 09.21, therefore you are travelling in peak time and your ticket is invalid. I'll need you to pay the full fare from London to Oxford. We take cash, credit or debit cards.

**Chelsea** I don't have any of those. I only have traveller's cheques.

**Tessa** Guess you're stuffed!

**Guard** How do you propose to pay for the ticket?

*(**Joth** steps up, trying to put his arm around her protectively, but she moves away.)*

**Joth** Can't you just let it go?

**Guard** Sir, look there *(points to audience)*. My every move is observed, and were I to let this young lady off without paying I can assure you it would not go unnoticed. I would prefer to keep my job, wouldn't you?

*(**Joth** does not respond. The train is now going slowly. **Guard**, in a completely different voice, makes the announcement:)*

**Guard** The train will shortly be arriving at Slough. Please take all your personal belongings with you when leaving the train. Please mind the gap between the train and the platform.

**Guard** Miss, if you are unable to pay for the ticket, I am afraid you are going to have to get off the train here. Please don't force me to contact the transport police.

**Chelsea** The police!?

*(The train has arrived at Slough.)*

**Guard** You can pay me the full fare, get off the train, or deal with the police. Your choice.

*(The doors open and people rush off the train. The **Guard** blocks the door so no one can come on; she is about to blow her whistle.)*

**Guard** I'll do it Miss, I'll call the police.

**Chorus/**

**Tessa** Get off!

*(Looking very lost and childlike, **Chelsea** and her luggage get off the train.)*

## TWO

### Slough-Reading

*Slough is a hive of activity (perhaps slightly surreal) as people get on and off, change costume and are transformed.*

*The **Chorus** are a combination of old-time porters and a circus act, getting people and luggage on board, juggling, playing with sticks etc.*

**Richard** takes advantage of an empty seat; **Joth** watches him closely.

*On the train, **Tessa** is standing up and watching; something in her body suggests she might bolt at any minute. She looks at her ring, and then sits down. **Myrtle**, listening to the iPod, takes her hand.*

**Meredith**, an academic, laden with too many books and papers, gets on.

**Dean** is furiously typing, annoyed at the disruption from the other passengers. His head is still killing him and he pops two more pills, without water.

*The last passengers to get on are **Emily** and **Archie** (along with the **Guard**, who rides on the back of **Archie**'s pushchair), laden with bags of stuff. The train is about to go and **Emily** struggles to get the pushchair and bags on board, and nearly dumps **Archie** on the track in the process. The **Guard** is dumped on to the track and has to clamber back up to become **Archie**'s puppeteer. **Meredith** helps **Emily** and they get on board, just as the doors shut.*

**Emily** (to **Meredith**) Thank you. God. Sorry. That was... I'm not normally late on the train like that. Well I don't normally take the train. I couldn't get his pushchair to unfold, then I looked at my watch and saw the time and someone is meeting us so I had to get *this* particular train and there were so many people—

*(Her phone rings. Archie starts crying.)*

**Emily**           *(cannot find the phone)* Archie, shush. Mummy will be with you in a minute. Where, where, where... *(To Meredith)* Too many pockets! And I never put it in the same one.

*(She finds it just as it stops ringing.)*

**Emily**           Shit! *(To Meredith, who is now backing away from Emily)* I'm sorry, I didn't mean to... *(To Archie)* Sorry Archie, Mummy shouldn't swear. Don't cry sweetheart. I'm going to get you out of there.

*(Meredith retreats to an empty seat, close to Joth, and attempts to take some papers from her bag: everything falls out. Joth helps her pick it up. She smiles the thanks of someone too overwhelmed by attraction [to Joth] to speak. He does not really take notice. She retreats to marking students' work, which, by indication of the red marks she makes, is very bad indeed.*

**Emily** *tries to undo the very tricky straps on the pushchair. The phone rings again. She answers it, one hand still trying to free Archie.)*

**Emily**           Hello, hello. Oh, hi.    We made it. Only just. I nearly... Yes... The mechanic said there was no way he could do it today... I don't know, something to do with a part having to be shipped from Germany...

*(She frees Archie and has a brief moment of triumph. Archie climbs out of the pushchair.)*

**Emily** Cameron, you know I'm not very good at arguing with people like that...  
Mechanic type men. They tell me all sorts of things which don't make sense  
and I just have to take them at their... Well you weren't there and I...

*(Encouraged by the **Guard**, and unnoticed by **Emily**, **Archie** starts exploring the train.)*

**Emily** I'm busy too! You should have just taken it in yourself and then the man  
could have explained to *you* why it's impossible to have it done before next  
Wednesday.

*(**Archie** has grabbed **Dean's** pen and starts scribbling on his papers. **Dean** is on his  
computer and does not notice.)*

**Emily** Next Wednesday! Not this week. ... Surely you can see that this is much more  
inconvenient for me—

*(**Dean** notices.)*

**Dean** Hey!

*(**Emily** hurries towards **Archie**.)*

**Emily** Oh god, Archie's just... *(To **Dean**)* I'm SO sorry. *(To phone)* I've got to go.

*(She hangs up and scoops up **Archie**.)*

**Emily** I hope that wasn't something important.

**Dean** Please keep control of your child.

**Emily** *(taken aback)* I'm... sorry.

*(Carrying **Archie**, she makes her way to an empty seat, near **Joth** and **Meredith**. She is  
nearly in tears when she sits down, rocking **Archie** more for her own comfort.)*

**Myrtle** *gives Archie a little wave.*)

**Myrtle** Ah, bless him. Look at his little face. Trains are magical places for children. Your Auntie Nora and I did this exact same train journey when we was evacuated in the war. Did I ever tell you that?

*(Tessa has heard this story a thousand times. She nods vaguely. Her phone rings as Myrtle is talking, considers answering it, then rejects the call.)*

**Myrtle** Our mum, your great-gran, dressed us exactly alike, right down to the big white bows in our hair and put little tags on us so's they'd know who we were when we got to Worcestershire. Cept Nora and I, thinking we were being clever twinnies, switched the tags. We got on the train with our gas masks in one hand and our teddies in the other.

*(Emily wipes away a tear. Joth and Meredith observe it, and Emily is embarrassed.)*

**Emily** Sorry. It's just been...

**Joth** One of those days? Me too.

*(They are both relieved to have someone to talk to. Meredith gives a sympathetic smile, but goes back to her work, half listening-in on the conversation.)*

**Emily** And it's only... *(looking at watch)* 10 in the morning. God. I never cry in public. Well, hardly ever.

**Joth** Bad karma in the air, I guess.

**Emily** I guess.

**Joth** That guy was an ass.

**Emily** Thanks! He really was.

**Joth** (*mimicking*) ‘You need to keep better control of your child’. I mean, c’mon, your boy’s only what, four years old?

**Emily** Eighteen months.

**Joth** (*not listening.*) Exactly. Corporate wanker. How’s he’s supposed to know you shouldn’t draw all over someone’s stuff? He is your son, isn’t he? (*Awkward*) You’re not the nanny... or some fairy queen, stealing him away to join your merry band of... imps.

**Emily** (*starting to find him irritating*) No. He’s all mine.

(*Silence. They all look out the window.*)

(*Tessa’s phone rings again as Myrtle speaks, and she immediately rejects the call.*)

**Myrtle** Nora thought it was all a big adventure until she saw our mum waving goodbye to us on the platform, then the tears started rolling down her cheeks. I knew we were just going to have to grin and bear it, but Nora was much more delicate than me and couldn’t stop wailing. I did the Lambeth Walk till my ankles gave out, but nothing worked.

(*Archie sees something exciting. He makes a noise.*)

**Emily** That’s right, clever boy, cows go mooooooo! Mooooooo!

**Joth** (*enthusiastically joining in.*) Mooooooo.

**Emily** (*mild sarcasm*) Very good.

**Joth** Thanks.

*(They all moooooo. Meredith makes a noise of frustration, which makes them stop.)*

**Emily**        *(to Meredith)* Sorry.

**Meredith**    What? No, no, it's... *(indicating papers)* semi-colon... abuse.

*(Meredith and Joth look at her quizzically.)*

**Meredith**    They just stick them wherever they want, without thinking of the repercussions.

*(They still do not understand.)*

**Meredith**    *(Embarrassed)* Sorry. I didn't mean to interrupt your... mooing.

*(She goes back to her papers.)*

*Myrtle is still speaking; Tessa examines her phone.)*

**Myrtle**        When we got there, they lined us all up against the wall then the families picked us out. I was chosen first, and when Nora realized we weren't going to be taken together, that made her wail even more and no one wanted her. She ended up being taken by some woman who already had ten children and didn't really want another one, and all I could do was watch as poor Nora headed off, walking behind their horse and cart like she was headed towards perdition. My family were nice enough, but they would never believe me that my name was Myrtle because of us mixing up those tags, and called me Nora the entire time. Oh well, happy days.

*(Emily's phone rings. She does not recognize the number, but answers the phone.)*

*During her conversation, Archie gets restless and moves about, making noises. Emily tries to keep him quiet and still without letting on to the speaker that she is dealing with a child.*

*Joth tries to distract Archie with peekaboo. Archie climbs down from Emily's lap and starts to play with Meredith's pens and paper. He makes a mess, but she doesn't know what else to do but let him. In the end, she even gives him some pens and he draws on her arm.)*

**Emily** Hello?... Speaking... Sorry, who is this?... His PA? I didn't know poets had PAs... Yes, I got the invite... I'm not sure of my schedule yet. When do you need to know?... Are you sure he wants me there? We haven't spoken for years. You didn't just invite everyone in his address book, did you?... He said that? Okay... Can I get back to you later today?... Thanks.

*(She hangs up and looks at the phone, not quite believing the conversation. She doesn't notice the mess Archie has made with Meredith, who now attempts to clean herself and her papers.)*

**Joth** *(in reference to the phone call.)* The busy social life of a glamorous mother...

**Emily** No, no. I can't remember the last time I went out.

*(She remembers Archie and scoops him up.)*

**Emily** *(to Joth, trying to end the conversation.)* I'm sure you didn't come on this journey to be a children's entertainer.

**Joth** *(using his bandana as a puppet, and speaking in a funny voice)* It's no problem. What's your name little boy?

**Emily** Archie.

**Joth** Can't you say your name, little Archie?

**Emily** His speech hasn't quite developed yet.

**Joth** And what's your mummy's name Archie?

**Emily** Um... Emily.

**Joth** Joth.

*(He offers his hand - she shakes it awkwardly.)*

**Joth** Was he bottle or breast fed?

**Emily** *(shocked at the question)* Uh... well... a bit of both. Only bottle now.

**Joth** That's why he can't talk yet. Bottles change the shape of the mouth. Impedes speech development. In many African countries, babies are breast fed till four years of age.

**Emily** Right.

**Joth** *(back to the strange voice)* And are you going far today?

**Emily** *(undercurrent of annoyance)* To Oxford, *(to Archie)* to visit granny and grandpa, aren't we?

**Joth** I'm going to a... *(he decides not to tell the truth)* festival. A music festival.

**Emily** Oh. Funny time of year.

**Joth** *(realizing the mistake of his lie)*... yes. *(Quickly changing the subject)* Does Archie listen to music?

**Emily** A bit.

**Joth** You should play him some jazz. The complicated musical motifs fire off the synapses in the brain and aid in mathematical reasoning. Babies in Japan listen to jazz for a minimum of three hours a day, and look how good they are at maths.

**Emily** (*knows that he does not*) You must have children.

**Joth** Uh... no.

**Emily** Nieces and nephews?

**Joth** No. I'm an only child. Lone wolf (*a little howl*).

(**Archie** starts to cry. **Meredith** smiles at him.)

**Emily** Oh, Arch, shush shush. It's alright.

**Joth** You tired little Archie?

**Emily** We had to get up early today and he doesn't really understand what's going on.

(**Archie** starts crying even more.)

**Joth** Why don't I move over there (*beside Emily*) so he can stretch out here and sleep.

**Emily** Oh, no, you don't need to...

(*But he already has.*)

**Emily** Okay. Archie, why don't you stretch out on Joth's seat and have a nap.

*(She lays him over two seats; Meredith has to move her papers out of the way. Emily sits down beside Joth.)*

**Emily**           *(through gritted teeth)* How kind of you.

*(They both observe Archie for a while, who is not sleeping.*

*Tessa's phone rings again.)*

**Myrtle**           *(loudly – she still has the earphones in)* You'd better get that love. Someone wants to speak to you.

*(Tessa indicates she's going for a walk, gets up and answers the phone as she walks to the space by the doors, out of earshot of Myrtle.)*

**Tessa**           What?... No. I. Did. Not. Get. Off. The Train... Did you really expect me to do that?... I told you, I'm not leaving Nan. Do you know what that would do to her?... Well *I* care. She's the only one who can be bothered with me...

*(Overlapping with action above:*

*Noticing that Emily is a bit hemmed in by Meredith's books, she — Meredith — tries to move them.)*

**Meredith**       Sorry, I have a bad habit of... spreading out beyond my appointed space.

**Emily**           I've got plenty of room. It's just nice to sit down for a while. It's been such a struggle on my own, trying to get Archie out the house and on the train... he's normally much more settled than this.

**Tessa**           What do you want me to do? I've got to go back to school... Do you think I *want* to go back to Reading? I want to stay with Nan, but Mum won't let me...

And with you, Jamie, of course I want to stay in London with you, stop being so moody! God, I thought you'd be happy to be left alone in London so you can be with your other — ... Don't even pretend, I know what you do...

**Joth**            (*genuine*) It must be really hard being a single parent.

**Emily**           Did I say I was single?

**Joth**            Um...

**Emily**           I'm married. I have a husband. Archie's dad. (*Showing him, though perhaps making more of a point to herself*) I'm wearing a ring.

**Joth**            Oh. Sorry. I wasn't trying to —

(*Archie makes a noise.*)

**Emily**           I... don't think he's going to settle.

(*She picks Archie up and holds him protectively.*)

**Emily**           (*indicating that Joth should take his original seat*) I think, perhaps... ?

**Joth**            (*disappointed*) Of course.

(*Emily turns her attention to Archie. Joth decides it is best to move seats. He leaves his newspaper behind.*)

**Tessa**           I told you a million times I love you, stop saying that!... I've got to go. I can't listen to you anymore.

(*She stares out the window at the countryside, then returns to Myrtle.*)

(*Emily shakes her head, Meredith looks up.*)

**Emily** I'm not being stupid am I? He (**Joth**) did just try and pull me.

**Meredith** Oh. I don't know. I think he was maybe/ just—

**Emily** Maybe I was being stupid.

**Meredith** I thought he was nice. He liked playing with—

**Emily** I'm sure he was lying about going to a festival. Bet he has loads of money.

**Meredith** I don't know. (*Looks at Joth:*) But I think he's okay.

**Emily** Sorry. Get back to your work. It's just, you know... over-sensitive Mummy talk.

(**Meredith** *does not know, but would like to.*)

**Guard** *finds a ball in Archie's bag. She bounces it off surfaces, enjoying herself, then attempts to throw it to Dean, but he does not notice and it just bounces off him. She does the same to Joth, and it bounces off him. She throws it to Meredith, who catches it. She puts it back in Archie's bag.*

**Archie** *climbs down from Emily's lap and grabs Meredith's shoe.)*

**Meredith** Oh! Hello.

**Emily** Archie, don't touch.

**Meredith** It's okay. (*Taking off the shoe*) Here you are little... baby.

**Emily** He'll chew on it.

**Meredith** It's fine. I've got plenty.

(**Archie** runs down the aisle with **Meredith**'s shoe, **Emily** hanging back a bit so he can explore. **Meredith** watches them, wanting to join in but not knowing how. Before she can stop him, **Archie** pulls something out of **Joth**'s bag. **Emily** takes it from **Archie** - it's a dark suit.)

**Emily**            Interesting choice of clothes for a festival.

(**Joth** quickly stuffs it back in his bag.

A text message arrives for **Dean**. The **Chorus** look to the **Guard**.)

**Guard**            (to one of the **Chorus**) Can't you see I'm busy! You do it.

(One of the **Chorus** becomes an over-the-shoulder **Lurker**.)

**Lurker**            Morning! (letter) U get a card for Gran? Birthday tomorrow. T.

(**Dean** texts a response — he is very quick.)

**Lurker**            No. Forgot. Did (letter) u? D.

(A response comes.)

**Lurker**            No. Where (letter) r (letter) u?

(**Dean** texts back.)

**Lurker**            On my way to Worcester. Don't tell Mum. D.

(One of the **Chorus** comes through the carriage as a cleaner. She picks up **Joth**'s newspaper, but a section falls away. She is about to put it in her bag when **Joth** spots her. He strides down the aisle and grabs her arm angrily.)

**Joth**                That's mine!

**Chorus** It's five days old.

**Joth** Give it to me.

*(He snatches it out of her hand. The Cleaner shakes her head, tired of yet more rudeness from passengers. **Joth** realizes he's being an ass.)*

**Joth** Sorry, I—

*(But she has already gone and doesn't hear. **Meredith** passes him the bit of paper that fell.)*

**Meredith** *(trying hard to get his attention)* I think this bit fell out. But it's just the obituaries, so maybe you don't—

*(**Joth** grabs it from her hand and goes back to his seat. **Meredith** watches him go.*

***Archie** discards **Meredith**'s shoe and reaches for **Dean**'s but **Emily** grabs his hand before he can touch it or **Dean** notices. **Archie** turns his attention to the shoes of **Myrtle** and **Tessa**.)*

**Emily** Archie...

**Myrtle** No trouble!

**Tessa** He drooled on my trainer!

**Myrtle** Now Tessa love, if you want to work with children, you're going to have learn that we all drool a little from time to time. My Tess is going study child care, aren't you love... if we can get you through your GCSE's. And isn't he a good boy? Can he talk yet?

**Emily** A few words, but only I understand him.

**Myrtle** Oh aren't you a clever little lamb! Tessa here spoke full sentences at thirteen months, didn't you?

*(She shrugs.)*

**Myrtle** How old is he?

**Emily** He was eighteen months a few days ago.

**Myrtle** Oh what a bright little button! And Tessa started walking at ten months, didn't you love?

*(Another shrug. A little bit of crying from Archie; they have to talk over him.)*

**Myrtle** How long has he been walking?

**Emily** Only about a month or so – he was a bit late.

**Myrtle** What a strong, clever, boy. We all take our own time, don't we...? *(Asking his name with voice intonation.)*

**Emily** Archie.

**Myrtle** What a lovely name! *(Clearly does not think so.)*

*(Archie starts crying more.)*

**Emily** I'm sorry. He's so tired.

**Myrtle** Don't worry, we all have to have a bit of a moan from time to time, don't we Tessa?

*(Archie starts crying even more. Emily's phone rings.)*

**Myrtle** Answer it love, we'll keep him occupied.

*(Emily answers the phone, whilst jiggling Archie on her knee. Myrtle makes faces at Archie and tickles him, trying to get him to stop crying. Tessa looks uncomfortable: she wants to help but does not have the confidence to do so.)*

**Emily** Hi, sorry I didn't ring you back. Archie's still in a mood —... When?... I can't do Thursday... I've got my writing class, you know that... Cameron, you *know* that... I've paid for it, out of my own pocket and I'm not missing it! Mimi and Elliot are hideous, why do we have to have them over for dinner?

*(Overlapping with Emily's speech:)*

**Myrtle** Sing to him Tess.

**Tessa** I don't know any baby songs.

**Myrtle** Course you do.

*(Tessa crosses her arms sullenly, refusing to cooperate. Archie is really kicking off now.)*

**Emily** Archie, shush, I'm talking to Daddy... He's overdue for his nap... I can't *make* him go to sleep... I can't... Well, if you actually spent one minute alone with him, you'd realize how difficult it is to...

*(Archie wails and goes into full throttle tantrum. Tessa covers her ears.)*

**Myrtle** He's got a good set of lungs on him!

*(Emily hangs up the phone and attempts to pick him up, but he refuses and starts banging his head on the ground. Everyone watches the struggle in silence until:)*

**Tessa** *(very sullen)* He's gonna get brain damaged!

**Emily** Archie, please, you're hurting yourself.

**Dean** Can you not just make him stop? I have work to do!

*(Emily manages to pick him up, but Archie continues to wail. Emily jiggles Archie desperately and the Chorus make comments such as:)*

**Chorus 1** Poor dear, she's in over her head.

**Chorus 2** People shouldn't be allowed to have kids if they can't handle them.

**Chorus 3** All children cry, it's natural.

**Chorus 1** You've got to go shhhhhh... shhhhh... shhhh... again and again... shhhh... shhhh... shhh... it's like the sound of blood rushing through the womb.

**Chorus 2** When is he getting off the train?

**Chorus 3** I have a nephew and he never cries. Sleeps like a dream. Smiles constantly.

*(Etc. etc.: the Chorus improvise responses.)*

*Emily is losing the plot. The entire carriage is filled with Archie's wails. Joth tries to distract him with the bandana, but Archie throws it back at him. Meredith gets her shoe and wiggles it at him, to no avail.)*

**Dean** *(almost mirroring Archie)* Make him stop! Make him stop!

**Emily** Will you just all please... you don't... ARCHIE PLEASE!

*(In the midst of the furore, Tessa starts singing, 'Twinkle Twinkle Little Star' to Archie. She picks up a nappy and uses it to create the actions. Archie takes an interest and starts to quiet down. Richard notices and joins in, making an animal out of newspaper. Archie laughs. The other passengers follow suit, except for Joth, who watches Richard intently, and the train is*

*transformed into a dream-jungle full of fantastic creatures and noises. The dream ends with Archie asleep peacefully in Emily's arms.)*

**Tessa**           *(surprised)* He liked my singing.

**Myrtle**           You're a natural, love. You take after your old Nan.

**Tessa**           *(not convinced)* Yeah.

*(She stares out the window, worried.)*

**Richard** *admires the sleeping Archie, then goes back to his seat. Joth hides behind his newspaper.*

**Dean**, *very reluctantly, makes a phone call.)*

**Dean**           Terry. Dean... Yeah, fine. Listen, can you email the managers and ask them to ignore the report I sent? There's a bit of a problem with the numbers... I used the wrong ones... I know... I'm trying to write a new report now... I don't think I'm going to include the 2010 CRs... because my brilliant marketing strategy for this year has resulted in negative growth and I'd rather not share that with the entire fucking board... Terry, you're not the one who's going to be sacked!... That's not fair, I'm sure it won't mean redundancies... Look, can you just stall them or something while I try and fix this?... I don't know, tell them the train's broken down or something!

*(He hangs up and lets out a frustrated yell which makes everyone jump and wakes Archie up, who starts whimpering. A frustrated Emily shoots mental daggers at Dean and takes Archie back to their original seats.)*

**Dean** realizes that he was a bit of a prat and stands up to apologise, but his head pounds. He sits down and rubs his temples, then gets straight to work.

**Emily** sits down with **Archie** across from **Meredith**. When he sees her he stops making noise and stares at **Meredith** until she notices him.)

**Meredith** Oh. Hello.

**Emily** We're back.

**Meredith** Great.

(**Archie** climbs up on the seat beside her and takes her pen.)

**Meredith** More drawing. Okay.

(She holds out her arm for him to draw on. He goes for her paper instead.)

**Meredith** Maybe not that...

(But he has already scribbled on it.)

**Emily** Archie!

(She picks him up, chastising.)

**Emily** All I've been doing is apologising for you since we got on this train.

(She cuddles him.)

**Emily** Did he write on... is that poetry you're writing?

**Meredith** This? Um... yes, I suppose it is.

(**Emily** spots a book on the floor with **Meredith's** picture on it. She picks it up.)

- Emily** Did you write this?
- Meredith** Umm... yes, I guess I did. Shocking picture.
- Emily** So you're quite a well-known poet.
- Meredith** No, not really. Is it even possible to be a well-known poet?
- Emily** What's that one (*the poem she's working on*) about? Or is it wrong to ask?
- Meredith** No, no, it's just about... trains, and um... children... and (*swift glance at Joth*)... passion... and... missed opportunity.
- Emily** I thought you were a teacher, with all those red marks.
- Meredith** Kind of. I'm a lecturer.
- Emily** You're very young.
- Meredith** Not really. There's someone in the Physics department who's twenty-three.
- Emily** God. I generally didn't get out of bed till noon when I was twenty-three.  
Where do you teach?
- Meredith** Oxford.
- Emily** Wow.
- Meredith** I did my undergraduate degree there, then my postgraduate work, so I guess they thought they should give me a job when I finished.
- (*Archie makes a noise. Emily takes a book out of her bag to amuse him.*)
- Emily** So you haven't been out of education since you were...

**Meredith** Four. That's quite depressing.

**Emily** No, no, that's amazing. I always meant to go back and do my MA but never got round to it. I wish I had your drive. Did you hear that Archie? She teaches at Oxford *and* she's a poet. Mummy can barely manage to do the assignments for her crappy little creative writing course.

**Meredith** Well... you have a child. That changes everything.

**Emily** Yes, I guess so. You don't have any?

**Meredith** The necessary... man... is not in place.

**Emily** I don't know, these days anything's possible... Sometimes I think a test tube would be the easier option.

*(Meredith looks at Joth again: she would prefer the traditional method.)*

**Emily** *(tentative)* Have you ever heard of the poet Sergio Vega?

**Meredith** Isn't he the Spanish one with all that... bestial imagery? I think his first major collection in English is about to be released?

**Emily** Next week.

**Meredith** Are you a fan?

**Emily** An ex-girlfriend.

**Meredith** Oh. Wow. Lucky you. He's really... *(Super-hot!)*

*(Tessa's phone rings.)*

**Emily** Yes. (*He really is!*) I haven't seen him for ages. We lived together for a while. He wrote, I worked. I wrote too, but... the focus always seemed to be on him. He spent all my money, then went off with some French girl. I don't think he even spoke French.

**Meredith** Oh. Still. (*He's super-hot!*)

(**Myrtle** leans over to look at who is calling.)

**Myrtle** Who's Jamie?

(**Tessa** heads off down the aisle out of earshot.)

**Emily** I've been invited to his book launch. I still can't believe someone's published him.

**Meredith** Are you going?

**Emily** I have no idea.

(**Archie** starts making noise. *He is bored with this conversation.*)

**Tessa** Don't... Jamie, don't. I'm not doing it... So that's it. If I get off at Reading you're finishing with me... How can say do that?... And if I come back to London you're going to stop all this messing around with other girls?... And what about the other stuff? I can't have you doing that to me anymore...  
(*looking at Myrtle*) Oh god, Jamie, don't make me do this... I've gotta go... I don't know what I'm going to do Jamie, I've GOT TO GO!

(*She hangs up and walks back, slumping in her seat. Myrtle watches her.*)

**Myrtle** Everything okay love?

*(Tessa puts her earphones in, and turns up the volume, so her music spills out from the headphones.)*

*Some people, notably **Dean**, are annoyed by it, others enjoy it. The **Guard** approaches **Tessa**, looking as if she is going to ask them to turn it off, but instead she turns it up. The music infiltrates the carriage until everyone's rhythm becomes one with the beat, the **Guard** using her whistle as if she is at a rave, as the train speeds up then slows down on its approach to Reading. The train announcement, made by **Guard**, becomes part of the music.)*

**Guard**        The train will shortly be arriving at Reading. Please ensure you take all your belongings with you when leaving the carriage. Please ensure all items of rubbish, animal waste, used prophylactics, love letters, hate missives, general queries, dissertations, dirty tissues, undesired cake, expired hand cream, and illegal aliens are deposited in the correct repositories. Please tip the Guard handsomely. And above everything, PLEASE... mind the gap.

*(Still part of the dance, the passengers get ready to get off at Reading. **Tessa** separates herself from **Myrtle**. **Myrtle** is transported off the train by the **Chorus** and the door shuts. **Tessa** is still inside, looking at **Myrtle**. **Myrtle** breaks free of the **Chorus** and pounds on the doors of the train, desperate. The **Chorus** try to pull her away. **Tessa**'s heart is breaking: she cannot believe what she has done. **Guard** blows her whistle, and looks at **Myrtle**.)*

**Guard**        *(sighing)* Alright, get on then.

*(She opens the doors. **Myrtle** clambers back in.)*

**Guard**        But be aware that you are causing unnecessary delays.

*(She shuts the door. The train departs.)*

**Myrtle and Tessa** look at each other; they do not know what to say.)

**THREE****Reading-Oxford**

*The train is silent. Everyone is watching Myrtle and Tessa. Tessa's teenage facade has dropped and she looks like a frightened child. Myrtle turns to steel. Archie cries a little and Emily shushes him. We see how young Tessa really is.*

**Myrtle**        You were leaving me.

*(Tessa can't reply.)*

**Myrtle**        You were leaving me. To deal with your mum. To have to go and tell her that I... lost you. So you could go be with that boy. Weren't you? You're just like your auntie Nora. And your grandfather. And everyone in my life who leaves. Everybody leaves.

**Tessa**         I'm sorry Nan.

**Myrtle**        I've told you the story a thousand times, my own twin, my other half leaving me to run off with some man. You know the horrible thing that happened to her and you know what it did to me. And now you're doing the exact same thing.

**Tessa**         Jamie's not like that.

**Myrtle**        They're all like that. What were you going to do? You don't even know where this train is going.

**Tessa**         *(still childlike)* Get off in Oxford and go back to London. To see him.

**Myrtle** Well that's fine. You do that. Go be with this boy, let him do whatever he's going to do to you. Throw away all the good things. You do that.

*(She holds out her hand.)*

**Myrtle** Give the ring back. You don't need it.

*(Tessa hesitates, then takes it off and gives it to Myrtle. Myrtle turns around and goes to her seat. Tessa bursts into tears.)*

*A 'ding' from Dean's computer breaks the silence. Everyone turns to look at him. Archie starts crying, and Emily tries to distract him with toys.*

*Dean looks at his computer, and an over-the-shoulder-Lurker becomes his mum.)*

**Lurker** Skype video request from... *(taking on the appearance and voice of Dean's mother)* Mum!

*(Dean does not want to respond, but has to. He talks to the computer in a hushed tone, but reminiscent of a whinging teenage boy.)*

**Dean** Hi Mum. I'm on the train.

**Lurker** Hi darling! I saw you were online. How are you?

**Dean** I'm on the train Mum, I can't talk. I have a huge amount of work to get through.

**Lurker** You're always busy! Tommy told me that you're passing through Oxford today.

*(Dean is not pleased — Tommy was not supposed to tell!)*

**Lurker** Can you stop on your way back so you can see Gran? Just for a few hours. It's her birthday tomorrow and she asks about you all the time.

**Dean** I can't. Not today. Sorry. I'll send her a card.

**Lurker** I miss you. You haven't been home for months.

*(This affects Dean.)*

**Dean** I know. I want to come home, it's just been...difficult. I really gotta go Mum.  
I'm sorry.

*(He disconnects.)*

**Lurker** End call.

*(Dean goes back to work, typing furiously.)*

*Tessa's phone rings. She looks at Myrtle and ignores the call.*

*Dean thinks he's found a solution. His headache is gone. He types excitedly.)*

**Dean** *(to himself)* Yes. Yes. YES!

*(His excitement attracts the unimpressed attention of Emily.)*

**Emily** That guy! He complains about Archie making noise, but he's just as bad. Totally self-absorbed. Clearly doesn't have kids. Children give you perspective on what's important in life.

**Meredith** *(legitimately wants to know)* What is important?

**Emily** *(not expecting the question, but as she tries to make up an answer, she reveals something to herself)* Um... being real, I guess, and knowing that the small

irritations in life don't matter in the big scheme of things... Understanding that there's little in life that you can control. That you don't need to be the most successful person in the room to be happy... That life doesn't have to be perfect, and you don't have to be perfect and your... husband doesn't have to be perfect. That he doesn't have to write poetry or have a flawlessly toned... physique. That getting down on the floor and playing hoppy bunnies and finger painting and singing is much more fun than going out to clubs, and dinners and... book launches. That you can't have it all and you have to make sacrifices.

*(As **Emily** rambles, **Meredith** looks at **Joth** and her fantasy world unravels: she and **Joth** are married and have a brood of beatific children, who read books and play graceful games of tag and peekaboo. The fantasy comes to an abrupt end with **Emily**'s final words.)*

**Meredith**      Sacrifices.

**Emily**          Yes.

**Meredith**      Like career sacrifices.

**Emily**          Quite often.

**Meredith**      If you're a mother.

**Emily**          Yes.

*(They both ponder this for a moment.)*

**Meredith**      When I was an undergraduate, my tutor was this amazing woman: one of the world's leading experts on mid-twentieth century poetry, absolutely brilliant and absolutely terrifying. I wanted to be just like her. And now I work with

her. She's lived the most amazing life, travelled everywhere, met the most remarkable writers — slept with a few of them — but last year, after too many drinks in the SCR, she told me her greatest regret was never having a child, and that I should be careful or I'd end up just like her! And now, after a lifetime of hard work and... sacrifice, she's being 'retired' because the opinions she puts forward are no longer fashionable. And I have no idea where that leaves me.

*(They ponder again.)*

**Meredith** looks at **Archie** and then at [an oblivious] **Joth**. She goes back to her work.

**Archie** decides to go for a walk. He goes to **Richard**, who captivates him with a very successful game of 'hide the coin'. **Joth** watches.

**Tessa's** phone rings again. Looking at **Myrtle**, she answers.)

**Tessa**           I can't talk.

*(She hangs up. The phone immediately rings again. She answers it.)*

**Tessa**           ... Jamie, please. Leave me alone. I can't talk right now.

*(She hangs up. The phone immediately rings again. Tessa looks lost and Myrtle gets up from her seat, goes to Tessa, takes the phone and answers it.)*

**Myrtle**           Are you deaf or something? She said she can't talk to you.

*(She hangs up the phone.)*

**Tessa**           Nan, I'm so —

*(Myrtle just looks at her.)*

**Tessa** I'm really sorry. I don't know what I was doing.

**Myrtle** Of all the people I've lost in my life, all the people who have upped and left and never come back, I thought at least I didn't have to worry about you. I was more worried about what'd happen to you after I went, but I guess I needn't have troubled myself. And all for some stupid little boy.

**Tessa** It's not... I don't... (*Finally admits the truth*) I'm really scared to go back to school Nan. What if I fail? Then all the things we planned, college, and me living with you in London, and getting a job, none of that will ever happen.

**Myrtle** So you thought you'd mess it all up first. (**Myrtle softens a bit**) Tess, you've got to give yourself a chance.

(**Tessa shrugs.**)

**Myrtle** This boy has said he'll take care of you, has he?

(**Tessa nods.**)

**Myrtle** And that everything will be okay if you just go and be with him. I know this type of boy well and what kind of a man he'll turn into, and I promise you love, it isn't good.

**Tessa** Jamie's not/ like that—

**Myrtle** It'll come out eventually. Always does. I'm getting off the train at Oxford and I'm going to turn right back round to Reading, so your mum knows at least she's still got her mother, if not her daughter. You think you love this boy, so you have a decision to make.

(**Myrtle goes back to her seat. Tessa follows.**)

**Archie** *climbs up into Richard's lap for a cuddle.*)

**Emily** Is that okay?

**Richard** *(speaking in a friendly voice to Archie)* Of course - a visit from a little person is just what I need today. *(To Emily, very matter of fact)* I'm on my way to a funeral.

**Emily** I'm so sorry. Was it someone close?

**Richard** My brother.

**Emily** Oh. Do you come from a large family?

**Richard** No. Just me and him left. And now just me, I guess. And a nephew somewhere, but it's probably been ten years since any of us have seen him. I don't know if he's even aware his father's dead.

**Emily** That's terrible.

**Richard** Never mind, that's families for you, isn't it? Life goes on. *(To Archie)* Would you like to see a magic trick young man?

*(Emily and Archie both nod and Richard performs a sleight-of-hand which delights them both. The slightest hint of a smile arrives rather unexpectedly on Joth's face as he watches. He has seen this trick before.)*

**Guard** *comes through with a trolley.*)

**Guard** *(as an announcement)* A trolley service will be shortly coming through the carriage, offering you a delightful selection of... *(Calling out as trolley girl, certain words directed at certain customers)* Snacks! Refreshments!

Magazines! Coffee! Gin! Mouthwash! Deodorant! Sleep! Lies! Acclaim!

Career ruin!

**Dean** Coffee please.

**Guard** That'll be eight pound seventy-two please sir.

*(Without complaint, **Dean** pays and attempts to have a celebratory sip of his coffee, but it's too hot. He takes the lid off and sets it down by his computer before returning to work, clearly in a much better mood. He makes a call.)*

**Dean** Hi Terry. Look, I'm sorry about before. No, I shouldn't have snapped at you. Well, believe or not I've managed to rework the entire bloody report so that things don't look quite so dire. It seems Mitchells have had a bad year too so I've worked in their results. Plus I've added in a section on unforeseen macro-environmental factors. And, I've put together some impressive projections for next year. God knows, but hopefully they'll buy it... I know, disaster averted! I'm just going to go over the report one last time, then I'll email to you. Can you forward it to everyone? Just blame Stacey for the last one. You're a star. Cheers.

*(The **Guard** hands the trolley over to one of the **Chorus** and goes to **Archie**.)*

*Very pleased with his new friend, **Archie** takes **Richard** for a walk. **Emily** follows at a distance. As **Richard** passes by **Joth** he notices him looking. **Joth** looks away, but something has passed between them. After **Richard** has passed, **Joth** goes back to watching him intently.*

**Meredith** stops the trolley.)

**Meredith** Do you have any sweets?

*(The trolley lady brandishes some love hearts like a bottle of fine wine.)*

**Meredith**            How much?

**Trolley**                For you, madame, no charge.

**Meredith**            *(puzzled)* Oh. Thanks.

*(As the trolley lady passes by **Joth**, she turns around and gives **Meredith** a big wink.)*

***Dean** has received an email from Stacey, read by a **Lurker**.)*

**Lurker**            Dear Dean, Gary has requested an urgent meeting with you on your return from Worcester. According to your diary, you are returning at 6pm this evening, so I have scheduled it for then. Please let me know immediately if this is a problem. Regards, Stacey.            p.s. Gary came to talk to me today. He was pretty pissed about the whole mixing up 2010 with 2008 thing and was under the impression it was my fault. I set him right. I also showed him your twitter feed, the one where it says he's a wanker and you hate your job? Think that's what the meeting is about. In case you're wondering. X X Stacey  
p.p.s What kind of an idiot posts a message like that in a public forum? Even children know how to keep those things private.

*(**Dean** stares at his computer. His headache is back with a vengeance.)*

*Plucking up every mite of courage, **Meredith** taps **Joth** on the shoulder and interrupts him from his staring.)*

**Meredith**            Love heart?

**Joth**                    What?

**Meredith**                    *(losing her nerve)* Would you like a sweet?

*(Joth 'sees' Meredith for the first time and is about to take a sweet when we hear:)*

**Emily**                    ARCHIE! DON'T!!

*(Archie has reached up for Dean's coffee, but Emily is too far away to stop him.*

*Archie spills Dean's coffee all over his computer and lap. Dean jumps up; he is scalded and his computer ruined. Everything stops. Dean implodes.*

*Emily is frozen in horror, staring at the computer. Archie reaches up for her, but she doesn't see. He turns to Joth, who picks him up.)*

**Emily**                    Is it broken?

*(Dean doesn't reply – he just stares at her.)*

**Emily**                    *(very nervous)* Is it broken?

**Dean**                    *(frighteningly measured)* Of course it's broken. Of course it is. I'd just figured out how to make everything okay so of course you and your... *(said with the implication of much stronger language)* **child** come along and destroy it. And me. My job... gone. Just like that. What kind of a mother are you, you useless—

*(Archie cries and Dean stops and looks at him. He takes in everyone's looks of disgust, then grabs all his gadgetery and stumbles to an empty seat behind Tessa.*

*Emily, still in a state of shock, turns to Joth to retrieve Archie.)*

**Joth**                    Is it okay if I hold him? Just for a moment.

*(Emily starts to say no, then reconsiders.)*

**Emily**        Okay.

*(Dean is silently punishing himself in the corner.*

**Richard** *turns around to check that everything is okay with Archie and gives him a little wave. Joth gets Archie to wave back.)*

**Joth**        *(talking more to himself than Archie)* Do you know who that man is Archie? No? I do. He's my uncle. His name is Richard and I haven't seen him for probably ten years since I told everyone in my family to go away. My Dad died a week ago and I think Richard's on his way to the funeral. I guess I am too.

*(Tessa hands a tissue to Dean. He accepts it silently and wipes the coffee off. She passes him another.)*

**Dean**        I wasn't—

**Tessa**        I know.

**Dean**        I think I've lost my job.

**Tessa**        Sounded like it was shit anyhow.

**Dean**        I don't know... maybe if I explain to them—

**Tessa**        Whatever. It's your life.

*(Tessa turns around to Myrtle. She takes the ring off Myrtle's finger and puts it on hers.*

*Myrtle takes her hand and they sit in silence.*

**Joth** *gives Archie back to Emily.)*

**Joth**        *(genuine)* He's lovely.        *(With an edge of regret)* You're lucky.

*(Emily gives Archie a kiss and does not respond.)*

*The train starts slowing down. The Guard makes an announcement.)*

**Guard**                    We will shortly be arriving at Oxford. Get off the train, stay on, I don't care, just take your bloody mess with you and mind the gap!

*(Everyone starts shifting in anticipation of getting off. Meredith gathers her books and papers together, but neglects to put the book of her poetry in her bag.)*

*The train arrives. The Guard and the Chorus play a game of catch with Archie's ball whilst the passengers get off.*

*Myrtle and Tessa get off, and Meredith gives Joth one last fleeting look before she gets off.*

*Richard helps Emily get Archie off the train; Joth watches. Dean goes to the doorway, trying to catch up with Emily.)*

**Dean**                    I'm sorry. I didn't mean—

*(But Emily does not hear him [or chooses not to]. He stays in the doorway, watching everyone go, then looks back at his computer.)*

*Joth notices Meredith's book and picks it up. He goes to Richard.)*

**Joth**                    Is it okay if I sit here? *(The empty seat beside Richard)*

**Richard**                Please.

*(The Guard, holding the ball, says:)*

**Guard**                All aboard!

*(She throws the ball at Dean. He catches it, considers it for a moment, then steps off the train, heading into Oxford, ball in hand.)*

*The train departs with **Joth, Richard** and the **Chorus** still on board. The **Guard** remains on the platform, sweeping up the mess. She looks up, notices the audience is still there and says:)*

**Guard**        Go on now. Playtime's over.

*Playground*

by Karen Morash

Performed at the London Theatre, New Cross

27 April – 1 May 2016

*Playground* was first produced at the London Theatre, New Cross, 27 April – 1 May 2016

with the following cast:

**Amy/Worker 2** Komal Amin

**Bobbi/Foreman** Ava Amande

**Coral/Worker 1** Katie Turner

**Elaine/Deputy/Terry** Jenna Thorne

**Head** The cast

*Directed by* Jack Paterson

*Movement/Assistant Director* Roman Berry

*Lighting Design/Operator* Sarah Trim-West

*Set and Costume Design* Marcio Andrey Santarosa

*Sound Design* Sepy Baghaei

*Stage Manager* Helen Wrack-Adams

## Characters

- Amy** female, 20s, working-class (also plays **Worker 2**)
- Bobbi** female, 40s, upper middle/upper-class (also plays **Foreman**)
- Coral** female, 20s-early 30s, working-class (also plays **Worker 1**)
- Elaine** female, mid 30s+, middle-class (also plays **Deputy**)

**Head, Terry** male

All roles are non-race specific.

There are two sets of children involved in the action.

- 1) **Coral, Elaine, Amy, and Bobbi** appear as children in the first and last scenes; they are visible to the audience. Though they are referred to by the same names, they are not necessarily the same people.
- 2) The children belonging to the characters are all invisible to the audience, but not to the characters.

**Note:** strange punctuation, irregular word spacing, and odd utterances should be treated as suggestions for actors, rather than typos. A / indicates a point of interruption.

*An English village. Rural enough to have tractors parked outside the shop, but close enough to a city to be filled with middle-class professionals. The sound of birdsong only just wins over the drone of a nearby construction site.*

*As the play progresses, the construction becomes louder until the birdsong is drowned out.*

## ACT ONE

### Scene 1      On Your Marks

*The village school playground on Sports Day: loud, boisterous, full of cheering people.*

**Elaine, Amy, Coral, and Bobbi** are four-year-old children (not necessarily representing the same people as the later adult characters), clumsily lined up in sacks, excited for a race.

*They wear black leggings and t-shirts.*

*The **Head** stands at the opposite end of the playground.*

**Head**            Our bright and shiny Reception students, on their first Sports Day! Children, are you ready? Steady?

*(Elaine and Amy give each other a good luck cuddle. Bobbi waves and then adjusts her outfit in response to a parental command. Coral looks around for a parent, but cannot see one.)*

**Head**            Go go go!

*(They all start awkwardly hopping towards the **Head**. Bobbi falls over. Coral hauls her up. Coral arrives first, followed by Amy, Elaine, and then Bobbi. The **Head** distributes plastic eggs and spoons, but in reverse order of arrival. As soon as each child is given an egg and spoon, she transforms into an eight-year old.)*

**Head**            Don't drop the eggs. No messing around. Just try your best. Go!

*(They start the second race in the order they were given the egg and spoon. Coral looks around again for a parent. Bobbi drops her egg as she tries to keep her hair tidy; Elaine helps her pick it up and they both fall behind. Amy leads, but Coral grabs her top to pull her back so they are even.*

**Amy and Coral** reach the other end first, followed by **Elaine**.)

**Head**           The three-legged race. Get a move on girls! Where's your competitive spirit?

*(They are now fourteen years old, and can't be bothered. Elaine picks up a rope, and offers to be Amy's partner, but Coral grabs Amy and ties their legs together. Elaine turns to Bobbi; Bobbi inspects her fingernails whilst Elaine ties their legs together.)*

**Head**           Get on with it!

*(Coral spits out some gum. They start hobbling to the end. The Head walks to the finish line and sets out four bags of clothing. Coral and Amy are ahead, but Bobbi trips and knocks them over, giving her team the advantage. Coral gives Bobbi the Vs. Both teams arrive at the same time, and untie themselves. They are now adults.)*

**Head**           My favourite moment of the day. The Mother's Race!

*(The women look in the bags and race to put on their costumes — the outfit they will wear throughout the play, indicative of character and class — and run to the other end. Coral finishes first and pumps her fist in the air in celebration. The Head walks over to her.)*

**Head**           Disqualified!

**Coral**           What?

**Head**           You forgot something.

*(The Head pulls out a hefty gold link chain necklace from Coral's bag.)*

**Coral**           I'm not wearing that.

**Head**           It's the rules. You know I can't do anything about the rules.

*(The **Head** puts it on her. The other women arrive, with **Bobbi** last, but the **Head** does not see in what order.)*

*The **Head** walks past **Amy** and **Coral**, and stands between **Elaine** and **Bobbi**.)*

**Head**           And the winner is...?

*(Peak crowd-roaring. Black.)*

## **Scene 2           Swings and Roundabouts**

*The village playground. Birdsong is occasionally interrupted by the rumbling of lorries.*

*Churchbells ring out.*

***Bobbi** and **Amy** are on an invisible see-saw, going up and down. They do not talk to each other, but exchange occasional awkward smiles. This is not **Bobbi**'s natural domain. Their arms are positioned so as to indicate they both have invisible children on the seat in front of them. **Amy** also has a baby in a (visible) carrier on her front. Silence, until:*

**Amy**           Have you had enough yet?

**Bobbi**         God yes.

**Amy**           Um. *(Indicating child)* I meant her?

**Bobbi**         Oh.     Even so. I can't bear it any more. *(To her child)* Vincent? Can we get off?

*(Vincent does not want to get off.)*

**Bobbi**         Please. Please Vincent. My legs are in distress. I'll get varicose veins. On top of the stretch marks. *(To **Amy**)* My stomach is covered in what looks like the

skid marks of a haemorrhaging hamster. According to my husband anyhow. I've tried all the creams and nothing bloody works. What do you use?

**Amy** I don't think I've ever had stretch marks.

**Bobbi** Of course you haven't, what are you, 19? Value your collagen whilst you have it darling, trust me.

**Amy** 25.

**Bobbi** *(to Vincent)* I'm begging you. Please stop.

*(Vincent does not want to get off.)*

**Bobbi** I'll give you a sweet. *(To Amy)* Does she want one? It's organic.

*(Vincent decides to get off. Bobbi grabs him and stumbles off the see-saw, causing Amy and her child — Beth — to crash painfully to the ground. Amy gets up and dusts off her child.*

**Bobbi** *instinctively reaches up to fix her hair.)*

**Bobbi** *(to Vincent)* Look, the slide! Doesn't the slide look fun! *(To Amy)* I've already done bikram today. My legs are jelly. Molten jelly.

**Amy** *(patting the baby in the carrier on her chest)* Ssssh, it's alright.

*(Vincent has run over to the swings.)*

**Bobbi** *(under her breath)* Fucking swings. *(Full voice, to Vincent)* Mummy's coming sweetie.

*(Bobbi walks over to the swings and stands, looking at it. Beth also heads to the swings, and Amy goes with her, holding her hand. She places Beth in the swing.)*

**Bobbi** The only problem sweetie, is that it's a bit hard for Mummy to pick you up. (*To Amy:*) Tennis elbow. From actually playing tennis, imagine! Physio says no heavy lifting for six months. Except for Cross Fit obviously, but that's all about maintenance. He's an absolute beast of a boy.

**Amy** Do you should I put him in?

**Bobbi** Would you?

*(Amy places Vincent in the swing. Bobbi steps back, brushing off her clothes. Amy realizes that she is supposed to push both children, so she does. It is a bit of struggle with the baby on her front.)*

**Bobbi** You are an absolute star. You're very good at the lifting. And the pushing. (*To Vincent*) Isn't it nice that she is pushing you?

*(They observe the swinging for a while in silence.)*

**Bobbi** *(indicating sound of church bells)* Wedding today.

**Amy** I love that sound. How it echoes across the hills and—

**Bobbi** Do you think you'll get married?

**Amy** Yes. I mean, I am already.

**Bobbi** Oh! Right. Sorry. You just... seem so happy.

*(Beat.)*

**Bobbi** Not saying that I'm not. Happy. I just wish I'd chosen a different wedding dress.

*(Silent pushing and contemplation. Bobbi struggles with silence.)*

**Bobbi** How's your daughter liking year 1? Henry hates it. But he hates anything that attempts to temper his natural affinity for violence. Wait. Wait. Are you the right girl?

**Amy** What do you mean?

**Bobbi** Are you the girl with a daughter in Henry's class? I can't keep all the mums straight.

**Amy** Yes. Millie talks about Henry quite a bit.

**Bobbi** Dreadful teacher. Breath like a whore's diaphragm.

*(Amy does not know what to say to that, so she just nods and keeps pushing.)*

**Bobbi** This playground is so... dull, isn't it? I didn't even like them when I was a child. Swing swing push push slide slide fall down throw mud. Yawn. Someone else normally takes them out... *(vague gesture)* here. But she has unfortunately decided to move on. Vincent, sit still! Sweetie.

**Amy** *(shyly)* I see Vincent at playgroup.

**Bobbi** Someone else normally takes him. I went with my first. Henry. You know Henry, right? Yes, we've established that. But there is that... smell. And some of the mums are so judgy. You know? They tut at everything, pronouncing on the behaviour of other people and their children whilst sporting see-through yoga bottoms that wouldn't know a downward facing dog if it bit them in the arse. *And* Henry threw someone's mobile in the sand and water table. In the water, not, sadly, the sand.

**Amy** Oh.

**Bobbi** And gave a child a concussion. With a fairy wand.

**Amy** I remember.

**Bobbi** I had to tell my husband it was a cricket bat. Fairy wands are *verboden* in our household. Nothing pink or sparkly for our little barbarians-in-training. Only offensive weapons masquerading as sports gear.

**Amy** Right.

**Bobbi** So I thought it best if I went back to work so the nanny could take him. I didn't want to deny him play time.

**Amy** No. What is it you do?

**Bobbi** Oh you know (*gesturing vaguely*) solicitor stuff. Très ennuyeuse.

**Amy** Right.

**Bobbi** I miss it though.

**Amy** Sorry. You're not working now?

**Bobbi** They downsized a month after I went back. Mothers are always the first to go. Can't blame them really. Eddie thinks it's for the best because the children are only small once and he doesn't want me to miss it. Do you know any nannies? It would be a full time position.

**Amy** I can't think of anyone right now.

**Bobbi** If you do. Think of anyone. Let me know. Immediately. .

(**Bobbi** walks to the front of the swing.)

**Bobbi** Are you having fun Vincent? It's so nice of her to push you.

(*Vincent kicks Bobbi.*)

**Bobbi** Bloody hell! Ow! (*remembering herself, to Beth*) Sorry Amy, grown-ups shouldn't speak like that.

**Amy** I'm Amy.

**Bobbi** Sorry?

**Amy** (*embarrassed*) She's Beth. I'm Amy.

**Bobbi** God, sorry, shocking with names.

**Amy** It's okay. Lots of people get it wrong.

**Bobbi** Amy. Beth. And... what's that one (*the baby*)?

**Amy** Sarah.

**Bobbi** Christ! Three girls. Entirely sensible names though. So many ridiculous names around these days. Misplaced aspirations. Like that. That girl in their class. Davia. Dahlia.

**Amy** Danya.

**Bobbi** Yes! That's it. Well done. Danya.

**Amy** She's a nice kid.

**Bobbi** She doesn't stand much chance in life, with that name following her around.

You couldn't get your daughter to go to the slide, could you? He might follow her, instead of going to the—

*(Vincent is heading for the roundabout.)*

**Bobbi** I hate the bloody roundabout. *(To Vincent)* Look Vincent! Matilda is going to the slide! Look!

**Amy** It's... Okay.

**Bobbi** You know sweetie I hate the roundabout. I can't push. Not with this elbow. And these shoes.

*(She gives a sideways glance to Amy.)*

**Amy** Hey monkey *(Beth)*, shall we go on the roundabout? It's alright. I can push.

**Bobbi** You're a treasure.

*(Amy starts running around, pushing the roundabout.)*

**Bobbi** You're so graceful. And lithe.

*(Amy puts a protective hand on the carrier, and keeps running and pushing, winded.)*

**Bobbi** That's your baby?

**Amy** Um yes?

**Bobbi** Are you not sure?

**Amy** No. It's definitely mine. I didn't steal it.

**Bobbi** I wasn't sure if you were, you know, *looking* after it.

**Amy** No, I don't do that anymore.

**Bobbi** Why? Are you sick?

**Amy** It's hard to combine with having my own children.

**Bobbi** Well, if you change your mind! Please come see me. Straight away. Even better, I'll give you my number and you can ring.

**Amy** *(still pushing; unsure about revealing)* I'm... actually I'm pregnant again.

**Bobbi** You must stop that immediately.

**Amy** Sorry?

**Bobbi** Stop pushing. Stop pushing immediately. You'll do yourself damage.

*(Amy stops pushing, completely out of breath.)*

**Bobbi** Congratulations. Incredible. You're so skinny.

**Amy** Thank you?

**Bobbi** You're a saint. I can barely deal with two.

**Amy** We love kids.

**Bobbi** Washed down with a nice glass of chianti, eh? *(She laughs at her own joke.*

**Amy does not understand.)** I do too. Love my kids. But. You've clearly got a lot of patience. *(To Vincent, who is now pushing the roundabout)*

Vincent! Sweetie! Don't push so fast, you're going to—

*(Vincent has fallen.)*

**Bobbi** Fall. (*Under her breath*) For fuck's sake. (*To Vincent, loudly:*) Oh Vincent.  
 (*To Amy*) He's crying.

(*Amy kneels down beside Vincent.*)

**Amy** Are you okay monkey? Did you hurt your knee? Ouch. It's bleeding a bit.

**Bobbi** Oh. Um...

**Amy** I have a plaster.

(*She applies an invisible plaster to an invisible knee. Whilst in supplicant's position*)

**Amy** Do you do you know how long the building work is going on?

**Bobbi** No.

**Amy** I thought you were on the parish council. Maybe not.

**Bobbi** Oh well yes I am. But I don't often pay attention.

**Amy** Did you hear about Mrs Cornish?

**Bobbi** Who's Mrs Cornish?

**Amy** The elderly lady with the little terrier. She walks around the village a few times a day. Always wears a purple beret. She's lived here all her life. Three houses down from you.

**Bobbi** Nope.

**Amy** She was knocked down a few days ago by one of them lorries going to the site.  
 She's in hospital with a broken leg.

**Bobbi** How dreadful. Those lorries have taken my wing mirrors off on numerous occasions.

**Amy** I'm worried about the kids. They keep leaving the gate open at the site and I can't let my girls ride their scooters and bikes because it's too dangerous.

**Bobbi** They are a damn nuisance.

**Amy** But can't can't the parish council do anything about it?

**Bobbi** The children would, unfortunately, protest.

**Amy** The building site?

**Bobbi** Right. The building site.

*(Vincent decides he wants to go back on the see-saw.)*

**Bobbi** The see-saw? Again?

*(Bobbi gestures to Beth.)*

**Bobbi** Would she like to go on?

**Amy** It's okay, Beth can wait.

**Bobbi** She can push for a bit. I'm exhausted.

**Amy** I don't think her legs are quite long enough.

*(Amy sticks Beth on the see-saw opposite Vincent and climbs on.)*

**Amy** *(to Vincent)* You okay Vincent? Shall we do some gentle bumps? Yeah? *(To*

**Bobbi)** I was just wondering if the parish council could do—

**Bobbi** I think he likes you better than me.

**Amy** No. No.

**Bobbi** I haven't seen him smile in weeks. Possibly months. And now he's positively beaming at you. How do you do it?

**Amy** He's lovely.

**Bobbi** No. I legitimately want to know how you do it. Do you think you can come over to my house for a masterclass? Just maybe when my husband's not home.

*(Amy's phone rings.)*

**Amy** *(to Bobbi)* Sorry. *(To phone)* Hello? Hi. Oh. Who?

*(Amy looks, a bit nervously at Bobbi. Bobbi's phone rings. Simultaneous conversations.)*

**Amy** Really?

**Bobbi** Bobbi speaking. Vincent please sweetie, just for a moment. Mummy needs to talk. Hello? *(Loudly)*/ I can't hear you!

**Amy** Really? He—

**Bobbi** Yes, speaking. I'm sorry, I can't really hear you./ Vincent, darling, just for a moment! Here's a sweet.

**Amy** *(whispering)* Did he touch her?

**Bobbi** Oh, yes, hello. *(To Amy)* It's the school.

*(Amy half smiles at her.)*

**Bobbi** I suppose I can come in. Does it really have to be now? I have my youngest with me.

**Amy** Okay. (*Looking at **Bobbi**, but speaking to the phone*) What're you going to do?

**Bobbi** Well, it would help me to know how serious/ the situation is if you would just give me a bit of information.

**Amy** Um... yes, I guess I can come over. I gotta take the kids though. I'm just in the playground with....

*(Pause. Then, at the same time)*

**Bobbi** Okay, fine. We can discuss it there.

**Amy** Okay, yeah. I'll see you soon.

*(They both hang up. **Bobbi** scoops up Vincent from the see-saw, making Beth fall dramatically, but she catches her.)*

**Bobbi** Some kind of drama at school. He probably has a sore tummy or something ridiculous — schools these days, they won't bloody well tell you anything over the bloody phone. Say bye-bye Vincent! Bye bye!

*(**Bobbi** gathers Vincent and all her bits up, and dashes off. **Amy** gives her a small wave which disintegrates into a shoulder slump as soon as **Bobbi** is gone.)*

**Scene 3      Nowhere to Run To**

*The school playground at the end of the day. Coral is clearly unhappy. Elaine circulates, tablet in hand, and zeroes in on Amy.*

**Elaine**      There's still lots of spaces for school carnival helpers... face painting tombola cake stand parent choir laser tag the knock the can off game thingy, soup stand cotton candy craft table and beer tent of course. Where would we be without the beer tent? It's just for an hour probably and it will really help and you won't have to do much, it's a great way of meeting people and raising money and you know *so* much fun. Can I put you down?

**Amy**      I think I'm already down.

*(Elaine scrolls through her tablet.)*

**Elaine**      Aha! Amy. Here you are.

**Elaine**      Laser tag. Two o'clock. *(Turning to Coral)* Can I tempt you with the craft table?

**Coral**      No.

**Elaine**      The soup stand? You literally just have to ladle warm liquid into —

**Coral**      No. Busy.

**Elaine**      Okay, great. Good. It's wonderful to be so forthright. Better to say no than to say yes and just complain about it for days like everyone else does. It's great to know exactly where we are. *(To Amy)* I don't suppose you could do another hour? We're getting desperate.

*(Bobbi enters the playground, looking harassed. Coral elbows Amy.)*

**Amy** Steve's working, so it's a bit tricky.

**Elaine** Just another hour... please please please please.

**Amy** I can try to work something out with/ my mum, but maybe something different than —

*(Elaine has spotted Bobbi, and walks towards her whilst talking back to Amy.)*

**Elaine** Great. I'll put you down for a second hour on the laser tag.

*(Coral whispers in Amy's ear again, clearly indicating that the source of her disdain is*

*Bobbi. Bobbi is aware, but tries to appear unaware. She impatiently gestures to the teacher.)*

**Bobbi** Bffff. You bloody thing. C'mon.

**Elaine** They're out late today.

**Bobbi** She always does this. And she knows we've got tae kwon do.

**Elaine** Maybe she's just being vigilant about checking they've got all their bits? I know there's been complaints about missing mittens.

**Bobbi** If only she would be that vigilant about mouthwash.

**Elaine** This is such hard work. Nobody's volunteering. It's not like I'm asking them to donate a kidney.

**Bobbi** Bfff. You know what they're like. They'd rather complain about how rubbish an event is than actually lift a finger to help. *(Directed to teacher)* What is the matter with you?

(**Elaine** scrolls through her tablet.)

**Elaine** I don't think you're down.

(**Bobbi** gestures wildly to the teacher.)

**Elaine** No, you're definitely not down. What time can you do?

**Bobbi** No. (*To teacher:*) You can see me standing. Right here.

**Elaine** Bobbi...

**Bobbi** I'll give you a hundred pounds. Surely that should be enough to get me out of that fucking carnival. LET HIM GO!

(**Coral's** child — *Danya* — has been released.)

**Bobbi** She's holding him back just to torment me.

(**Coral** protects *Danya* behind her back whilst staring pointedly at **Bobbi**. **Amy** hugs *Millie*.)

**Elaine** That takes all the fun out. If everyone did that we...

(**Elaine** notices the tension between the two women.)

**Bobbi's** child is finally released. She runs to meet, him, and pulls him by the hand.)

**Elaine** Bobbi?

**Bobbi** Gotta dash. (*To Henry*) Darling, please, don't drag. Can you cooperate with Mummy? Just for a moment. COOPERATE!

**Elaine** What's going on?

(**Bobbi** looks for an exit, but her way is blocked by **Coral**.)

**Coral** I wanna talk to you.

**Bobbi** (*faux cheer*) Can't now, sorry!

(*She attempts to get by, but Coral blocks her.*)

**Coral** We gotta talk about what your boy—

**Bobbi** (*faux cheer crumbling slightly*) Drop me an email, we've really got/ to get going.

**Coral** Your boy's a paedo.

**Bobbi** Not now.

**Elaine** Did she say? No.

**Coral** I said her son's a paedo.

**Amy** Coral...

**Elaine** I'm not sure children can be paedophiles. Can they? I mean, by definition?  
I'm not sure.

**Coral** (*to Bobbi*) Don't you have anything to say?

**Bobbi** I. Have. To. Go. We can talk about this another time. When you're a bit less aggressive.

**Elaine** Talk about what? Exactly?

**Coral** Pffff.

(*Amy tries to put a soothing hand on Coral, but she shrugs it off. Bobbi takes the opportunity to push past Coral, nearly knocking Amy off her feet in the process.*)



**Worker 2**    Nope.        (*Looks at what Worker 1 is doing.*) You're not doing that right.  
It's supposed to be blue, red, blue, green, not blue, red, green green.

**Worker 1**    They didn't give me enough blue. I've got too much green. What am I  
supposed to do if I don't have enough blue?

**Worker 2**    I dunno.

**Worker 1**    Can I have some of your blue?

**Worker 2**    No.

(*Worker 2 begins building.*)

**Worker 1**    What am I supposed to do?

**Worker 2**    I dunno. But don't get me involved. The Deputy's already on my case and if I  
go, what'll happen to you?

(*Deputy enters.*)

**Worker 1**    Hey boss.

**Worker 2**    Hi boss.

**Deputy**        Alright.

**Worker 1**    Any chance we'll get off early?

**Deputy**        It's unlikely.

**Worker 1**    I've got to get to the doctor's. My kidney's hurting.

**Deputy**        Did you put a formal request in writing to the Foreman?

**Worker 1** No.

**Deputy** Then it's... unlikely. (*He inspects the work.*) There's not enough blue here.

**Worker 2** I said that.

**Deputy** And what steps did you take to remedy the situation?

**Worker 2** I told him he was doing it wrong.

**Worker 1** I wasn't given enough blue!

**Deputy** You could have shared your blocks. You need to take more initiative. You can't expect us to sort out all your problems. I'll get sanctioned by the Foreman if I have to spend my time sorting your problems out, and what will happen to you?

(**Foreman** *enters. They all straighten up.*)

**Worker 1** Hey boss.

**Worker 2** Hi boss.

**Deputy** Hello.

(**Foreman** *says nothing.*)

**Worker 1** Hey boss, I'm really worried about my kid—

**Deputy** Sssh. You're not supposed to directly address him. (*To Foreman*) Sorry boss.

**Foreman** It's not a problem (*it is*). There's a problem.

**Deputy** Yes, I've only just realized as it wasn't brought to my attention earlier. There's a lack of blue. It's shoddy work. (*To Worker 1*) You need to apologize for your—

**Foreman** I don't give a toss about the blue. What I care about is the distinct lack of windows.

**Deputy** But you didn't—

**Worker 2** —tell us to make—

**Worker 1** windows!

**Foreman** Come on now! Every construction needs a window. That's rudimentary building rules. What will the company inspectors say if they show up and there's not even one window!

*(They shrug.)*

**Foreman** I will be publicly flogged, that's what will happen. And then what will happen to the rest of you? Who here knows how to make windows?

*(Worker 2 and Deputy shift uncomfortably.)*

**Foreman** None of you?

**Deputy** No one's ever taught us!

**Foreman** You have brains in your head! You should know how to make windows!

*(Worker 1 whispers something to Worker 2.)*

**Worker 2** Sssssh!

**Foreman**      What did you say? Why are you whispering? Whispering is not allowed on a building site!

**Worker 1**     I... I'm not allowed to directly address you. Sir.

**Foreman**      Speak!

**Worker 1**     I know how to make windows.

**Foreman**      Show me.

*(Worker 1 expertly makes a window.)*

**Foreman**      Good. This wall needs five windows by the end of the day. And a turret. Off you go.

**Worker 1**     But I need to leave—

**Foreman**      That sounds like direct address to me. Off you go. And make sure they are evenly spaced and aesthetically pleasing. There can be no cause for complaint from the company inspectors. The rest of you, except for you (*indicating Worker 2*) can knock off early. You (**Worker 2**) need to sort out the blues.

*(Foreman and Deputy exit.)*

*(Worker 2 kicks the blocks over.)*

**Scene 5**      **The Kitchen Sink**

**Coral's** kitchen. She has a broom and ferociously clears away the mess from the building site until everything is perfectly in order. **Amy** sits, with her baby in her lap. *Danya* is pestering **Coral**, who is trying, and failing, to stay calm.

**Coral** I don't got any. I already said. Get off!

(*Danya persists, hanging on Coral's arm. Coral throws her off roughly.*)

**Coral** Get off!

**Amy** (to *Danya*) Millie and Beth'r' watching *Ninja Turtles*. Go on monkey. You can talk to mum in a bit. Good girl.

(*Danya leaves.*)

**Coral** Terry's going to hear about it.

**Amy** How?

**Coral** Don't know. He always does.

**Amy** You didn't do anything! Except shout in the playground.

**Coral** Don't matter.

**Amy** What can he do?

**Coral** Pfff. You know what he can do.

**Amy** Yeah. Sorry.

(*Amy's child is fussing.*)

**Coral** I wish he would smash that kid.

**Amy** He's just a child.

**Coral** His stuck-up bint mother then.

**Amy** The kids'll hear you.

**Coral** Don't care. Better they learn from an early age what people are like.

*(Amy takes her baby and places it in Coral's arms.)*

**Amy** Here.

*(Coral stares at Sarah. It calms her. She kisses Sarah's head, and continues to clean whilst holding her.)*

**Amy** See look. She's settled right down. All my kids love you.

**Coral** I give them sweeties and you don't. Fuck, social services.

**Amy** Wasn't your fault!

**Coral** Don't matter. It was sexual assault. They'll say it's child protection issues.  
Like before.

**Amy** Sexual assault? It wasn't that serious was it?

*(Coral gives Amy a look.)*

**Amy** Well whatever. They can't blame you for what happened in school.

**Coral** It wasn't my fault before.

**Amy** Yeah. I guess. Why don't you be, you know... proactive?

**Coral** What?

**Amy** Put in an official complaint. With the school. And then tell social services.  
Before any of them gets to you.

**Coral** I'm not telling them nothing. They fucked things up for me and they'll fuck things up for her.

**Amy** Yeah. Okay.

**Coral** I just want that woman to take some responsibility for her kid.

**Amy** She wants me to be her nanny.

**Coral** What?

**Amy** Bobbi.

**Coral** Pfff.

**Amy** I think she thinks I've got a lot of time on my hands. Or maybe she doesn't know? Things are different for her. I guess. It's just ignorance or something.

**Coral** Don't make excuses. She just reckons you'll do it for cash in hand.

**Amy** It's like... the words just fall out her mouth. She probably grew up thinking it was okay to say whatever idea pops into your head.

**Coral** Stop making excuses. She don't deserve it.

*(Danya runs in again.)*

**Coral** Can I not have a bloody conversation?

*(Amy gets up and pours a glass of water. She gives it to Danya.)*

**Amy** It's okay monkey. Here you go.

(**Amy** gently ushers Danya out of the room.)

**Amy** She's just thirsty.

**Coral** Yeah. I know.

**Amy** You're a good mum. You just gotta try to stop shouting so much?

**Coral** I know.

**Amy** Like with Bobbi. If you go in all aggressive—

**Coral** Now you're calling me aggressive too. It's anger. It's different. I'm allowed to be angry ain't I?

**Amy** But there's better ways of getting what you want. I don't know... try smiling?

**Coral** People look at me funny when I smile. Take her. She's hungry.

(**Coral** hands the baby back to **Amy**. **Amy** sits down with the baby, puts a muslin on her shoulder and starts breastfeeding.)

**Amy** You've been through bigger things than this.

(**Coral** shrugs.)

**Amy** The school will deal with it. Just write to them. Officially.

**Coral** No.

**Amy** Why not?

**Coral** They didn't even tell me proper what happened. They just said there had been some incident and Danya was upset. I had to find out what actually happened from her. She don't wanna go to school no more.

**Amy** Millie says that sometimes.

**Coral** But that's different, ain't it? She's not scared.

**Amy** Danya's scared?

**Coral** Course she is.

**Coral** When you gonna give that (*breastfeeding*) up?

**Amy** Does it matter?

**Coral** Don't seem normal. Put Danya on the bottle straight away. It's not done her any harm. Better watch out or you'll have two of them hanging off you. And then when you finish you'll all shrink up. Your tits'll be like two balls swinging around in sports socks. You can play tennis with all them yummy mummies. But you'd have to be the equipment.

(**Coral** makes the sound of a tennis ball hitting a racket, and indicates the trajectory of a ball.)

**Coral** (*posh voice*) Oh darling, there goes your nipple. Can you be a sweetheart and fetch it for us?

**Amy** (*laughing*) Shut up. Breast's best, you know?

**Coral** Says who? The *Sun*?

**Amy** I don't know. People.

**Coral** People who get off on telling other people what to do. At least you're not like that one. Whatshername Mrs PTA.

**Amy** Elaine.

**Coral** She was feeding those kids out there in the playground till they were starting school. Trying to draw attention to herself with her dripping nipples. Like anyone wants to look. Her boy'll be asking for a slurp off his mam's teat instead of the stripper's on his stag. He'll need to keep her round in case he needs a squirt for his coffee.

*(Coral mimes squirting breast milk into a cup and offering it to Amy.)*

**Coral** Sugar with that sweetie?

**Amy** *(laughing)* Stop.

**Coral** I'm jealous.

**Amy** Of what?

**Coral** Of you having another one.

**Amy** What? No.

**Coral** Of your big fat belly.

**Amy** Shut up! It's not that fat.

**Coral** It's not that skinny.

**Amy** You never had a big fat belly, even when you was nine months.

**Coral** Yeah, but I loved being pregnant. I liked that feeling of not knowing what was coming. And also everyone doing things for me, asking me how I was feeling, making space... That all finished the moment Danya came flying outta me.

**Amy** Thought I was going to have to catch her.

**Coral** It's my superior fanny muscles, don't you know? Core training darling. You should see what I can do with a ping pong ball.

**Amy** I'd rather just have it out. I hate being pregnant.

**Coral** Then you should stop getting pregnant. Don't you know you're a burden on the state?

**Amy** I like kids.

**Coral** Yeah. Though they taste better with a bit of ketchup.

*(She laughs at her own joke.)*

**Amy** You could have another one.

**Coral** With who? There's no way Terry's getting near this *(her groin)* again.

**Amy** Yeah. Right.

**Coral** He ain't!

**Amy** You're young. You got loads of time. Look at all those ones in the playground having babies in their 40s.

**Coral** Rank. But even if I could still have one...

**Amy** Terry'll move on.

**Coral** Or end up in prison. Back in prison.

*(Danya comes running back in the room.)*

**Coral** Jesus. What do you want now?

(**Amy** gives **Coral** a look.)

**Coral**        Okay. Come here.

(**Coral** gets down on her knees and gives **Danya** a cuddle.)

**Coral**        Alright then. Off you go.

(**Danya** runs off.)

**Coral**        (*shouting after Danya*) Spaghetti hoops for tea! (*To Amy:*) She's a good kid. It's not fair that she's got to put up with that shit at school and nothing happens to the brat that did it.

**Amy**         He was punished, wasn't he?

**Coral**        They said they'd 'talk to him'. That's it. He'll still think it's his right to go around sexually harassing little girls. And she won't do nothing either. Maybe that's what they get up to in that house, but it ain't what's supposed to be happening. Social services should be looking into *her*.

(**Amy's** baby starts to fuss.)

**Amy**         Maybe you should talk to the teacher. Get her to move **Danya** so she's not near Henry? I can come with you if you want.

**Coral**        She won't do nothing. I told her loads of times I don't think **Danya's** being taught right, that she's bored, that she don't get enough praise, but that teacher just smiles at me and says she's doing fine. She's not fine. She's way behind all the other kids, but she's not stupid. She figures out stuff all the time that I can't. Nobody's gonna look out for my child 'cept me. It's the same as when I was in school, 'cept I had no one looking out for me and now I can't even...

(*Amy's baby is crying.*)

**Amy** She's tired, I'm going to have to get her home. Why don't you email the Head? He's got to do something for child protection and everything. Ofsted'll be after him otherwise.

**Coral** Pffffff. Just like you and the building site.

**Amy** Yeah. Kind of.

**Coral** Got a response yet?

**Amy** No.

**Coral** Pffff. They ain't gonna respond you know.

(*The baby cries even more.*)

**Amy** I gotta get her home. (*To baby*) Ssssssh. (*To Coral*) Just send him a message. Ask for a meeting. Get him to write down your complaint.

**Coral** He won't do nothing.

**Amy** He might have to. If you make it... official.

**Coral** Can't I just talk to him.

**Amy** You gotta put it in writing first. Proper channels.

**Coral** That's bullshit.

**Amy** Yeah. But that's the way it is.

**Coral** Don't know how to say stuff right in an email. I don't even have an... email thing. Address?

**Amy** I can set one up for you. And write the email? If you want? If you tell me what you want to say.

*(Beat and then:)*

**Coral** Yeah.

*(Coral takes the baby, jiggling and shushing. Amy starts tapping on her phone. )*

## **Scene 6 It's a Slippery Slope from Yoga to Satan**

*The school playground, abandoned except for Elaine. She is scrubbing a slide absent-mindedly and occasionally tapping something into her tablet, looking quite pleased when she has done so. She wears a baby sling, but there is no baby. The Head exits from the school. He pauses, reluctant to engage her in conversation, before he approaches, watching her silently behind her back.*

**Head** The children will be blinded by their own reflections.

*(Elaine jumps and turns round.)*

**Elaine** Oh. Ha.Ha. What?

*(Elaine slides the tablet into the baby sling.)*

**Head** You've polished the slide into a mirror. On a sunny day the children won't be able to see because of the glare.

**Elaine** Oh. Yes. Ha ha.

**Head** Why are you polishing a slide?

- Elaine**        (*gesturing vaguely*) The dust.     From the building site. I thought it was dangerous.
- Head**         Because...?
- Elaine**        It would make the slide too...
- Head**         Slippery?
- Elaine**        Exactly.
- Head**         Aha.
- Elaine**        I'm the chair of the Health and Safety Committee.
- Head**         Yes. I'm aware.
- Elaine**        And we wouldn't want the inspectors showing up and complaining about a slide that is too...
- Head**         Aha. Next time ask Mr Brooker to do it. I think overly slippery slides fall under a caretaker's responsibility.
- Elaine**        I did.        He said he was too busy.
- Head**         Yes. Yes. I'm sure he is. (*Looking around*) Where are your kids?
- Elaine**        Oh, they're just off... in the woods somewhere. They're fine. They're exploring. They've done their advanced water survival badge so the river isn't a problem and I taught them how to make a tepee and a slingshot and how to identify poisonous mushrooms so they'll be okay. Actually, can they get some kind of recognition for that? Some kind of certificate of achievement in assembly? I know rewards aren't actually that important but they are to

children. Hey have you ever thought of introducing more of a Scandi-slash-Native-North-American-live-in-the-forest-kind-of ethos? I read online the other day about a school in Cornwall that's gone completely roofless. And they were rated Outstanding. Outstanding's good. We could cook school lunches over an open fire. I'm not sure of the health and safety implications though. I could put together a risk assessment.

**Head** It's getting dark and I need to lock up. You should think about going home.

**Elaine** I've got my own set of keys.

**Head** Of course. Listen, could you do something for me? In your capacity as parent-teacher liaison?

**Elaine** (*excited*) Of course! Of course. Anything. Anything at all.

**Head** I need you to speak to Danya Flannery's mother.

**Elaine** (*not thrilled by the prospect*) Oh.

**Head** She's threatening further action. She said she might put in a complaint to Ofsted. About the incident.

**Elaine** The *incident*.

**Head** I thought you would be better placed to speak with her. She might respond to someone with less... authority.

**Elaine** Right.

**Head** I think she just wants to air her frustrations. If you could act the part of a sympathetic ear, then she may just go away happy.

**Elaine** What if she shouts at me?

**Head** Use your best diplomatic skills to avoid that.

**Elaine** Would I be allowed to take notes?

**Head** Why... Whatever. As long as you placate her.

**Elaine** *(taking out her tablet and tapping)* Okay. I'll put it in my diary. Placate Coral Flannery. Terrifying, aggressive, Coral Flannery.

**Head** Life hasn't been that good to her.

**Elaine** Really? How so?

**Head** I'm relying on you to... polish the playground up a bit. Just like that slide. Angry parents don't make for a happy school.

**Elaine** Or a good Ofsted report. Or an outstanding. One.

**Head** Yes.

**Elaine** Okay. If it helps.

**Head** It does. Goodnight.

*(The Head starts to go, and Elaine goes back to the scrubbing. He stops and watches her for a moment. She mutters something and takes out her tablet.)*

**Head** Elaine?

**Elaine** Oh! Hello. You're still here.

**Head** You don't happen to have a blog do you?

*(A momentary 'Oh Shit' look, before she regains composure, and stealthily stows her tablet.)*

**Elaine** A blog? Sir?

**Head** A friend forwarded the link to a tumblr, by someone called 'PTAPaladin3', which is attracting a lot of attention. Apparently it was listed in the top ten primary school parenting-association blogs by What School.

**Elaine** *(very pleased)* Top ten? *(Remembers herself)* Sorry, what's a *(sounding it out)* tumblr? The only tumblr I've heard of is at gymnastics, right?

**Head** It's just that the school described and the head leading it bears a great deal of resemblance to this school and this head.

**Elaine** Oh. Well sir, I suspect there are quite a few schools like this one, and quite a few heads who... do a great job just like you do. Sir.

**Head** It wasn't complimentary.

**Elaine** Maybe it was parody?

**Head** It wasn't funny.

**Elaine** Oh. Not even a bit?

**Head** I felt extremely insulted on behalf of whoever that particular head is.

**Elaine** That wasn't—I'm sure that wasn't the intention. Sir.

**Head** You don't need to call me sir. That's just for the children.

**Elaine** I'm more comfortable that way.

**Head** You are up to speed on our education authority's social media policy?

**Elaine** Yes. (*She is not.*)

**Head** Good. Then you'll know that it is strictly forbidden for any staff member, governor, or parent association member to use social media, or any type of website, to discuss administrative issues or private matters relating to staff, students, or carers. This is a policy I wholeheartedly support. But I'm sure, given you don't seem to know anything about one of the most popular platforms for microblogging, that it isn't an issue for you.

**Elaine** No sir. I barely know how to turn this thing on.

**Head** Because an infringement like that would mean you would have to step down from the PTA. Which would be a... shame. And you definitely couldn't take a position on the governors.

**Elaine** No. I definitely couldn't.

**Head** Good. Glad we're on the same page. You'll tell me about your chat with Miss Flannery?

**Elaine** Yep.

**Head** And only me.

**Elaine** Yep. Only you. Because it would be *really* inappropriate to—

**Head** It would.

(*The Head turns to go.*)

**Head** Don't stay too long — it's getting dark and your children need their tea.

**Elaine** They're foragers, they'll find something out there.

**Head** Keep them away from the building work. I've had a few reports of children getting on site. Good night.

**Elaine** Will do. Good night. Sir.

*(Elaine watches him go. Once he is gone she retrieves her tablet from the sling and stares at it.)*

**Elaine** Damn.

## **Scene 7      Knock Knock Who's There**

*Amy walks to the edge of a noisy, but empty building site. She has her invisible baby in a carrier. She jumps nervously with the crashes and bangs. She waits patiently for someone to come, then knocks awkwardly on a wall.*

**Amy**            *(shyly)* Hello? *(Slightly louder)* Hello?

*(The Foreman crosses the space, looks at Amy, and leaves. She knocks again, and then realizes the knocking is stupid on such a loud site. She raises her voice a bit.)*

**Amy**            Hello? I... need to talk to someone?

*(Worker 1 walks into the space, not initially noticing Amy.)*

**Amy**            Excuse me? Hello?

**Worker 1**    *(looking her up and down)* Hello.

**Amy**            Can I talk to someone about—

**Worker 1** You can talk to me.

**Amy** Okay. I—

**Worker 1** Your husband work here?

**Amy** No. I—

**Worker 1** Not married? With *(pointing at her baby)* that?

**Amy** No. I mean yes, I'm married, but—

**Worker 1** You want a job? Is that what you're after? Cause I can't help you with that.  
Plus it'd be a bit tricky with a baby.

**Amy** No, I just want to—

*(Deputy walks across the space.)*

**Deputy** Hard hat area love. No hard hat, no entry. And no babies allowed. It's a  
dangerous place for children.

*(Deputy exits. Amy looks to Worker for support. He shrugs.)*

**Worker 1** Gotta do what the boss says. Sorry.

*(He pats his hat and leaves. Amy walks away.)*

## **Scene 8**      **Stick a Needle in My Eye**

**Coral** and **Elaine** sit on a park bench in the village playground. The children are playing.

- Elaine** (to her child) What did I say about being sensitive with sticks pickle? Tools, not weapons! (To **Coral**:) It's lovely seeing them play together. We should do this more often.
- Coral** Danya doesn't like boys.
- Elaine** It's good for them to mix, don't you think? I don't understand single sex schools do you? What is it preparing them for? Life in a religious order? That's the only thing I can think of. They need to learn how to *be* around each other and. Otherwise how can they possibly have positive sexual relationships? I worry about these things. I'm always happy to have Danya over to mine for a play, especially if you're... working?
- Coral** Amy looks after her.
- Elaine** Lovely. Lovely Amy.
- Coral** I gotta go. Danya needs her tea before I start my shift.
- Elaine** What is it, your job?
- Coral** I've got three.
- Elaine** Three what?
- Coral** Jobs.
- Elaine** Wow. Three jobs. Well done you. Three jobs. Wow. Where are you tonight?
- Coral** Care home.
- Elaine** Lovely!

**Coral**           *(it is not)* Yeah.

**Elaine**           I bet you're brilliant at it. I bet you've got such a good touch with all those elderly people. So few people can manage a job like that.

**Coral**           I mainly change the bedpans.

**Elaine**           Still! I bet you're brilliant at it. I wish I had a job that was so fulfilling. My job... It's barely even a job.

**Coral**           *(reluctantly participating in the conversation)* What do you do?

**Elaine**           I'm a writer. Well not a *writer*. I write stuff online. And sometimes put funny pictures with it. Memes. For mothers.           Do you know what they are?

**Coral**           No.

**Elaine**           They are very inconsequential in the big scheme of things. And I... write other stuff. Sometimes. Online. Blogs. Nothing very good. Nothing you'd want to read.

**Coral**           Does it pay?

**Elaine**           Not really.

**Coral**           So why do it?

**Elaine**           Good question. Maybe I should give it up and become a care worker!

*(Beat.)*

**Coral**           Why am I here?

**Elaine**           That's a hard question. Existential even. I suppose one could argue —

**Coral** You asked me to come.

**Elaine** Oh, yes! Of course. I initiated this, didn't I?

**Coral** Yes.

**Elaine** I did, I did. So I did. Well... it was so we could talk.

**Coral** I got that. When you said, 'we need to talk'.

**Elaine** Yes! I did say that, didn't I?

**Coral** About...?

**Elaine** About...?

**Coral** What. Do you want. To talk about. I've got stuff I need to do.

**Elaine** Oh! Yes of course. I'll be quick. Quick quick quick. (*Scrolling through tablet*)  
Well...

**Coral** Pffff.

(*Coral's display of impatience makes Elaine even more nervous.*)

**Elaine** The Head.

**Coral** The Head?

**Elaine** He asked me to chat —

**Coral** He can't be bothered to talk to me.

**Elaine** No. No. No, really, it's just procedure. You asked for a meeting.

**Coral** With the Head.

**Elaine** But I'm the PTA Staff-Parent Liaison.

**Coral** Right.

**Elaine** It's a silly title really. I don't actually know what it means but I think it means that I'm... your first port of call. In a storm. When you have an *issue*.

(*To Luther*) Sensitive sticks Luther darling, sensitive sticks! (*To Coral*)

After the civil rights activist. Not the leader of the Protestant Reformation.

Or the television show.

**Coral** Right. What's my issue then.

**Elaine** Oh you know, what you were shouting in the playground. Well not shouting.

*Asserting*. That's a better word. The Head has told me a bit about your situation.

**Coral** What?

**Elaine** Your... you know... In the most sensitive way possible. *Problems*. In the past.

But no actual hard details. Feel free to fill me in on details if that helps.

**Coral** You're his gatekeeper.

**Elaine** No no. No no. ... It's better if we can work it out ourselves, before disputes become... difficult. Isn't it? That's what we tell the children.

**Coral** You get paid to do that liaison thing?

**Elaine** Voluntary. It'd be *great* to get paid as things are you know *tight* financially sometimes but I'm sure I don't need to tell you that and even so I like to help where I can. And I'm hoping to be a governor so it's good experience.

Wow. They really are playing together brilliantly. No arguing at all. It's quite amazing.

**Coral** (*shouting to Luther*) Put that stick down! You'll have her eye out. (*To Elaine*)  
Hope you don't mind me shouting at Luther.

**Elaine** It's fine. (*It isn't.*) We have a few positions available on the PTA, if you're interested in getting to know the Head a bit better... It's not technically supposed to get you preferential treatment but you do sometimes manage to get into the inner sanctum of his office although I haven't quite managed that yet.

**Coral** I have three jobs.

**Elaine** Of course how silly of me and you're a single mum on top of it all aren't you? Honestly, what was I thinking? Society is so hard on people like you but really you're the backbone of everything and I don't understand why the papers and the politicians all... well perhaps *hate* is a strong word but they certainly don't respect you when all you do is work work work work and you get so little for it and people treat you like you're lazy scroungers but you deserve the same luxuries as everyone else I think. All this nonsense about widescreen televisions and iphones. I voted Labour.

**Coral** I didn't.

**Elaine** Okay. The Head he of course understands your concerns and would like the situation resolved in as positive a way possible. So, I guess that means we need to discuss what needs to happen so that...

**Coral** The Head doesn't want me complaining to, what're they called...

**Elaine** Ofsted.

**Coral** Yeah. He don't want me complaining to Ofsted.

**Elaine** Yes, obviously that would be a bit of a... negative outcome. But what he is really concerned is that you feel that Danya is safe and happy at school.

**Coral** But she ain't.

**Elaine** What?

**Coral** Safe and happy.

**Elaine** Oh. Well. Why not?

(**Coral** gives **Elaine** a deadly look.)

**Elaine** Oh yes. The incident. Sorry. (*Slight hint of aggression*) Sensitive sticks pickle!

**Coral** I'm going. Danya!

**Elaine** Please don't go. Please. We haven't reached any kind of resolution and the Head—

**Coral** She's your mate so you're never going to take my complaint seriously.

**Elaine** My mate? Who? Not the Head. Who is a he. Whom is a he? No, who. Definitely who.

**Coral** Bobbi.

**Elaine** I wouldn't exactly call her a *mate*, more of a—

**Coral** Whatever. You're gonna side with her.

**Elaine** I don't think there are sides but I can see how it might look that way. I'm entirely neutral. Cross my heart and hope to die.

**Coral** Pfffff.

*(Elaine stands and walks over to where the children are playing.)*

**Elaine** *(screaming at Luther)* I TOLD YOU TO PUT THE STICK DOWN!

*(She grabs the imaginary stick and throws it.)*

**Elaine** *(brightly)* I should be taking notes.

*(She gets her tablet out from the baby sling.)*

**Coral** If that kid don't get punished for what he did to Danya I'm going to Ofsted. And I want some kind of assurance from the Head that Danya is going to be properly looked after and supported.

**Elaine** *(stops tapping)* O...kay. But I think he was punished. Wasn't he? And they called Bobbi in. And made sure you were informed. Didn't they?

**Coral** How has he been punished? By putting his name up on the board for a day beside a crying rain cloud? What does that do? And Danya's still gotta go in and sit beside him every day. And I haven't had an apology from your not exactly a mate.

**Elaine** You want an apology from Bobbi?

**Coral** For a start. And a promise that it ain't gonna happen again.

**Elaine** Isn't.

**Coral** What?

**Elaine** Nothing. Sorry. Okay (*tapping on tablet*). You want reassurance that Henry won't repeat—

**Coral** I need to know Danya's safe at this school. I gotta be able to tell her dad that he don't need to worry about his little girl being sexually assaulted.

**Elaine** Sexual assault? Isn't that a bit... strong? They're five.

**Coral** That's how I see it. Put that in your thing.

**Elaine** Okay. Sure. Yep.

**Coral** I want the boy moved away from Danya.

(**Elaine** *looks up at the children.*)

**Elaine** It's okay sweetie. I'm sure Danya didn't mean to push you. Come here. (*To child*) You sit right here and have a cuddle with Mummy. (*To Coral*) It's fine don't worry he's fine. (*To her child*) Sometimes little girls need to push just to even things up. The important thing is that you don't push back. So the thing is I don't have much *power* over what goes on in the classroom. I can pass along your concerns but I can't actually *force* the teacher to move the offending child.

**Coral** Pffff.

**Elaine** Please don't go to Ofsted. I'll do what I can to get him moved. And I can... I can. I can get Bobbi to apologise.

(*Beat from Coral.*)

**Coral** Fine. She can do it tomorrow. After school. At school.

**Elaine** In front of other parents? I'm not sure that's—

*(Coral's look silences her.)*

**Elaine** Sure. Let's do that. Tomorrow.

*(Coral stands and digs in her bag for something.)*

**Coral** Here.

*(She hands Elaine a lolly.)*

**Coral** For him. *(To Luther:)* Danya's sorry for pushing you. *(To Danya)* C'mon.

*(Coral strides off, not looking to see if Danya is coming.)*

**Elaine** *holds the lolly like it is a piece of excrement.*

### **Scene ix. Flushed Away**

**Bobbi's house.** *She is hiding from her children in the loo, sitting on the toilet (but not using it). A dog barks.*

**Bobbi** Please darlings, stop. Please. I just need a minute. It doesn't matter what I'm doing. Please stop pounding. And tie up the dog before he eats another one of Daddy's cricket bats. Just a moment. I just need a moment.

*(Screaming)* I'm having a poo! No, you can't watch!

*(She buries her head in her hands. It has been a hard day. The phone rings. She looks in the mirror, wipes some snot away and fixes her hair before answering.)*

**Bobbi** Hello? Hello Elaine.

I'm fine. Hayfever. Do you fancy coming over for a bit? The boys are stir crazy and Eddie has gone off to the rugby. In Italy. Again.

Of course. Another time.

Absolutely not.

Oh fuck off Elaine, no. I'm not doing that.

Because she will probably knife me. I'm not exaggerating! You've seen the woman. And the whole thing is humiliating. Everyone will be watching.

*(To children)* I am still on the toilet!

No.

No. *(To boys, desperate)* Please. Just give Mummy... a break.

*(To Elaine)* No, not you. It's just... I'm fine.

I hate you.

*(To boys)* Not you darlings, not you.

*(To Elaine)* Fine fine fine fucking fine. Just... you owe me some babysitting.

Love to your family too.

*(She hangs up.)*

*(Exhausted, to boys)* It's okay. Mummy's coming.

*(She examines herself in the mirror, and is very unimpressed. She straightens out her hair, and puts a smile on her face before opening the door.)*

*(To boys)* Darlings. *(Face falls)* Oh fuck.

**Scene 10      I Do Desire We Be Better Strangers**

*The construction site. Worker 1 and Worker 2 are working hard at building a block tower.*

*Deputy is operating a toy dump truck and enjoying himself; Worker 1 and 2 watch jealously. Deputy dumps more blocks in front of them.*

**Deputy**      We're behind schedule. Stay focused. Foreman says company loses money with delays so any delays are taken out of your paycheque.

**Worker 1**      But you didn't bring us the material on time.

**Worker 2**      Didn't you see the help wanted signs on the gate? They'll replace us if you moan too much. Just get on with it.

**Worker 1**      *(to Deputy)* Can I have a go? I always wanted to use a dump truck.

**Deputy**      First of all, it's not 'use' a dump truck, it's 'operate' a dump truck.

**Worker 2**      Yeah. Or sometimes 'drive' a dump truck.

**Deputy**      Yes. And secondly, you have to have a dump truck operator's license. Do you have a dump truck operator's license?

**Worker 1**      No.

**Deputy**      I thought you didn't.

**Worker 2**      Yeah, I thought you didn't too.

**Worker 1**      How do I get a license?

**Deputy**      By operating a dump truck.

**Worker 2**      Yeah, by driving a dump truck.

**Deputy** And thirdly, I said no. It's mine.

**Worker 2** Yeah, and... wait, can't I have go?

**Deputy** No.

*(The Foreman arrives, pushing a hugely impressive steam roller.)*

**All (except**

**Foreman)** Whoah.

**Foreman** Awesome, right?

**All (except**

**Foreman)** Yeah.

**Foreman** Who here's hot for this... sexy machine thing?

*(They all put up their hands.)*

**Foreman** Good. So, here's how it's going to work. We've had some complaints from the local community. It seems our efforts to bring a bit of sophistication and cosmopolitanation into their lives through identikit housing isn't enough to please them – they also want the gates locked so that their precious little offspring can't get in.

**Deputy** Boo to curious children!

**All** Boooo!

**Foreman** Now, according the company inspectors — who, by the way, are due to arrive any day soon — we should be keeping access to the site secure so that they

don't get sued. What I want to know, with the incentive of being the first to getting to ride this big steamy thingamajig, is... who left the bloody gates open?

*(Without hesitation, **Worker 2** and **Deputy** turn and point to **Worker 1**.)*

**Worker 1** No I didn't! I don't even have gate lock clearance.

**Deputy** I think all our pointing fingers mean that you did.

**Worker 2** You can't argue with the pointing fingers.

**Deputy** Quiet. Or I'll point at you.

**Foreman** Good. Good job on the finger pointing. I'm glad we're all working together for the common good of pleasing the company inspectors by finding someone to blame. Except for you (**Worker 1**). You get docked two days' pay.

**Worker 1** What?

**Foreman** Three. For saying 'what?' And if I hear any more 'whats' it'll be your job.

*(**Worker 2** puts a hand up.)*

**Foreman** Yes? Good job on the hand raising, by the way. Company inspectors like hand raising. And coming in under budget.

**Worker 2** Who gets the steam roller?

**Foreman** I don't know who put their hand up first. You need a steam roller license anyway.

*(The **Foreman** pushes the steam roller out, thoroughly enjoying himself. The others watch, jealously.)*

**Foreman**      Back to work, all of you.

**Scene 11      The Artful Todger**

*End of the school day. Coral is crouched down, listening to her child, and is not happy.*

*Bobbi and Elaine stand together; Elaine is clutching her tablet. Amy leans against the fence, out of the way. Children are playing football in the playground.*

**Bobbi**            She looks angry. Or drunk. Or both.

**Elaine**            Best behaviour Bobbi.

*(Coral marches over to Amy.)*

**Coral**            They've made her move.

**Amy**              What?

**Coral**            You said to be nice—

**Amy**              Tell me what's happened.

*(Coral strides off towards Bobbi and Elaine.)*

**Amy**              Coral...

**Bobbi**            *(as Coral approaches)* Christ on a caravan.

**Elaine**            *(under her breath, to Bobbi)* Smile. *(To Coral)* Hi!

**Coral**            Danya's been moved.

*(Beat.)*

**Coral** To the back of the class. I asked you to get her son shifted, and it's my kid who ends up moving. She can't see the board back there.

**Elaine** I'm not sure how that happened.

**Bobbi** Does she need glasses? I know a great optometrist.

**Coral** She's being punished for something she didn't do.

**Elaine** I'm really not sure how that happened.

**Bobbi** I'm sure it has far more to do with Miss wanting to keep a closer eye on my horrid Henry than any kind of punishment for... (*can't remember the name*) your daughter. He's being punished by being denied her lovely company.

**Coral** It happened because I spoke. (*Referencing Elaine*) To you.

**Elaine** No no. No no. I've been trying—

**Coral** How's she supposed to get the same attention from the teacher if she's stuck in a corner? She's got special needs.

**Bobbi** Oh well, the teacher does circulates, and there's all those... assistant people. She is rubbish though, that teacher. I'll give you that. Why don't you try booking in an appointment to—

**Coral** It took me ages to get them to move her to the front, and now she's farther back than where she started.

**Elaine** That's not what I intended to happen. I—

(*The football rolls over to Elaine. She clumsily kicks it back while everyone watches.*)

**Bobbi** Who even knows where the front is in those ridiculous classrooms? Between the electronic white boards, the story corner, and the science boutique, it's a wonder the children can focus on anything. I'm sure it doesn't make a difference where she sits.

**Coral** Pffff.

**Elaine** I can try to have another word with the teacher.

**Coral** Don't. I'm done with this.

**Elaine** What does that mean exactly? 'Done'?

*(Coral shrugs meaningfully.)*

**Elaine** Okay, well perhaps we can talk about that later and for now just focus on—

**Coral** Is she gonna apologize?

**Bobbi** Sorry?

**Elaine** Yes.

**Bobbi** No.

**Elaine** Yes. Bobbi.

**Bobbi** You said nothing about apologizing.

**Elaine** I did.

**Bobbi** Well you.... caught me in a moment of weakness. What would I even be apologizing for?

**Coral** Pfff. (*Back to Amy*) What did I tell you?

(*Amy gestures to Coral to keep calm.*)

**Elaine** We all need to make amends. We can't have this tension in the playground.  
It's bad for the children.

**Bobbi** Fine. I'll see if I can get Henry to apologize to Daria.

**Elaine** Danya.

**Bobbi** He's not very proficient with apologies. But I'll try. It isn't clear to me why I  
need to apologize however.

**Coral** You do.

**Bobbi** Could you elaborate?

(*Coral looks back at Amy. Amy silently encourages her to continue calmly.*)

**Coral** A. You was really rude when I tried to talk about what—

**Bobbi** I don't think I was rude. Just in a hurry.

**Coral** (*struggling to remain calm*) And B. You haven't taught your kid right from  
wrong. He probably don't even understand what he did.

**Bobbi** (*with subtle, but intentional emphasis on 'doesn't and 'don't*) No, he probably  
doesn't understand. Because he is five. And to be honest, I don't understand  
the fuss myself. He was just doing what boys do. Dan...

**Elaine** ...ya.

**Bobbi** I know that Elaine. Danya is hardly going to be scarred for life.

**Coral** Pfff.

**Bobbi** Is there a C?

**Elaine** Let's get Henry over here, so we can explain it to him, and he can apologize to Danya. And then we can move on to—

**Bobbi** *(shouting across the playground)* Henry! Henry darling! HENRY!! Come here and talk to your little friend...

*(A child mis-kicks the ball and it hits Elaine in the face.)*

*Elaine clumsily rolls the ball back, and then realizes her nose is bleeding. Whilst Bobbi is talking, Amy steps forward and offers Elaine a tissue; she gratefully accepts and pinches her nose to stop the bleeding.)*

**Bobbi** Henry! Sweetie! He won't stop playing. There's nothing I can do. I hate football.

**Elaine** *(through pinched nose)* Bobbi.

**Bobbi** What?

*(Elaine gestures that she should speak to Coral.)*

**Bobbi** I'm sorry, but I simply don't see the point. And Henry is clearly reluctant to stop playing. HENRY!! *(To children:)* You children just stop playing with him, and send him over. *(To group:)* I've already spoken to him about all this. I did my job. *(To children:)* Just. Stop. Playing. It's like I'm invisible.

**Coral** (to **Amy**:) People like her think they're above apologizing to people like me.

**Bobbi** Complete rubbish. There is no 'people like her' and 'people like me'. You tried to publicly humiliate me. You should apologize.

**Elaine** Bobbi.

**Coral** (to *herself*) Fucking unbelievable.

**Amy** (to **Coral**:) I think we should probably go.

**Bobbi** And now you're swearing at me. In public. In front of your daughter.

**Elaine** Bobbi. Pot. Kettle. Black.

**Bobbi** Time and place, Elaine. Time and place. (*Noticing her bloody nose*) What the fuck are you doing?

**Coral** (to **Amy**) I told you this would happen. They think they run the school.

**Amy** Let's just go.

**Elaine** No, no, no, no. Not at all. Can we not just reach some kind of a res—

**Coral** You've got your noses so far up the headmaster's arse—

(**Elaine** takes the tissue off her nose to examine it and re-pinches her nose. A child mis-kicks again and this time it hits **Bobbi**. She throws it back at him with extreme violence, but attempts to speak calmly.)

**Bobbi** Someone needs to be the adult here, so if it is so very important to you, I am truly deeply sorry for whatever it is I did to make your life so very miserable

and I will now go and forcibly drag my son so he too can apologize for what really amounts to a simple act of boyish cheek—

**Coral** He sexually assaulted my daughter.

**Bobbi** That's a bit strong. All he did was show her his... well, you know. They see as much when they're changing for PE.

**Coral** He dipped his penis in a paint pot and used it like a brush. On her artwork.

**Elaine** What?

**Coral** And then he tried to get her to use it too. He took her hand and made her touch it.

*(Bobbi bursts out laughing.)*

**Coral** It's not funny.

**Bobbi** They didn't tell me that bit, but it explains why his John Thomas was green. I thought he had a fungus. A little lovesick Van Gogh. Brilliant.

**Coral** Brilliant?

**Bobbi** It's hysterical. He was just trying to collaborate, albeit in—

*(The football hits Elaine again. Coral punches Bobbi.)*

**ACT TWO****Scene 1      It's Oh So Quiet**

*The village playground. The sound of building work is a bit louder.*

**Coral** *pushes Danya on the swing.*

**Coral**      Quiet today.

It's nice.

You wanna go higher? Hold on tight.

You holding tight?      Good girl. Whoooo.      You're brave.

I used to come here. When I was little. Loved the swings. I hated those things over there. What're they called? Monkey bars. Everybody else seemed to know what to do on 'em. Do tricks and stuff. I could never figure it out. No one ever showed me. I think you gotta be taught stuff like that. Loved the swings though. Loved going high. Like you. You can figure out how to go high. All on your own.

I used to come here with my friends when I was a kid and we'd muck about. Your dad and me... Maybe I'd better tell you about that another time.

He made me laugh. Once upon a time.      Our parents didn't come with us, so's they didn't know what we got up to. I don't think they could be bothered. Well not my mum.      You know, your gran? Don't ever remember

her pushing me in the swings. Maybe she did and I don't remember. I did I ever tell you how I had to go away for a bit? For a few years? The people I stayed with took me to the playground sometimes. But they weren't actually that nice to me. So it turned out I was better off with your gran.

It's weird you never met her. Maybe good. She was a bit of a... well, whatever. She wasn't all bad. Life was hard on her. She probably would have loved you. She probably would have taken you to the playground.

Sorry. Slacking off a bit.

*(Coral gives Danya a little tickle with the push.)*

**Coral** Tickle monster!

Gotcha again!

Whoah. Better stop that or you'll fall.

*(Coral resumes pushing.)*

**Coral** Me and you never get to do this, eh?

I know school's hard right now. I wish... I'm trying to sort it out.

You just have to keep going and trying and forget about that stupid kid and get everything you can when you're in the classroom, even if the teacher ain't helping you enough, because you only got one chance at an education and I'm not having you mess it up like I did. You'll be teaching me in a few years.

And you're a good girl and you don't lose your head like I do, so you got to keep going and trying and I'll help you as much as I can. Which isn't much I know. Sorry. I think in a few years you'll be teaching me.

Good girl. Alright, higher. Hold on.

*(Terry appears at the edge of the playground.)*

**Terry** S'too high that.

*(Coral stops pushing.)*

**Terry** She'll get hurt.

**Coral** She wanted to go high.

**Terry** Just cause kids ask for stuff, don't mean you should do it. Any good mother knows that.

*(Coral stops the swing.)*

**Coral** Time to get off now love.

**Terry** *(to Danya)* How are you darling? Daddy's missed you.

**Coral** You're not supposed to be here. You didn't tell me you was coming.

**Terry** *(to Danya)* I bet you missed Daddy.

**Coral** Don't.

**Terry** Don't what?

*(Terry takes a step closer to them.)*

**Coral** You're supposed to tell me when you're coming.

**Terry** Pffffff.

*(Coral leans down to talk to Danya.)*

**Coral** Go home. You know where the key is. I'll be there soon. Go on. Be a good girl.

*(She watches Danya go, then turns to Terry.)*

**Coral** You can't just turn up like this.

**Terry** Didn't use to bother you.

**Coral** Things are different.

**Terry** You're bored of me now.

**Coral** *(Sarcastic)* Yeah. That's the problem.

**Terry** I'm not bored.

*(He takes a step closer.)*

**Coral** Don't.

**Terry** What?

*(Coral shrugs.)*

**Terry** Exactly.

*(Coral starts to go.)*

**Terry** Stop. Shit. Look, I just wanna talk to you. I don't know why it always ends up like this. Stop. Please. Just... pull up a swing. C'mon C.

*(He sits on an invisible swing, and gestures for **Coral** to do the same. She reluctantly does.*

*They start swinging a bit.)*

**Terry** Just like when we was kids.

**Coral** Yeah.

**Terry** Remember it? Swinging and smoking?

**Coral** Yeah.

**Terry** You got any tabs?

**Coral** Nah.

**Terry** Never did. Always taking mine.

**Coral** What are you doing here?

**Terry** I heard what that kid did to Danya. Checking she's okay.

**Coral** Who told you that? The school?

**Terry** Don't matter.

**Coral** It's not your concern.

**Terry** Course it is. She's my daughter.

**Coral** I've had it out with the school. And his mum.

**Terry** I heard. I heard you punched her. Right in the gob. Nice one.

*(Coral smiles a bit.)*

**Coral** I shouldn'ta done it.

**Terry** She deserved it.

**Coral** I guess. But it was stupid. You can't go around punching people who piss you off.

**Terry** And what's happened to the little shit?

*(Coral shrugs.)*

**Terry** Pffff. Like I thought.

**Coral** Keep away from him.

**Terry** Pffff.

**Coral** He's just a kid. He ain't been brought up right. It's not his fault.

**Terry** He needs to be taught some manners.

**Coral** Not by you. Don't be a fucking stereotype.

**Terry** C'mon now, that's not very kind is it? To say to the father of your child? How can someone as devastatingly attractive as me be a stereotype? You changed your hair.

*(She shrugs.)*

**Terry** You look good. For your age.

**Coral** Shut up. Same age as you.

(**Terry** takes a strand of **Coral**'s hair and tugs it, playfully, but slightly harder than he should.)

**Terry** Miss you.

**Coral** Pfff.

**Terry** Miss this.

**Coral** Yeah.

**Terry** Yeah?

(**Coral** shrugs.)

**Terry** I'm going to see my daughter. You coming?

(**Terry** leaves the playground. **Coral** follows, slightly behind.)

## Scene 2      **Ida? Ida Who?**

**Amy** at the edge the building site, wearing a hard hat, without a baby, and clutching a piece of paper. She raises her hand to knock, and then thinks better of it. She steps a bit further into the space. **Worker 1** crosses the space, carrying a block.

**Amy** Excuse me?

**Worker 1** Hello. Again.

**Amy** Hi. Is —

**Worker 1** You got your hard hat.

**Amy** Yes. Can I —

**Worker 1** Still no jobs. Even if the notices say there are.

**Amy** I'm not —

*(Worker 1 holds up the block.)*

**Worker 1** I'm on a schedule. Some of us gotta work. Bosses on our case. Shut the gate.  
Kids about.

*(Worker 1 exits. Amy looks for someone else. Deputy crosses the space, carrying a clipboard.)*

**Deputy** Hard hat area, love. No hard hat—

*(Amy points to her hat.)*

**Deputy** Oh right. Okay. What can I do for you then? That your CV? You're not looking for a job, are you? Because there aren't any. Even if the notices said there were.

**Amy** It's a list of —

**Deputy** What? Can't hear you. It's loud here. You should have ear protectors.

**Amy** It's a list of concerns —

**Deputy** Sorry, can't hear.

*(Deputy consults clipboard and starts inspecting/adjusting items on the site, pretending to be oblivious to Amy.)*

**Amy** This site isn't safe.

**Deputy** Sorry — are you speaking to me?

**Amy** ... Yes.

**Deputy** Members of the public aren't supposed to be on site. Especially in your... condition.

**Amy** You left the gate unlocked. And you did it yesterday and the day before. The kids are getting in. And there's other problems. I got a list.

**Deputy** Speak to the Foreman. Get permission to be on site. It's a nice hard hat, but you shouldn't be on site without permission. Company inspectors can show up any time and your failure to gain permission, combined with the lack of ear protectors and budding foetus would be major problems. Big, fat, fetid problems.

**Amy** Can't I get permission from you?

**Deputy** I've got no power. No power. None.

**Amy** Where's the Foreman?

**Deputy** Not here. Come back. When you've got permission. (*Referencing a non-ringing phone*) Gotta take this. Ear protectors. Get some.

**Amy** But how do I get—

(**Deputy** exits. **Amy** looks at the paper, then also exits.)

(*Once she is gone, the relieved workers sneak back and arrange blocks for the next scene.*)

**Scene 3      Head of the Class**

*The **Head**'s office. He sits in the middle, forming part of a sofa to his right, and is also behind a desk to his left. Meetings with **Bobbi** and **Coral**, played simultaneously (but not actually happening at the same time).*

*A tentative knock.*

**Head**      Yes.

*(Another knock.)*

**Head**      Come in.

*(The knocker does not enter. Sighing, the **Head** gets up and opens the door. It is **Coral**. She has a bruise on her face, badly covered with make-up, which the **Head** observes.)*

**Head**      Mrs Flannery.

*(The **Head** indicates a chair to the left of his desk.)*

**Head**      Thank you for coming in. Take a seat.

*(**Coral** sits, uncomfortable in this environment.*

*Without knocking, **Bobbi** appears at the door. She also has bruise on her face.)*

**Bobbi**      Afternoon Paul.

*(The **Head** shifts gaze to the right. He pats the sofa.)*

**Head**      How are you? *(Noticing face)* Oof. I can see how you are. That looks sore.

**Bobbi**            (*indicating bruise*) Is it that noticeable? I thought I'd covered it up. Bloody hell, I've got Pilates after this.

**Head**            It's not that bad.

**Bobbi**            I hate walking around looking like a victim of domestic abuse. People think Eddie did it.

**Head**            I'm sure they don't.

**Bobbi**            I keep getting asked how it happened.

**Head**            And what do you say?

(*The Head looks towards Coral.*)

**Head**            Sorry. *Miss* Flannery isn't it? Or do you prefer Ms?

**Coral**            Whatever.

**Head**            Okay. Well, Miss Flannery, I assume you know why I called you in?

(*Coral shrugs.*)

**Head**            I want to help.

**Bobbi**            How's Ginny?

(*The Head looks towards Bobbi.*)

**Head**            Ginny's... feeling a bit abandoned at the moment.

**Bobbi**            Too many late nights?

**Head** There's an inspection looming. I feel it in my bones.

**Bobbi** Well, we're due. We'll be fine.

**Head** I'm not so sure.                      Strictly between you and me.

**Coral** Why do I have to go over it again?

*(Head looks toward Coral.)*

**Head** Different people have different versions of events. And I need to have your version on record. I don't want you to be misrepresented.

**Coral** You're recording me? Ain't — aren't — you supposed to tell me if you're recording me? That's the law, isn't it?

**Head** I'm not electronically recording you. I'm just taking notes. There are no hidden cameras.

*(Coral gestures toward the upper corner.)*

**Coral** What's that then?

*(Head follows her gaze.)*

**Head** Oh, that's just the standard CCTV camera. There's one in every space in the school. For our...

**Coral** Protection.

**Head** For the protection of the children.

**Coral** You've got one in Danya's class?

**Head** Yes.

**Coral** And the playground.

**Head** Yes.

**Bobbi** I'm not sure how much help I can be. With this (*her face*) and everything else, I don't think my position on the governors is tenable.

(**Head** *looks toward Bobbi.*)

**Head** What do you mean? Are you thinking of resigning?

**Bobbi** I don't —

**Head** Are you taking Henry out?

**Bobbi** I'm not —

**Head** It doesn't reflect well on a school when parents like you take their children out.

**Bobbi** The playground has become a difficult place. For me.

**Head** Please don't leave.                      We'll work something out.

**Coral** Who's going to see those notes?

(**Head** *looks toward Coral.*)

**Head** They are just so I have an official record of events.

**Coral** Are you sharing them with anyone else?

**Head** Can you just tell me what happened? Please.

(**Coral** *shrugs.*)

**Head** That's all you've got to say? You hit somebody. On school grounds. In front of children.

**Coral** You got that on your cameras?

**Head** As a matter of fact, we do.

**Coral** And do you have that kid molesting Danya on your cameras?

**Bobbi** I'm talking to the police.

(**Head** *looks toward Bobbi.*)

**Head** The police?

**Bobbi** Yes.

**Head** Why?

**Bobbi** Look at my face!

**Head** Right. Okay.

**Bobbi** What would you do if a thug came up and belted you? In front of all the other parents? It was humiliating! It continues to be humiliating. I can't go anywhere because I know everyone is talking about me. Judging me. And I don't deserve to be judged.

**Coral**           What should I have done then? Just ignored the fact that her kid sexually assaulted my daughter and she laughed about it? What would you've done if it was your kid?

**(Head turns to Coral.)**

**Head**            I would have responded in a... perhaps more restrained manner.

**Coral**            Pffff.

**Head**            You should have let the school deal with it.

**Coral**            You are kidding me.

**Head**            Sorry?

**Coral**            If you had done something in the first place, when Amy — when I first emailed you, we wouldn't even be sitting here.

**Head**            We dealt with the original situation. You spoke with Elaine, didn't you?

**Coral**            *(to herself)* This is bullshit.

**Head**            Mind how you speak to me Miss Flannery.

**Coral**            Pffff.

**Bobbi**           Bfff. I just don't see any other way to proceed. Eddie agrees. Eddie thinks we should sue her, but I'm not inhumane. She clearly doesn't have any money.

**(Head looks toward Bobbi.)**

**Head**            You realize a police investigation would likely trigger an Ofsted inspection?

**Bobbi** You said you were expecting one.

**Head** Yes. But it is a different kettle of fish when Ofsted arrive because of reports of playground violence, rather than simply because an inspection is due.

And — as I don't need to tell you — there are certain elements who would use a situation like that to bring the school, and me, down.

**Bobbi** I'm very aware of those elements. That's why I want the police involved. I'm tired of feeling threatened in my own playground.

**Head** They're in the minority.

**Bobbi** You don't spend much time outside, do you? There are more of her than me. Every day I enter that playground I feel their eyes bore into me. It's especially hard because we've made a conscious decision to support the school. We could have gone private, but we know how important a place like this is to the village. The school needs families like ours.

**Head** Absolutely. Absolutely.

**Bobbi** But it's becoming harder to maintain that level of support.

**Coral** How many times do I have to say my daughter was molested before someone actually does something about it?

*(Head looks towards Coral.)*

**Head** We're getting into issues of semantics here.

**Coral** What?

**Head** Henry was punished, Bobbi was consulted. You spoke with our staff-parent liaison. You didn't need to take matters into your own hands.

**Coral** Nothing happened to him. Nothing serious. He'll keep on doing whatever he wants in class, his mum will keep doing whatever she wants, and Danya will keep falling more behind because she's scared to go to school. She's not stupid you know, but she can barely read. She tries really hard. But no one seems to care, not the teachers, not you. You don't even care that she was molested, or whatever you want to call it. The only reason I'm here in this office is because you want to treat me like some kind of criminal for defending my kid. Maybe I should tell Danya to start punching other kids. Then she'll get some attention.

**Head** If you don't want to be treated like a thug, then stop acting like one.

*(Coral is dumbfounded.)*

**Head** Sorry, I Can we please stick to the agreed topic for this meeting, and then we can set up another time to discuss Danya's progress?

**Bobbi** I just feel that the police are better placed to deal with it.

*(The Head pauses.)*

**Head** A police investigation, along with an emergency Ofsted inspection, will attract press attention. The press will want to speak to Coral, and I suspect she will want to speak to them.

**Bobbi** She'd love her five minutes of tabloid fame.

**Head** But if she talks to them, or even if she just talks to the police, Henry and... what he did to Danya, will be mentioned. I won't be able to protect him. Or you.

**Bobbi** But it was just a boy being a boy! Hardly a serious offence.

**Head** Things like this have a way of... turning up when you don't want them to.

**Coral** I want to put in a complaint.

(**Head** *looks toward Coral.*)

**Head** Isn't that what you're doing —

**Coral** A proper one. A formal one. I need the number of what're they called. Ofsted. You've got to give it to me. I'm sure you've got to give it to me. Amy said so.

**Head** What is the specific nature of your complaint?

**Coral** You.

**Head** Aha. Go ahead, complain. I'm listening.

**Coral** You're not. You don't want to know about Danya, or me. You're happy just to let kids like her sit there and not learn anything, as long as some of the others are doing well. The ones with money. That's not right.

**Head** Are you accusing me of bias against Danya because of her background? I do everything in my power to support people like you. I come from people like you. Do you know how many times I've had to cover Danya's lunch money out of my own pocket? You could have free school meals, but you can't even

be bothered to fill out the form. You just assume she'll get fed. I've also had to give her bits of uniform and kit that every other family seems to be able to provide. She's had her school trips paid for. We provide volunteers to read with her to make up for a lack of home support. Parent volunteers. What have you ever contributed?

**Bobbi** What are you saying? It sounds like a threat.

**(Head turns to Bobbi.)**

**Head** I've been to your house for drinks. Of course I'm not threatening you. I'm just trying to help you see that a police investigation may not be the best course of action.

**Bobbi** Something has to be done. I can't go on feeling humiliated.

**Head** Let's think...

**Bobbi** Can you bar her from the playground?

**Head** She's a sole parent. There'd be no one to take Danya back and forth to school. The poor kid's already suffered enough.

**Coral** She reads at home.

**(Head looks toward Coral.)**

**Head** How often?

**Coral** Often. I gotta work so my mum makes her do it.

**Head** Makes her do it. Reading should be a joy for a child.

**Coral** But ain't that your job? You're supposed to teach her, not me!

**Bobbi** It's not your fault their kids are thick.

(**Head** *looks toward Bobbi.*)

**Head** That is, unfortunately, not the general consensus.

**Bobbi** Can't there be something done to limit the time spent in the playground? By parents? To cut down on opportunities for ... uninformed bitching?

**Head** You want me to change the procedure for going in and letting-out?

**Bobbi** Yes.

**Head** The other parents would object.

**Bobbi** So? They object to everything. Except spray tan and Ugg boots.

**Head** Bobbi. Though it's nice to see your sense of humour back. I know this is stressful. And I'm sorry it's happened on my playground.

**Bobbi** Stop being so bloody earnest.

**Head** Let's be creative about this. You want her to—

**Bobbi** Go away.

**Coral** And you're supposed to teach them right and wrong, and you're not doing that neither!

(**Head** *looks towards Coral.*)

**Head** Again, I think the greater part of responsibility for teaching morals lies at home Miss Flannery. We appear to be talking in circles.

**Coral** Yes. We do.

**Head** I have another meeting so I'm going to need to cut to/ the chase.

**Coral** I've had to take time off work to be here. I'm not getting paid.

**Head** I appreciate that. But you committed assault on school grounds, and I need to respond. What do you think my response should be?

(**Coral shrugs.**)

**Bobbi** What if she chose to go away? What if she took the step herself, because she—

(**Head looks toward Bobbi.**)

**Head** What?

**Bobbi** When people feel under threat, and that the powers that be are not addressing their concerns, they often remove their children from the school.

**Head** I don't want to lose a child.

**Bobbi** It's like, what's it called... gangrene. Better to lose one finger than an entire arm.

**Coral** I'm not apologizing to her. She deserved that punch. She never apologized to me. Are you gonna give me that number for Ofsted?

(**Head looks toward Coral.**)

**Head** We seem to be at an impasse.

(**Coral shrugs.**)



**Coral** Pffff.

**Head** If you want things to change, you need to realize that change must originate with you. And I think a change may be just what you need. Maybe a different school would provide a better environment.

**Bobbi** Bugger. I'm late for Pilates.

*(Bobbi takes out a mirror and applies some cover-up on her bruise. Head looks toward*

*Bobbi.)*

**Head** What about the police?

**Bobbi** Let's see how it goes.

**Head** Okay. And you're not leaving? The school? Or the governors?

**Bobbi** I'm leaving. Your office.

**Head** Elaine is putting herself forward for the vacant position, right? On the governors?

**Bobbi** Who else would do it?

**Head** Well. She'll be highly efficient.

**Bobbi** That's one word for it.

*(Bobbi exits, wagging her fingers goodbye.*

*Head looks toward Coral.)*

**Coral** How am I supposed to get her to another school?

**Head** I'm sorry Miss Flannery, but as I said, I've got another meeting.

*(Coral stares at him. He stands up, and gently touches her on the arm. She pulls away.)*

**Head**            I'm afraid I'm going to have to ask you to leave.            But let's keep the  
lines of communication open, shall we? At the end of the day, we all want  
what's best for Danya.

*(Coral stands and leaves.*

*When she is gone)*

**Head**            Sorry.

#### **Scene 4            I Like Coffee, I Like Tea, I Like Amy to Jump With Me**

*The village playground. Construction and lorries starting to win over the birdsong. Elaine is going up and down on the see-saw, typing on her tablet. Her children play nearby. She reads back something she's written, laughs, and then reconsiders.*

**Elaine**            No Elaine. You can't write that.

*(She deletes. Amy enters the playground with children.)*

**Amy**            *(whispering to children)* There's Luther and Sage. Off you go.

*(Amy walks up to Elaine. She holds a disposable cup of coffee. Elaine is too engrossed in what she's writing to notice.)*

**Amy**            Hi.

*(Elaine jumps and nearly drops the tablet. She quickly stows it in her sling.)*

**Amy**            Sorry.

**Elaine** No, no! Miles away. Thanks for coming. I'm so glad you came. I wasn't sure... Sorry it's so cold. (*Looking at the baby*) Good for you, you've got her all bundled up. Any luck at the site?

**Amy** No. I don't think we're speaking the same language.

**Elaine** They all seem to be foreigners these days. But they work hard and everyone deserves a chance and they aren't really taking that many jobs from British workers and they need to feed their children and my god those poor refugees on top of everything people just don't seem to understand that all they want to do is live and not be bombed every day. I hate the *Daily Mail*.

**Amy** I meant... I don't think they understand my concerns.

**Elaine** The refugees?

**Amy** The people at the building site.

**Elaine** Oh yes. At least you tried. Good for you. I despise all the dust. I signed a petition. Anonymously. My husband thinks the whole thing is good for the village. He actually fancies moving into one of the new houses but the idea is horrifying to me give me my ramshackle tiny — but ridiculously expensive what is it with prices around here — cottage any day. At least it's authentic. I'm so glad you came.

(*Amy nods. Beat.*)

**Elaine** Do you think *she'll* come?

**Amy** I don't know. I sent her a text.

**Elaine** And you didn't mention Bobbi?

**Amy** No.

**Elaine** Good good. Good. I didn't mention it to Bobbi either. I mean I didn't mention Coral coming to Bobbi, obviously I mentioned coming here to Bobbi or the whole thing would be pointless. I'm a bit nervous.

**Amy** Yeah. But it's a good thing to be doing, right?

**Elaine** I hope so.

*(Beat.)*

**Elaine** Shall we sit?

*(Elaine leads the way to the bench. Amy follows, pushing her buggy, sits, shivers, and takes a sip of her coffee.)*

**Elaine** Did you know in Norway they put their babies outside to sleep in the middle of winter? In minus 50 degree weather? Amazing people.

**Amy** Don't think she'd like it that cold.

**Elaine** No.

*(Beat.)*

**Amy** *(indicating tablet)* What're you writing?

**Elaine** Oh. It's... nothing. I just... keep a diary. Of sorts.

**Amy** Wow.

**Elaine** Not really. It's... not really. How's the tummy?

**Amy** The baby? Yeah, good thanks. It kicks a lot.

- Elaine** You must be used to it by now.
- Amy** I guess. Yeah.
- Elaine** You're very brave. My two ripped me apart. I still can't sneeze properly.
- Amy** Oh.
- Elaine** Couldn't you... I know they're dreadful and they've been forced on the village and it would go against everything you're trying to fight for, but the new houses being built aren't a few of them designated affordable? You must be fighting for space in yours not that there is anything wrong with having lots of children but my goodness there is a lack of um, what do you call it....
- Amy** I don't know.
- Elaine** Property... that you don't... pay for. You know...
- Amy** Council?
- Elaine** Yes! There's a definitive lack of council housing with enough bedrooms. They just expect everyone to squeeze in on top of each other like a Dickensian poorhouse.
- Amy** We're housing association.
- Elaine** Oh! That seems better. Is it better?
- Amy** Sometimes. We pay for it. There's rent.
- Elaine** Oh right of course! But don't you think, even though the whole thing is a bit dreadful, that you might be able to get into one of the affordable houses? It

would be nice not to have to worry about the coun—housing association booting you out at their whim.

**Amy** The new houses only have two bedrooms. The affordable ones anyhow.

**Elaine** Oh.

**Amy** And the garden is smaller than ours.

**Elaine** Oh.

**Amy** And even if I was working we still couldn't afford the deposit.

**Elaine** Oh. Right. Well your house is very jolly anyhow.

*(Bobbi arrives, flask in hand.)*

**Bobbi** It's bloody freezing Elaine. Why are we out here? *(Noticing Amy)* Hello. *(Proud of herself for getting it right)* Amy. *(To Elaine)* And why did I have to bring *(the coffee flask)* this?

**Elaine** Where are the boys?

**Bobbi** With the cleaner.

**Elaine** But this was supposed to be a playdate.

**Bobbi** What does that even mean?

*(Elaine starts to explain, but Bobbi cuts her off.)*

**Bobbi** It doesn't matter. I'm exhausted, Eddie is away again. Stop judging me. I don't understand why we couldn't meet at the pub.

*(She pours some coffee for herself and Elaine.)*

**Elaine**        What about Amy?

**Bobbi**        I'm sorry. I didn't realize you were with us.

**Elaine**        I forgot, you're pregnant! Caffeine is poison for foetuses! Foeti?

*(Amy self-consciously wraps her hands around her coffee cup.)*

**Bobbi**        I drank coffee when I was pregnant. Are you saying I fucked up my children?

**Elaine**        Bobbi! Amy doesn't swear.

**Bobbi**        Really? Why?

*(Bobbi drinks her coffee and sighs.)*

**Bobbi**        That's better. Shocker of a day.        Shocker of a week.

*(Beat.)*

**Elaine**        Still. Things could be worse.

**Bobbi**        Could they Elaine? Could they really? You've seen this huge bruise on my face? That beast of a woman has made it impossible for me to—

**Elaine**        Coral is Amy's friend.

**Bobbi**        Really? Why?

**Amy**        She's not as—

**Elaine**        We both think —Amy and I— it's time the two of you sorted this whole situation out. It's really not good for the children to be witnessing two grown women swearing and shouting and hitting each other.

**Bobbi** I didn't hit her.

**Elaine** Perhaps not physically—

*(Coral appears, and stops quickly, not expecting to see **Bobbi** there. She starts to leave.)*

**Amy**

**and Elaine** Coral!

**Bobbi** What's going on?

**Coral** *(to Amy)* What is this?

**Amy** I—

**Elaine** Please don't be mad at Amy. We've had a chat and just thought you and Bobbi needed to get together in a you know *neutral* setting and have it out with each other. Well maybe not have it out because that led to violence last time, but just to talk and air your grievances in a calm and adult way, in front of a sympathetic audience — Amy and me — and we can get to the bottom of it and start defining a path towards well maybe not friendship but at least understanding. I brought a talking stick. *(She observes **Coral's** face.)*

Goodness, what happened to you? Bobbi, you did hit her!

**Bobbi and**

**Coral** No.

**Elaine** Well at least that's a starting point. You are both bruised.

**Bobbi** Bfff.

**Coral** I'm going. *(To Amy)* You coming?

**Amy** I just thought maybe you could sort things out here away from school and you could explain why you got a bit crazy. And maybe she (**Bobbi**) might consider not getting the police involved.

**Elaine** (to **Bobbi**) The police?

(**Bobbi shrugs.**)

**Elaine** Surely that's a bit... **Bobbi** that's a bit...

(**Bobbi shrugs.**)

**Elaine** She could have just as easily called the police about what Henry did... (To **Coral**) I'm sorry, I'm sure **Bobbi** —

**Coral** Why does everyone always apologize for her. (To **Bobbi**) Have you rung the cops?

**Bobbi** I'm extremely uncomfortable with this situation.

(*The other three stare at her.*)

**Bobbi** I haven't done anything. Yet.

**Coral** Pfff.

(*Elaine suddenly remembers and brandishes her talking stick, which is actually a pop-up clown puppet.*)

**Elaine** Sorry, it's all I could find. All the sticks on the ground are rather... sharp. Who wants to start? **Bobbi**?

**Bobbi** This is ridiculous.

**Elaine** It's not! It's an effective tool for communication, which originated with the Native North-American peoples and has since been —

**Coral** I'll start.

**Elaine** Oh! Okay. Wonderful.

*(She hands the 'stick' to Coral.)*

**Elaine** You just hold the stick and say whatever comes into your mind, without worrying about punctuation or grammar and the rest of us are not allowed to interrupt you until —

**Coral** Yeah. Got it.

*(She addresses Bobbi directly. Bobbi cannot meet her gaze.)*

**Coral** You think you know —

**Elaine** Sorry. I should have said that you need to start with 'I feel', like 'I feel you think you know'.

*(Coral gives her a look.)*

**Elaine** Or just do it the way you want.

**Coral** You've lived here a few years. I've lived here all my life. My mum and my gran lived here. It's my home. It's my home and you don't know me.

**Bobbi** I know —

**Coral** I got the stick. I get to speak.

**Elaine** She's got the stick.

**Coral** I don't know if you've even, before all this happened, said more than hello to me, and you only said that because our paths crossed and you couldn't avoid me. And whatever, it's fine, cause I don't need more friends and we don't have much in common apart from our kids being at the same school. But when Henry did what he did to Danya, I just needed to get it sorted out with you, I just wanted to talk to you and thought that because you are who you are, and educated and so involved in stuff and whatever, that we could talk about it and maybe you could see why I was so upset.

**Bobbi** But you came at me like —

**Elaine** The stick, Bobbi, the stick.

**Coral** I'm not... I'm not very good in these situations. And I think I come across different to you than I do to me, but I just wanted to talk. Then you laughed at me. Do you know what that feels like?

*(Silence.)*

**Elaine** Was that... rhetorical?

**Coral** No.

**Elaine** Okay. She needs the stick to answer. *(Passing it over)* Bobbi...

**Bobbi** Of course I know what it feels like.

**Elaine** *(Gently taking the stick)* Maybe if you provided us with an example, your response would seem more... legitimate.

*(She hands the stick back to Bobbi.)*

**Bobbi** *(reluctantly participating)* Sometimes my boys are not as well-behaved as they should be. I struggle at times to control their behaviour in public spaces, and I am aware of the snide looks when... I am not completely on top of their actions. So I know what it feels like to be laughed at *(To Elaine)* Happy?

**Elaine** Coral, do you have a response?

*(Elaine takes the stick from Bobbi and passes it to Coral.)*

**Coral** It ain't — it's not — the same. You get laughed at because you flap around your kids like a rabid chicken, but it's fair to laugh at that because you've got the money to have a nanny or a parenting consultant or whatever they're called and you've gone to university and you should be clever enough to be able to figure out how to control your kids. But you laugh at me because of who I am and what I haven't got.

**Bobbi** *(grabbing the stick)* That's not true. And how should I control my kids — beat them? Shame them in front of their peers?

**Coral** I don't —

**Bobbi** I have the stick now. I wasn't laughing at you, I was laughing at the situation. It was completely ridiculous. And humiliating. This is completely ridiculous. I mean *(indicating the stick)* look. *(Looking around)* Is there anyone watching us? Please don't let there be anyone watching us.

**Coral** You're still — *(Elaine grabs the stick and passes it to Coral)* You're still doing it. Laughing at me.

**Bobbi**           *(grabbing the stick)* I'm not. Did you hear any laughter?

**Coral**           *(grabbing the stick)* You are. Maybe you didn't laugh out loud, but you're mocking me.

**Bobbi**           *(grabbing the stick)* I'm not.

**Coral**           *(grabbing the stick)* You are.

**Bobbi**           *(grabbing the stick)* I'm not.

**Coral**           *(grabbing the stick, and sticking the clown in Bobbi's face aggressively.)* You are.

*(Bobbi looks at the clown and laughs. Coral is about to hit her with it, but Elaine blocks her and holds the stick.)*

**Elaine**           Perhaps Amy might —

*(She starts to hand it to Amy, but Bobbi grabs the stick.)*

**Bobbi**           How am I supposed to respond? The kindest thing I can do is laugh. I don't understand this score you have to settle with me. I don't understand why I'm the target of your unhappiness. And why you have to embarrass me.

**Coral**           Pffff. You embarrass yourself just fine.

**Amy**           *(quietly to Bobbi)* You're not the target of her unhappiness and *(to Coral)* she's not laughing at you. Not really. This is uncomfortable. The playground is awkward. We deal with it in different ways. Just like the kids. Some of them throw things when they feel sad, some try to take control, some hide in the

corner, some pretend nothing's happening, some laugh because they're nervous. That's just people.

**(Elaine takes the stick and hands it to Amy.)**

**Amy** I'm done.

**Elaine** Wise. Whoops (*taking the stick back*). Wise words. Profound even. So clever.  
Well done. Well done you.

**Coral** Pffff.

**Elaine** (*offering the stick*) Was there something you wanted to say?

**Coral** Clever, in't she?

**Elaine** Yes. She really is.

**Coral** More clever than her (**Bobbi**).

**Elaine** Well, I couldn't really fairly assess —

**Coral** And you.

**Elaine** I'm sure that is probably accurate.

**Coral** Are you?

**Elaine** Yes. Probably. Sure.

**Amy** Coral. Don't.

**Coral** Why do you talk to her like that then?

**Elaine** Sorry? I don't. I don't follow.

**Coral** You talk to her — and to me, but I'm thick so it don't matter — but she's proper clever, and empathetic, and you talk to her like she's some six year old special needs kid who just managed to wipe her arse for the first time. She don't need your praise.

**Amy** Coral. (*To Elaine*) Sorry, she's just —

**Coral** Stop apologizing! Don't you get what she's doing?

**Elaine** I don't know why you've suddenly... why this has become about me. I'm just trying to help. And you're not even using the stick.

(*Elaine is trying not to cry.*)

**Bobbi** See? Aggressive is as aggressive does. (*To Elaine*) Stop snivelling.

**Elaine** I just why can't everyone just get along?

(*Elaine bursts into tears.*)

**Amy** (*to Coral*) All she's doing is trying to help. She's a nice person. Why've you got to be so mean to everyone?

**Coral** I'm not —

**Bobbi** This is what you do. You make people sad. Does it feel good to make her sad? Look at her. You've ruined her make-up and taken away her dignity. Why? Because she tried to help you, with her... stupid little stick thing. You're so angry at everyone, why not look at yourself. Why not stop complaining all the time about how life is so hard for you, and that you've been treated so badly, and actually make an effort to improve your life.

**Coral** Change my life. Just like that. Easy for you.

**Bobbi** If you want to change you can. School's not working for you and Danya?  
Move schools. It's not complicated.

**Elaine** (*whispering*) Bobbi.

**Bobbi** Or, how about you stop letting that man, your husband or boyfriend or whatever he is, hit you. What kind of an example is that to your daughter? Take control of your life. Just *do* something. Stop feeling sorry for yourself and help out. You could... (*challenging*) take the empty seat on the governors. You've got so many opinions about the school, I'm sure you'd be spectacular.

**Elaine** (*whispering*) I was going to take that seat.

**Bobbi** As if she'd actually ever do it.

**Coral** Fuck you.

**Bobbi** And there you have it.

(**Coral** looks like she's going to go for her. **Bobbi** shrinks back.)

**Bobbi** Please don't hit me.

(**Coral** stares at **Bobbi** and then walks away.)

**Bobbi** Your insatiable need for world peace has ruined another of my mornings. You owe me some babysitting.

(**Bobbi** leaves.)

**Amy** I thought it was a good idea. I liked the stick.

**Elaine** What are we doing?

**Amy** In another place, another time, they would be best friends.

**Elaine** Can you imagine? Thelma and Louise.

**Amy** More like Dr Evil and Darth Vader. Come on. I'll make you a cup of tea.

**Scene 7** **Comment is Free**

**Elaine** *is on the phone with her husband.* **Coral** *is on the phone with the police. Both are in their own homes.*

**Coral** Hello? (*It is a recording.*) Pffff.

*She presses various numbers on her phone, listening to options.*

**Elaine** Can you take me off speaker phone? Hello? (*He will not take her off speaker phone.*) Fine.

**Coral** Hello? Can I— Yeah, put me on hold then.

**Elaine** It'll just take five minutes. I've got some really good news and I didn't want to wait till you got back. A week is a long time.

**Coral** Yeah. Hi. I need to... how do I apply for a restraining order? Is that what you call it? I can't come in.

I just can't. Why do I need to explain it to you? I don't want  
my daughter knowing I'm doing it. Because it's her father!  
I'm being calm.

**Elaine** I'm not nagging. They miss you. It's been a lot of weeks away lately.

**Coral** I don't know if I'm properly going to do it. I just want some advice. Can you  
give me some advice?

**Elaine** I don't want to argue on speakerphone. I don't know who's listening!

**Coral** My ex. Do I need a reason? Because I'm scared he might  
hurt me, alright! Well how about he's threatened to take my  
daughter. Is that good enough?

**Elaine** I just can I tell you my news?

**Coral** You don't need my name. I'm not giving it to you. I just want  
advice.

**Elaine** You know how I sent my blog stuff to that editor? And you said it was a waste  
of time. They liked it. They've asked me ME to write for them. Isn't that  
amazing? No, just on their website. It's still good. Loads of people  
will read it. I'm not being paid. I don't know,  
newspapers don't have much money. Well I don't mind so  
why should you! It might lead to something. When the kids  
are ready for me to go back to work.

No, they're not. Not yet.

**Coral** Because if I give you my name, it will go down somewhere on record.

I don't want that. I know that, but I haven't actually decided if I'm gonna do it or not! I just want some advice. Your job is to help me.

I am being calm. Please. Can you just tell me what I do if I decided to get a restraining order? Will it protect me? What if there's... something on my record? Will that affect my ability to get one? It don't matter what, okay? It's just a question.

**Elaine** The Head talked to you about my blog? That was totally inappropriate. It was between me and him. Why would he get you involved? Come on. He's not going to sue me for defamation. He said that?

**Coral** Can you just... slow down. (*She tries to write*) How do you spell that? Can you slow down? I don't know what that means. What's a URL? Can you speak in plain English? I don't understand.

**Elaine** This one will be different. It's more like social commentary. The playground's such a crazy place and I'm sure lots of people will be able to relate —  
It won't, I promise it won't. I won't use anyone's name, and I'll... I'll use a different surname. Yours, I guess.

Okay, not yours.

**Coral** Have you got somewhere better to be?

**Elaine** Am I keeping you from something?

**Elaine and**

**Coral**        You know what, never mind.

*(They both hang up.)*

**Scene 8        One is Silver and the Other Gold**

*A road in the village, near the construction site. There is no path. Amy is walking with her children. The noise from the construction site makes it difficult to hear.*

**Coral**        *(off stage)* Amy! Amy!! Ames!!

*(Coral appears, dragging Danya by the hand.)*

**Coral**        Oi. I was calling you. Didn't you hear?

**Amy**         What? I can't hear you. It's too noisy.

**Coral**        Nevermind.

*(Sound of a lorry rumbling past. Amy moves back from the road and shields her children.*

*Amy and Coral must shout to be heard.)*

**Coral**        I did it!

**Amy**         What?

**Coral**        I got the nominations!

**Amy**         What?

**Coral**        To be governor. I got enough nominations to run!

**Amy** You're going to run for governor?

**Coral** Yeah. Show that woman.

**Amy** Okay.

**Coral** I want to make real change.

**Amy** Okay.

**Coral** People were really supportive!

**Amy** People were what?

**Coral** People supported me. I didn't think they would.

**Amy** Great.

**Coral** Maybe I'll win!

**Amy** Maybe!

*(Amy turns to her children.)*

**Amy** Quit messing around. There's a ton of lorries. *(To Coral)* We'd better go. It's dangerous standing in the road.

**Coral** Can you help?

**Amy** Can I what?

**Coral** Help.

**Amy** I've already complained. They don't care.

**Coral** No. Help me.

**Amy**           What?

**Coral**           I need you to help me get elected.

**Amy**           Right. It's great you got nominated.

**Coral**           People like you.

**Amy**           Me?

**Coral**           They'll vote for me if you tell them to.

**Amy**           What?            You said people were supportive.

**Coral**           Yeah. To my face. But they probably can't be bothered.        They might've  
been lying.

**Amy**           No.

**Coral**           People like you more than me.

**Amy**           What?

*(Another lorry rumbles past. Amy looks back at the kids.)*

**Amy**           I said stop messing around. *(To Coral)* I gotta get them away from this road.

**Coral**           I just need you to talk to people. To get them to vote for me. They'll do it  
because they like you.

**Amy**           What?

**Coral**           You're nice to them. They like you.

**Amy**           Not everyone.

**Coral**        You gonna help?

*(Beat.)*

**Amy**         I can't.

**Coral**        What?

**Amy**         I can't.

**Coral**        What?

**Amy**         I signed Elaine's nomination form.

**Coral**        Why?

**Amy**         She followed me around and asked me to. I was in a rush.

**Coral**        I told you I was gonna do it.

**Amy**         I didn't think you were serious.

**Coral**        You didn't think what?            It don't matter. You can still help me.

*(Amy does not reply. Another lorry rumbles past and she puts her arm out to hold her kids back.)*

**Coral**        Why can't you help?

**Amy**         Don't you think it would be weird if my name's on Elaine's form and then I'm telling people to vote for you?

**Coral**        Weird?

**Amy**         Yeah.

**Coral** Who cares about weird?

*(Amy shrugs.)*

**Amy** Are you sure this is what you want? You're not just proving a point?

**Coral** I told you, I wanna change stuff.

**Amy** What?

**Coral** I wanna change... Look can you just—

**Amy** There'll be a lot of paperwork you have to do. You know that, right?

**Coral** What? You're not gonna help.

**Amy** I gotta go. *(To kids:)* Stay to the side. We're going. Just a sec.

**Coral** I don't understand. Why aren't you helping?

**Amy** I'm just tired. I'm really tired.

**Coral** You're a shit friend.

**Amy** What?

**Coral** You. You're a shit—

*(Coral jumps to knock one of Amy's girls out of the way. Amy turns to look at her children.*

*Harsh air brakes of a lorry. After a horrible moment, Coral starts yelling.)*

**Coral** *(To lorry driver)* You fucking asshole. You nearly killed her kid. *(To Millie, who was nearly struck)* What are you doing? Didn't you hear her tell you to stay outta the road?



There are times in the humdrum grind of the school week, where I wish I could float above the playground, omniscient...no, I'm not God, (*retyping*) *removed but observant*, better, of what is happening below. From this lofty vantage point, it is difficult to tell who's who by the manner of dress or speech, and adult and child blend into one. That may be a bit too Lennon-under-the-influence-of-Yoko. Never mind. **The make of one's car, whether a school uniform comes from John Lewis or Tesco, no Asda is better (*types adjustment*), or Asda, whether the house one lives in is three bedrooms or four, rented or owned outright, housing association or council, or if you were born on English soil...** British? No, English, I don't know enough about Scotland, **none of this can be determined from on high.** That's a long sentence. Maybe the sub can take care of it. Do I get a sub? God. Focus. Right.

New paragraph. **Sadly, I don't have wings, and at ground level, the differences are abundantly clear.** Or daily reinforced? I'll come back to that. **Class means nothing to children. They just want to play, and they don't care about how much your trainers cost, as long as you like to play footie.** Football? Footie sounds better. Casual. **It's the adults who are the problem.** **We are tribal. Whilst we may send smoke signals across the jungle about the weather, or when on earth we're supposed to bring in the money for the fundraising tea towels, we only feel we are truly understood by our own kind. We are generally polite to the other side, we sometimes even arrange playdates, but in reality we'd prefer it if we didn't have to mix.** Is that too strong? It's true. **But in reality we find these encounters awkward, unnatural. They require a great deal of effort.**

**There are those, not in our tribes, who, no whom (*editing*) we sense could be our true friends if class wasn't an issue. If the tabloids and talk radio didn't have such a hold on their sensibilities, if they were a little less racist, if they had a better understanding of how society has screwed them over and that the government and big business is manipulating them to self-hatred. Good. We desperately want to send up the puff of white smoke and end this battle, but the war is becoming more epic every day.**

*(As she continues to read, the **Head, Amy, Coral** [on a phone] and **Bobbi** appear, also reading out loud, their intonation revealing what they think of **Elaine's** words.)*

**In our playground, there are many warriors, and they all eye up each other warily. The lord of the jungle is the headmaster, hidden far away from the masses in his treehouse/office, promoted mainly because of his sex, who talks about equality of access to learning, but is just as loyal to his own tribe as anyone else. He may have managed to pull himself up from the lower tribes, and he tries to beat the working class drum, but his rhythm's off and if he's being honest he'll admit that he shifted tribes the moment he stepped on to his red brick university campus. Oh god, do I dare? Do I dare? I dare. He's a twat.**

**Then there's the angry mob, continuously looking for a fight, sometimes with justification, but you wish you could train them in the subtle art of intelligent argument. They fool themselves by attempting to taking on positions of power, not realizing they will never be taken seriously. On the other side, you have the inept entitled, terrible at almost everything they do yet, thanks to the situation they were born into, still on top. They**

jealously guard their position, terrified of the angry mob, but determined to keep them in their place through the sheer force of making them feel terrible about themselves. There is the aspirant but uneducated young mother, desperate for her offspring to cross into enemy territory, but unable to see the benefit — for her family and a tax-burdened society — at stopping at two children.

In another place, another time, some of these people would be best friends. There is possibility for peace, but we need to be honest about the fact that the jungle is awkward. Adults behave like children. Some of them throw things when they feel sad, some try to take control, some hide in the corner, some pretend nothing's happening, some laugh because they feel uncomfortable. That's just people.

**Amy** That's what I said.

**Elaine** And how do I fit into all of this? When I feel the desire to float above it all, like a geographer mapping the jungle floor from a plane which never touches down, I remind myself that the better — but by far harder — job is to be a missionary. Meeting the tribes, trying to instil a common language, convincing them that they have more in common than they think and life in the jungle will be much more tolerable if they could forget their differences and work towards a common good. Which, in the school playground, must always be the children. Is that awkward? It sounds awkward. Or maybe it's fine. It's hard work, because they have been worshipping the same gods for millennia, and some missionaries end up being skewered and spit roasted over a bonfire. But, when it comes to

**creating a peaceful, more equitable future for our children, I'm willing to take the risk.**

*(Lights out on the others.)*

Oh god. Am I there? Do I send? Scott is going to kill me. Do I send? Send send send (*sending*). Sent. Oh god.

*(She puts her tablet to the side. The **Foreman** enters and hands her a hard hat. She puts it on. The other workers enter and stand, listening to the **Foreman**.)*

**Foreman** As you all know, the company inspector's been, thanks to the complaints of local females who have nothing better to do with their time than whinge and make babies. The report's delivered. (*Reading*) Electrical fittings?

*(The others look expectantly hopeful.)*

**Foreman** Fail. Suitability of interior decoration?

*(Hopefully expectant.)*

**Foreman** Fail. Quality of craftsmanship?

*(Slightly less hopeful.)*

**Foreman** Fail. Right angles?

*(They already know the answer.)*

**Foreman** Fail. Round holes? Fail. Personal hygiene?

*(They look up again. They might have a chance with this one.)*

**Foreman** As if. Fail. Energy and enthusiasm for work?

*(They look at the ground.)*

**Foreman** Fail. Double fail. I didn't know that was possible. Project coming in under budget?

**Others** *(Muttering)* Fail.

**Foreman** Pass actually. I was in charge of budget. Fortunately, this means you have the opportunity to redeem yourselves. This work must be finished on time. Double pace, double effort, double time. And weekends.

**Worker 2** Double pay?

**Foreman** If you do not enjoy these conditions, you may find alternative employment, which of course comes easily in the current economic climate of cheap labour and high turnover of unsatisfactory components. Actually. I have a report detailing a labour grievance.

**Worker 2** The conditions are dangerous.

**Worker 1** Ssssh.

**Foreman** You didn't put up your hand.

*(Worker 2 puts up a hand.)*

**Worker 1** Ssssh!

**Foreman** You may speak. Unless it's to tell me the conditions are dangerous.

**Worker 2** But they are!

**Worker 1** Sssssh! I can't afford to have my pay docked again.

**Foreman** Right.

**Worker 2** There's no toilet. And stuff falls down. All over the place.

**Foreman** You go to the toilet in your own time.

*(Pause.)*

**Foreman** You will go to the toilet in your *own time*. Off you go. *(To Deputy 2)* Find me another worker. In the meantime, you'll **(Worker 1)** have to pick up the slack.

**Worker 1** I've got a ruptured kidney!

**Foreman** There's no such thing. No direct addressing!

*(He makes a gesture to dismiss Worker 2. Worker 2 shuffles off.)*

**Foreman** Anyone else for the toilet?

*(They all shake their heads to say no.)*

**Foreman** So. It's now triple pace, triple effort, triple time. And evenings. Off you go.

*(Snaps his fingers. Lights out.)*

**ACT THREE****Scene 1      Here's Terry!**

*The village playground. The construction noise now drowns out birdsong. **Bobbi** sits on her own, drinking coffee. **Terry** enters and sits a little too close for her comfort.*

**Terry**            Bit funny being here on your own without kids?

*(**Bobbi** shrugs.)*

**Terry**            Funny peculiar, not funny ha ha, right? But it's good to get away from them sometimes. They do your nut in some days, right?

*(A curt nod from **Bobbi**.)*

**Terry**            Used to be peaceful round here, before all *(the construction noise)* that. Can't hear yourself think now.

**Bobbi**            Yes.

**Terry**            Ah, she does talk! I was beginning to think you was mute. I'm Terry.

*(He holds his hand out to shake and then pulls it back, and gives her a little shove on her shoulder.)*

**Terry**            Ahhhhhh, you know who I am, don't you?

*(**Bobbi** shrugs.)*

**Terry**            I know who you are. And your son.

*(**Bobbi** starts to go, but he puts his hand out to stop her.)*

**Terry** Don't go. We're just having a chat. That's what adults do, innit? The kids run wild round the playground and the grown-ups chat. Cept we don't got kids today. Never mind. You're good mates with my ex, right? Coral?

**(Bobbi laughs.)**

**Terry** See? I knew I could make you laugh. Coral's a live wire. I love her but sometimes she does daft things. Like punch you. And get a restraining order out on me so I can't see my own daughter. Did you know she did that? Trying to punish me. Things just... set her off and she blows up. But you know all about that.

**Bobbi** Mmm.

**Terry** We're both victims of her temper, right? I don't like using the word bitch too much, I know it's offensive and everything to women, but you know, sometimes that's what she is, you know what I mean. And it's not like she's got any right to be. She looked good when I met her, but... she don't take care of herself anymore. Not like you. You look good, if you don't mind me saying. I can tell you make an effort for your husband. I think that's the problem. She's jealous of everybody, but won't do nothing to improve herself.

**Bobbi** Right. Well I suppose she doesn't have much time. She works quite a bit, I believe. And she's a mother.

**Terry** Not an excuse though is it? Look at you. You got kids, and you find the time. I try my best with her, but she takes everything the wrong way, you know? She's too sensitive. Well, I guess you of all people know that. That bruise



**Amy** I need to see the Foreman.

**Worker 1** Alright love, no need to get shirty. (*Shouting to off stage*) Boss! Girl here to see you!

(**Worker 1 exits. Deputy enters.**)

**Deputy** Yeah?

**Amy** I asked for the Foreman. You're not the Foreman.

**Deputy** Nope.

**Amy** Where's the Foreman?

**Deputy** Dunno. Round here somewhere.

**Amy** Could you go and find him please? It's urgent.

**Deputy** Alright. Don't get your knickers in a twist.

**Amy** This is the third time I've been here.

**Deputy** Yes.

**Amy** I've received official permission for a site visit from the inspectors.

**Deputy** So I hear.

**Amy** I've got my hard hat. I've got my ear protectors.

**Deputy** I can see that.

**Amy** I've done everything that you told me to do.

**Deputy** You have.

**Amy** So why can't I see the Foreman?

**Deputy** Because you appear to be angry. Or hormonal. I can't always tell the difference.

**Amy** I want to speak to the Foreman.

**Deputy** This is way above my pay grade. (*Shouting to offstage*) Boss! Angry lady here to see you!

(*Deputy exits. Foreman enters.*)

**Foreman** What can I help you with? Madam?

**Amy** I wanted to let you know. I've filed a complaint with the inspectors. About safety on this site.

**Foreman** The complaint has been received. Thank you for bringing it to our attention. And to the attention of the inspectors. And, if I may be so bold, many congratulations on your upcoming childbirth.

**Amy** You left the gates open. Again.

**Foreman** Yes, and I apologize. Thanks to your complaint, we bought a new lock and fired someone. We're grateful for your vigilance.

**Amy** I didn't want anyone to get fired.

**Foreman** Really? That's what people normally want.

**Amy** One of your lorries nearly killed my child.

**Foreman** Ah well. That's terrible. But also the fault of one of our contractors. You'll have to complain directly to them. I can get you their number?

*(Beat.)*

**Foreman** Perhaps I could pass your complaint on directly to them, as a gesture of goodwill. Can I help you with anything else?

**Amy** That wall looks a bit unsupported.

**Foreman** We are really grateful that you took the time to complain. I have personally worked with the inspectors to put increased safety measures in place and feel confident that going forward this will be a building site we can all be proud of. We are working hard to improve.

**Amy** But/ that looks —

**Foreman** Have a fabulous day. And a radiant birth. Sweetheart.

*(The Foreman waves. Amy does not know what else to do, so she leaves. As she goes, the Foreman very obviously checks out her bottom.)*

### **Scene 3      The Enemy of my Enemy**

*Coral's doorstep. Bobbi knocks; Coral answers.*

**Coral** What do you want?

**Bobbi** And hello to you too.

**Coral** You here to make a citizen's arrest?

**Bobbi** No.

**Coral** You called the cops?

**Bobbi** No.

**Coral** Not yet.

**Bobbi** I'm not going to.

**Coral** Why not?

**Bobbi** You have enough going to deal with.

**Coral** What's that supposed to mean?

**Bobbi** I think you should call the police.

**Coral** What, on Henry?

**Bobbi** I just saw Terry.

**Coral** Where?

**Bobbi** The playground. He's been hanging around all day.

**Coral** Oh.

**Bobbi** Yes.

**Coral** Did he do anything to you? To Henry?

**Bobbi** I didn't have the children with me.

**Coral** Okay. Did he say something to you?

**Bobbi** It wasn't what he said so much as...

**Coral** Yeah.

**Bobbi** He seemed to think I was on his side. About you.

**Coral** Aren't you?

**Bobbi** Of course not. He's a brute.

**Coral** Yeah. But what's it to you?

**Bobbi** I was a solicitor. I suppose I still am. I've seen a lot of men like him before with... that look in their eye. He's volatile. And he's angry about the restraining order.

**Coral** Yeah. That. I don't actually got one. Just told him I did.

**Bobbi** Why?

**Coral** To keep him away.

**Bobbi** You should get one. I used to do a lot of divorce cases, and I don't... I don't want to tell you what you should do, but I think it might be an idea to take protective measures.

**Coral** The cops told me I had to look at this stuff online and to talk to a solicitor, and all this other crap I didn't understand but I don't have a computer, and I can't... I don't know how much a solicitor costs, but I think it's probably more than I got.

*(Beat.)*

**Bobbi** I've got internet access. And I'm a solicitor.

*(Beat.)*

**Bobbi** It's not hard to get it set up. I'll show you. You can put me down as your representative.

**Coral** I don't—

**Bobbi** You don't have to pay me. I'm not touting for work. I'm just trying to do something.

**Coral** Yeah. Okay. Um, thanks.

**Bobbi** It's fine. They don't always work though.

**Coral** Restraining orders?

**Bobbi** Yes.

**Coral** Okay.

**Bobbi** Do you know where I live?

*(Coral nods.)*

**Bobbi** I have security cameras and an alarm that goes straight to the police. And a big dog. If you...

*(Coral stares at her, then)*

**Coral** Okay.

**Bobbi** I just wanted to let you know.

*(Coral nods and Bobbi turns to go.)*

**Coral** Thank you. Bobbi. Listen, someone sent me this link, to this thing that your friend wrote.

**Bobbi** Elaine?

**Coral**            Yeah.

**Bobbi**            She's not my friend.

**Coral**            You read it then.

**Bobbi**            Yes.

**Coral**            Did she... does she...does she know what she sounds like?

**Bobbi**            Probably not, but that's no excuse.

**Coral**            Right.

*(Bobbi nods and exits.)*

## **Scene 5            The Wreckoning**

*The school playground, the quiet before the storm of children being released at the end of a school week. Coral signs a piece of paper and hands it to Bobbi.*

**Elaine enters and does a double take of Bobbi and Coral.**

*(Amy enters. Elaine grabs her.)*

**Elaine**            You know what you said about Darth Vader and Dr Evil?

*(She points to Bobbi and Coral.)*

**Elaine**            Wow, right? I'm worried the universe might implode.

**Coral and**

**Bobbi**            Amy!!

*(Amy goes to them. Elaine does not notice her lack of response to her attempt at humour.)*

**Elaine**        May the force be with you.

*(The sound of the children being released by the teacher. Coral, Bobbi, and Amy receive their children and send them off to play.*

**Elaine's children are released.)**

**Elaine**        Hello pickles.

*(She gives them a cuddle, then her tablet beeps to indicate email.)*

**Elaine**        Hang on. I've got a... *(looking at tablet)* message from the.... Headmaster!

*(She starts to read and her smile quickly disappears.)*

**Elaine**        Can you... just go and play with the other kids for a bit.

*(She continues to read. Coral, Bobbi, and Amy watch her, but as soon as she glances up, they look away. She swipes to close her email and methodically stows her tablet in her sling.*

**Elaine realizes everyone's eyes are on her.)**

**Elaine**        Luther. Sage. Come here.

*(The children run up.)*

**Elaine**        No. You can't play with Vincent today.        Because you can't.        No,  
not Millie or Danya either.        *(Near tears)* Because I said you can't!  
We need to go.        Now. *(The child runs off)* Luther! Come back!

**Coral** Tough day on the jungle floor? Oh wait, ain't you supposed to be flying above it all?

**Amy** Not here Coral.

**Coral** You're *still* defending her?

**Elaine** You read it.

**Coral** Yep.

**Elaine** (to **Amy**) I was just writing about characters, nothing personal! It was an attempt to be topical.

**Amy** Topical?

**Elaine** It means—

**Amy** I know what topical means. You wrote that I was a burden on the state.

**Elaine** Not you! Just people who...

**Amy** Have a lot of children.

**Elaine** But that's not you.

**Amy** I have a lot of children. I get benefits.

**Elaine** Bobbi, you know what I mean.

**Bobbi** Yes. And I also know what inept and entitled mean.

**Coral** I know I'm just a member of the, what you call us, the angry mob? And I'm thick and all, but I did notice something that's a bit off... You said that we should all be equal but you also say that only people who got money should be

allowed to have choice over how many kids they have. Bit of a flaw in the argument there, Socrates.

You know, it's mad, or maybe pathetic's a better word, cause you're wrong about pretty much everything. Class means nothing to children? Bullshit. They notice who's got the expensive trainers and they make fun of the ones who don't. They play together here cause they don't got a choice, but it won't last. Bit by bit you lot will start peeling off, going to private school, or even worse pretending that you support the state system, then moving house so's you can get your kids into a better school, putting up house prices while spouting out your crap about building up the working classes. You support us as long as you can keep us chavs at arm's length. Your kids will be exactly the same.

**Elaine** I would never use that word. I hate that word.

**Coral** But it's what you're thinking.

**Elaine** Maybe Bobbi, but not me!

**Bobbi** Don't implicate me in this.

**Coral** There was a bit, actually, that I liked. That bit about the playground being awkward and how grown-ups act like kids when they feel uncomfortable. Shame you stole it.

**Elaine** What? I didn't.

**Coral** Amy said it.

**Elaine** What?

**Bobbi** I was there when she said it. And so were you and your stupid stick.

- Elaine** I'm I'm sorry. If I did that. I didn't remember you saying... I'll give you credit. Maybe they'll let you write something.
- Amy** No.
- Elaine** I'm sure they would if I put in a good word and it would be really great to hear from someone like you—
- Amy** I tried hard in school. I take good care of my kids. We don't have much money, but we try not to be a burden on anyone. I've worked all my life, I just can't now.
- Elaine** I know.
- Amy** I don't think you do.
- Coral** You let your kids run around, with no supervision. They're always covered in crap.
- Elaine** It's free range parenting. It's not negligence. I don't expose them to actual danger. I don't shout and swear and abuse my children.
- Coral** I don't abuse my child.
- Elaine** I didn't say you did. But you know... there's lots of ways to harm a child.
- Bobbi** Shut up Elaine.
- Elaine** Nothing I wrote was personal, it was just meant to be something that people might... I don't know, relate to. If you didn't know it was me, you'd like it. This playground, this school is completely ridiculous! All the petty

arguments, all the silly behaviour, it's so... inconsequential. There are wars going on. People starving.

**Amy** Then why write about our playground? Write about the wars and the starving people.

**Elaine** I thought people would want to hear what I had to say. About our lives.

**Coral** Yeah, but you know nothing about my life. Or hers (**Amy**). You've never lived it. You complain about not having money, but having to go to Cornwall instead of Bali on holiday ain't the same as barely scraping together enough to feed your kid. My story ain't yours to tell. What made you think it was?

**Elaine** I I don't know. I was just trying... I don't know.

*(Beat)*

Congratulations. For the governor's seat.

**Coral** What?

**Elaine** The Head's making me withdraw. I just got an email. And I've been kicked off the PTA. You would've won anyhow.

**Amy** Elaine.

*(Elaine shrugs.)*

**Elaine** It's probably for the best. I don't see how I... I think I need to just withdraw.

**Bobbi** What do you mean?

**Coral** You taking your kids out?

(**Elaine shrugs.**)

**Bobbi** You're going independent aren't you? After giving me so much grief about it.

**Coral** (to **Bobbi**) You're sending your kids to private?

**Bobbi** In year three. Just like everyone else.

**Coral** (*quietly*) Pffff.

**Elaine** We can't afford it. We can't afford to move. I'm going to have to... I don't know.

**Coral** Get a job? An actual one?

**Amy** You don't need to leave. Everyone's sensitive about the choices they make and how other people judge them, but at the end of the day we're all just doing what we think is best for our kids.

(*The sound of children playing has completely gone.*)

**Coral** Where's Danya?

(*They all look around.*)

**Coral** She was just playing over there. I don't see her. Danya! Danya!

**Amy** She's probably around somewhere.

**Coral** She's not in the playground.

**Bobbi** (to **Coral**) Terry.

**Coral** Fuck. Danya!

**Elaine** I'll check inside in case she needed the loo.

*(Elaine runs off.)*

**Amy** I'll go ask the kids. She's probably just hiding.

*(She goes off stage.)*

**Coral** I told the police this would happen. They promised me—

**Bobbi** Let me call the police. If it was Terry they can't have gone too far.

**Coral** I gotta go look for them.

**Bobbi** It's not a good idea. He won't hurt her but he might—

**Coral** You know that for sure? That he won't hurt her?

**Bobbi** *(pause)* No.

**Coral** Call the police. I gotta go find her.

*(Coral runs off.)*

**Bobbi starts dialling, but stops when Amy comes running back.)**

**Amy** I can't find them.

**Bobbi** Who?

**Amy** My kids.

**Bobbi** Terry's got them too?

**Amy** What?

**Bobbi** Terry's taken Danya!

**Amy** He hasn't got her. I just saw him sitting in front of the pub. Danya wasn't with him.

*(Elaine comes running back.)*

**Elaine** She's not inside. I told the Head. He's looking too.

*(Bobbi looks around.)*

**Bobbi** Henry's gone. And so is Vincent. Where are Luther and Sage?

**Elaine** I don't know. Luther wanted to play with them all.

**Amy** Shit. I know where they are.

**Bobbi** Where?

*(The sound of construction reaches its peak. Almost black.*

*In the dim light, the remaining women put on construction hats and start throwing children's blocks on the floor. Underneath the sound of construction, Coral's voice is heard.)*

**Coral** Get out of there! Millie! Luther! Now! It's not safe! The wall is going. Get out! Move! Vincent! Beth!

*(The builders move to the side. Coral runs to centre stage, her arms extended.)*

**Coral** Henry!

*(There is a horrible crash, and Coral falls to the ground amidst the blocks.*

*A child's voice, which fills the space)*

**Danya** Mummy!

*(Dark. Silence. Then, the tolling of the church bell and birdsong.)*

**Scene 5      In the End Was the Beginning**

*The tolling bell continues. The workers clear the stage and exit.*

*Then, the sound of giggling children. **Elaine**, as a child, runs across the stage, pursued by **Bobbi**, who tags her. **Amy** wanders into the space, and **Elaine** rushes over and tags her. The three continue to play, with some subtle communication between **Bobbi** and **Elaine** which results in **Amy** being 'it' most of the time.*

*When someone is tagged, the tagger says: 'It'!*

***Coral** runs on and joins in. She allows **Amy** to tag her, and then tags **Bobbi**. She is brilliant at the game and attempts to make up her own rules, but these are rejected by **Bobbi** and **Elaine**.*

***Bobbi** encourages **Elaine** to hide, while the others continue to play tag. **Amy** spots them and hides with them. **Amy** gives the game away by accident, and **Coral** discovers them.*

*Annoyed, **Bobbi** takes **Elaine**, and initiates a game of hand-clapping with her. **Coral** and **Amy** want to join in, but are rejected. **Bobbi** and **Elaine** start the chant below, with the rhythm of their hand-clapping. **Coral** takes **Amy** to a separate space and they start their own clap-rhythm.*

Gypsy, Gypsy please tell me

What my fortune's going to be

Rich man, poor man, beggar-man, thief

Doctor, lawyer, Indian chief

*(repeat as lights fade to blackout)*

## Conclusion

As discussed in the conclusion to Chapter Three, writing text intended for performance, on one's own and isolated from collaborators, can be problematic, given the fact that, as Walter Ong argues, the 'extratextual' context is missing, whereby words realize their 'full phonetic qualities' in the act of being spoken/performed.<sup>1</sup> This corresponds to Rick Kemp's theories on the connection between embodied acting and neuroscientific approaches, founded on research which suggests that much 'linguistic expression has innate movement tendencies', and that a good deal of 'meaning in interpersonal interaction is communicated non-verbally'.<sup>2</sup> As established in Chapter Two, playwrights are generally trained to write non-collaboratively, and explore action and character predominantly through speech, which can mean a lack of consideration of extratextual effects and the potential for the actor's body (or indeed elements of design) to communicate meaning beyond dialogue. Indeed, as evidenced in Chapter Two, there is a decided animosity in pedagogical playwriting texts towards collaborative theatre making which would expose a playwright to the type of embodied performance identified by Kemp. This animosity is either overtly stated by writers such as Michelene Wandor and Steve Gooch, or implied through a neglect of the subject matter within influential texts by David Edgar, Steve Waters, and Robert McKee, amongst others. Likewise, in paying scant attention to the processes of devising, and providing limited exposure to actors, directors, and designers, the majority of playwriting courses, particularly those in the United Kingdom, do not provide their students with a holistic understanding of theatre making.

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<sup>1</sup> Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the World* (London: Methuen, 1982), pp. 101-02.

<sup>2</sup> Rick Kemp, *Embodied Acting: What Neuroscience Tells us About Performance* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), p. xvi.

Chapter One revealed how the landscape of theatre and performance has changed in the twentieth and twenty-first century, and that devised theatre, and performance work which might fall under the category of postdramatic (as the two are not necessarily the same thing), are now widespread and popular. However, as Liz Tomlin argues, the postdramatic and its regular (though inaccurate) association with non-text based performance, is not in strict opposition to the category of the dramatic, which is generally associated with traditional, Aristotelian approaches.<sup>3</sup> Regardless of the accuracy of the postdramatic framework, it must be recognized that traditional models of theatre making are being challenged in practice, though not in most pedagogical approaches to playwriting. As Joseph Danan argues, and as revealed in my survey of playwrights in Chapter Two, the ‘problem of alignment with the contemporary stage is sharply felt by the playwright’, who often emerges from training unprepared for collaborative contexts and non-traditional methodologies of creating performance.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, as Ong points out, ‘written words sharpen analysis’, and, as the case studies of Chapters Three and Four reveal, many collaborative companies choose to work with playwrights as they recognize the usefulness of the particular skills of the playwright, and the potency of text.<sup>5</sup> As Dymphna Callery states: ‘Even Artaud, who called so vociferously for the end of theatre’s subjugation to the word, wrote scripts for his surrealist productions.’<sup>6</sup> Though there are a number of ways to gain expertise, writing text for performance is a specialist skill, and, as established throughout this dissertation, the presence

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<sup>3</sup> Liz Tomlin, *Acts and Apparitions: Discourses on the Real in Performance Practice and Theory, 1990-2010* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), p. 51.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Danan, ‘Dramaturgy in “Postdramatic” Times’, trans. by Ada Denise Bautista and others, in *New Dramaturgy: International Perspectives on Theory and Practice*, ed. by Katalin Trencsényi and Bernadette Cochrane (London: Bloomsbury Methuen, 2014), pp. 3-17 (p. 11).

<sup>5</sup> Ong, p. 104.

<sup>6</sup> Dymphna Callery, *Through the Body: A Practical Guide to Physical Theatre, Exploration, and Exercises in Devising, Mask-work, Play, Complicite and Total Theatre* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2001), p. 159.

of an experienced writer can greatly benefit the collaborative process. John McGrath argues: 'Writing a play [...] can never be a totally democratic process. They [sic] are skills which need aptitude, long experience, self-discipline and a certain mental disposition in one individual.'<sup>7</sup> At the core of this investigation has been the understanding that the relationship between a writer-deviser and the companies she works with is a symbiotic one: a playwright learns to utilize holistic methodologies through observations of actors, directors, and designers in the active development of a devised piece of work, and the collaborative group benefits from the expertise of the writer.

As mentioned in the Introduction, the central inquiry of this PaR investigation is not *if* engaging with devising affects the methodologies of the playwright, but *how*; it began with the assumption (based on knowledge gained through previous practice and spectatorship) that working within a collaborative context will inevitably affect a writer's working practices. The understanding of the symbiotic relationship, however, is one which has emerged through the course of my inquiry. When I embarked on both the practice and text-based research elements (which, as previously stated, happened concurrently), I had not considered the benefits for devising companies of working with a trained writer-deviser. However, it quickly became obvious, through interviews with practitioners such as the members of Zuppa Theatre, Frantic Assembly, and Sound&Fury, along with secondary research into devising companies, that writers are often highly valued members of collaborative groups, and the skills they bring into these collaborations can fill gaps which other (non-writer) members are unable to.

There have been other findings, discovered through my multi-modal methodological approach, combining practice and more traditional research, which were not anticipated at the

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<sup>7</sup> John McGrath, *A Good Night Out: Popular Theatre, Audience, Class and Form* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1981), p. 44.

outset. These include (but are not limited to) observations on: the usefulness of having actors involved as editors in the early stages of redrafting; the importance of having clearly defined methodological guidelines (in both collaborative and non-collaborative contexts) from the outset; how the pressures of working collaboratively can help ameliorate writer's block; the importance of regular dialogue with all members of the devising team, including choreographers; and the applicability of structures and training methodologies generally associated with actor development (such as Laban and Viewpoints) to writer development. This last observation represents an exciting and potentially fruitful area for future research, and I hope to continue to investigate, both within my professional practice and academic research, ways in which pedagogical approaches to playwriting can be enhanced by methodologies associated with performance training.

The nature of this inquiry — in that it is looking at a figure, the writer-deviser, who exists in the liminal space between the two spheres of traditional playwriting and devising practice, along with the fact that the writer-deviser has gone largely ignored within the discourses related to these spheres — requires a large amount of territory to be covered within the research undertaken. The breadth of this investigation means that, along with the potential research avenue identified above, many intriguing branches of inquiry have been identified which I was not able to fully explore within the confines of this dissertation. These include:

- How playwrights can incorporate research on cognitive approaches to performance making into their work, in order to explore opportunities for performative expression that go beyond text-based speech.

- Experimentation with new structures of script writing which allow for a more improvisational feeling within performance.
- How the working space and economic conditions of rehearsals affect the development process and resulting performative product.
- The role of the PaR researcher within a collaborative ecology, and how to overcome (or, potentially, exploit) the difficulties of being both inside and outside of the process.
- The role of gender in determining the writer's status and power within collaborative theatre making contexts.
- The benefits and drawbacks for a playwright of being involved in a long-term relationship with an ensemble.
- The critical reception to devised work.

As discussed in the Introduction to this dissertation, PaR investigations are generally founded on what individual practitioners wish to explore in their own practice, with the intention of broadening and developing that practice. Although it is, in many ways, oppositional to traditional positivist approaches to academic research, performance-as-research has earned its place within the academy because of an acceptance that subjective inquiries based within the practice of an individual have the potential to reveal discoveries that are of significance to other practitioners, and to ongoing academic discourse and research. Therefore, whilst the findings of this inquiry and identification of potential additional research paths have been highly beneficial for me as both academic and practitioner, it is my hope (and expectation) that other writers, devising companies, writer-devisers, and researchers will not only find this investigation relevant to and useful for their

own practice, but will address in their own work some of the potential research avenues indicated above.

Baz Kershaw writes: ‘Every example [of PaR] is incorrigibly particular. Hence *boundless specificity* is a constitutive paradox of performance and performativity, creating multiple ontologies and epistemologies, ways of being and knowing.’<sup>8</sup> My particular methodological approach to this inquiry, designed to allow me to approach my investigation as both academic and professional practitioner, has indeed created multiple ways of being both artist and researcher, and has involved a number of approaches undertaken to gain an understanding of these identities, emblematically reflected in the hyphenation of ‘writer-deviser’ (which I could expand to ‘writer-deviser-academic’).

In Chapter Five I discussed the fascinating mirroring of the role of researcher within a collaborative ecology and that of the writer-deviser, in that both identities involve a dualistic inside/outside position. There is another, greater, and (in my view) exciting symmetry to be found in the correspondence of the perceived binary between traditional, Aristotelian models of playwriting and devised and/or postdramatic models of theatre making, to the tension between traditional, text-based, positivist models (which are also linked to Aristotelian epistemologies) of academic research, and more overtly subjective PaR models. The methodological structure of this dissertation, combining text-based approaches to research, with newer, practice-based models, replicates the role of the writer-deviser in its Janus-like quality: one face turned towards new forms of research and performance, whilst the gaze of the other remains fixed on traditional methodologies. As this investigation has revealed, the positioning of the writer-deviser, encompassing both spheres, means that she has been neglected within both performance making and PaR methodological approaches. In exploring

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<sup>8</sup> Baz Kershaw, ‘Performance Practice as Research: Perspectives from a Small Island’, in *Mapping Landscapes for Performance as Research*, ed. by Shannon Rose Riley and Lynette Hunter (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) pp. 3-13 (p. 4).

the liminal ontology of being a playwright who engages with collaborative devising practice, and finds value within this position, I am arguing for recognition of the continuing significance of the writer within performance structures. This is done with the hope that others will take up the call to redress the neglect of devising within playwriting pedagogy, and the general absence of the writer within devising discourse and performance-related practice-as-research methodologies.

## **Appendices**

## Appendix A

### Details of UK Postgraduate Playwriting Courses<sup>9</sup>

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Degree</b>	<b>Dominant Teaching Methodology</b>	<b>Devising/ Collaborative Methodologies included</b>
City University London	MA Playwriting and Screenwriting	Seminar and workshop <sup>10</sup>	No
Goldsmiths	MA Writing for Performance (Dramaturgy and Playwriting Pathways)	Seminar and workshop	Assessed project <sup>11</sup>
Royal Holloway	MA Playwriting	Seminar and workshop	Major component <sup>12</sup>
Royal Central School Speech and Drama	MA/MFA Writing for Stage and Broadcast Media	Seminar and workshop	Minor component <sup>13</sup>
University of the Arts London/ Drama Centre	MA Dramatic Writing	Seminar, workshop and apprenticeship	No (based on information from website; no response to email query), although the course offers 'collaboration with other Drama Centre courses'
University of Birmingham	MRes Playwriting Studies	Seminar	Minor component
University of Derby	MA Writing for Performance	Seminar and workshop	Telephone message left; no response to query

<sup>9</sup> Data accurate as of January 2014. Information has been derived from university websites and correspondence with course convenors. Courses featured have an emphasis on writing for the stage; graduate courses which take a more general creative writing approach are not included.

<sup>10</sup> Seminar refers to taught classes with a focus on dramaturgical or practical skills; workshop refers to classes where students read and assess each other's work in the presence of a tutor or experienced playwright.

<sup>11</sup> Assessed project means that students must participate in, and be assessed on, a devised/collaborative project, which forms a minor percentage of their overall grade.

<sup>12</sup> Major component means that it is a non-optional, assessed module.

<sup>13</sup> Minor component means that it may be included as one-off seminars or an optional module.

University of Edinburgh	MSc Playwriting	Seminar and workshop	Minor component
University of Essex	MA Playwriting	Seminar	No (based on information from website; no response to email query)
University of Glasgow	MLitt Playwriting and Dramaturgy	Seminar	Minor component of Dramaturgy pathway
University of Leeds	MA Writing for Performance and Publication	Seminar and workshop	Minor component
University of Lincoln	MA Playwriting and Script Development	Seminar and workshop	Minor component

## Appendix B

### Selected Early Pedagogical Texts: 1888-1961

Author/ Title	Year of Publication	Place of Publication and Publisher	General Approach	References to Devising/ Collaboration/ Practical Experience with Other Artists
'A Dramatist', <i>Playwriting: A Handbook for Would-Be Dramatic Authors</i> (identity unknown, but states that s/he is a 'Dramatic Author') [p. vii])	1888	London: The Stage Office (2nd ed.)	Practical, paternalistic tips and advice; very little on the fundamentals of writing drama. Appendix includes diagrams for those who have no experience of 'going on the stage' (p. i.)	Insists on the importance of practical experience of the stage; outlines the practicalities of working with actors through readings, rehearsals, etc.
Alfred Hennequin, <i>The Art of Playwriting, Being a Practical Treatise on the Elements of Dramatic Construction</i> (Belgian playwright, specialized in farce)	1890	Cambridge, MA: The Riverside Press	Practical and systematic introduction to theatre, with definitions of basic theatre terminology, and explanations of industry conventions. The elements of a script (exposition, denouement, conclusion, etc.) are explained.	He defines various personnel, and the types of characters actors might play; little on how to work with others, except to say (on p. 186, the last page of the book), that 'opportunities for acting' must be 'discovered by the author himself, either by native genius, or by dint of observation and experiment'.
William Archer, <i>Play-Making, A Manual of Craftmanship</i> (critic, playwright and notable translator of Ibsen)	1912	Boston, MA: Small, Maynard and Company	Rooted in historical dramaturgy; contains much of the vocabulary ('obligatory scene', 'crisis', etc.) of contemporary	Little reference to actors except in anecdote.

			Aristotelian texts.	
Charlton Andrews, <i>The Technique of Play Writing</i> (playwright, mainly comedy/farce)	1915	Springfield, MA: The Home Correspondence School	Contains glossary, examples of scripts, stage diagrams, practical exercises, combined with critical commentary.	Short section on ‘The Play as a Collaboration’ (pp. 233-34), which acknowledges that plays are not the product of one person only.
George Pierce Baker, <i>Dramatic Technique</i> (educator)	1919	Cambridge, MA: The Riverside Press	An expansion on his teachings at Yale and Harvard; focused on study of classic texts and development of Aristotle.	States the plays are ‘cooperative’ efforts (p. 11); recognizes that actors and ‘producers’ can ‘reveal genuine values’ in plays beyond the writer’s original vision (p. 12).
Agnes Platt, <i>Practical Hints on Playwriting/</i> (wrote a number of ‘Practical Hints’ texts, such as <i>Practical Hints on Training for the Stage</i> [1921] and <i>Practical Hints on Acting for the Cinema</i> [1923])	1919	London: Stanley Paul & Co.	Mainly about the business side of being a playwright: selling a play; stage terminology; casting, etc., with some advice on structure, dialogue and characterization.	‘However good the play, it will miss its effect on the stage unless it lends itself to acting’ (p. 5); regularly returns to the importance of the ‘ensemble’.
Moses L. Malevinsky, <i>The Science of Playwriting</i> (theatre lawyer turned playwright)	1925	New York: Brentano’s Publishers	Takes a technical approach; he constructs an algebraic formula for constructing drama (based on historical examples) and argues for the primacy of the legal drama structure.	The word ‘actor’ appears three times; ‘stage director’ only once.
Horace Wingfield, <i>Writing the Stage Play</i> (no biographical information found on Wingfield)	1930	Amberley: Blue Gate Press	Rooted in the practicalities of the theatre industry of the time; basic advice on choosing subject matter and structure which will please commercial managers and audiences.	Apart from theatre management, other artists are rarely mentioned.

Basil Hogarth, <i>How to Write Plays: A Guide to Successful Playwriting</i> (creative writing tutor)	1933	London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons	Argues that playwriting is a business which must yield profits; practical guide to craft and the commercial side of the industry.	States that playwrights must 'serve an apprenticeship to the theatre' (p. 2), and that it is 'not the mechanics of <i>writing</i> that you must study; rather is it the mechanics of <i>acting</i> ' (p. 5).
Clayton Hamilton, 'So You're Writing a Play!' (drama critic)	1936	London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons	Ahead of its time in the suggestion that the writer is simply another collaborator. Combines a practical understanding of theatre with a critical knowledge of theatre history.	Acknowledges the importance of actors, stage designers and directors (calls them 'collaborators', pp. 31-33) to the success of a play; devotes nearly an entire chapter to exploring the need for playwrights to have experience of/ understand other roles.
John Howard Lawson, <i>Theory and Technique of Playwriting and Screenwriting</i> (playwright and screenwriter)	1960 (3rd edition; 1st Edition 1936)	New York: Hill and Wang	A solid grounding in historical dramaturgy; argues for a development of Aristotle which recognizes the interdependence of character and action, and incorporates advances in psychology.	Some discussion of actors in the context of Stanislavski, but little on the practicalities of collaboration; he is mainly concerned with history and theory. The third edition is a development which includes commentary on playwrights who emerged from the 1930s onwards, such as Beckett and Sartre.
A. J. Talbot, <i>Craft in Play-Writing</i> (playwright, comedies)	1939	London: Frederick Muller	Dogmatically adherent to the three-act structure; concerned with teaching tried-and-tested rules of drama.	Discusses the difficulties actors can have with obscure stage directions, otherwise little mention of other artists.
Falkland L. Cary, <i>Practical Playwriting</i> (doctor turned playwright; wrote many successful comedies)	1941	London: Simpkin Marshall	Argues that writers must have hands-on experience of the theatre; practical tips and advice on negotiating the industry.	Advises writers to join amateur dramatic groups.

Lajos Egri, <i>The Art of Dramatic Writing</i> (playwright; best known for pedagogical activities in creative writing)	1946	New York: Simon & Schuster	Dramaturgically-based, rather than focusing on the practicalities of staging a play, although there is a section on 'Marketing Your Play' (pp. 294-297); shows cognizance of other pedagogical writers, and rejects concepts such as the obligatory scene, because 'every scene in a play is obligatory' (p. 232).	Little recognition of theatre as a performance-based medium, and therefore little recognition of the involvement of other collaborators.
Norman Holland, <i>Playwriting</i> (playwright; primarily focused on amateur dramatics)	1953	London: W. & G. Foyle	Focuses on bad habits of beginner playwrights, with general tips about the industry and following standard structures.	Advises playwrights to 'learn groundwork' by joining and taking on various jobs (including performing) with amateur groups (p. 14).
Walter Kerr, <i>How Not to Write a Play</i> (critic, playwright, and lyricist)	1955	Woodstock, IL: Dramatic Publishing	Argues that the three-act structure is 'tired' (p. 13) and that more innovation is required in playwriting.	Focuses on innovation through writing rather than developing work with other artists.
George Taylor, <i>Writing a Play</i> (playwright, mainly for the amateur market)	1957	London: Herbert Jenkins	Aimed towards those who wish to write for amateur theatre; basic introduction to finding appropriate material, planning, structure, and what to do with the play once finished.	None.
Roger M. Busfield, <i>The Playwright's Art: Stage, Radio, Television, Motion Pictures</i> (no biographical information available)	1958	New York: Greenwood Press	Standard Aristotelian approach, arguing for structural planning before writing.	Includes a chapter titled 'Writing in Collaboration', but it focuses on working with other playwrights; states that the actor is 'almost as important as

				the writer in so far as the success of a play is concerned' (p. 211).
Bernard Grebanier, <i>Playwriting</i> (critic and educator)	1961	New York: Thomas Y Crowell	Develops the fundamentals of Aristotle; very focused on plot and the idea of the 'Proposition'.	Very little on working with other artists; much more focused on theory.

## Appendix C

### Zuppa Theatre's 'Rules of Play' and 'Hierarchy of Proposals'<sup>14</sup>

#### Practical

Be on time at the beginning of the day and after breaks. If you are going to be late, let a Zuppa know *as soon as* you know.

Turn cell phones off and put them away during rehearsal time.

Come prepared (suitable clothes, hair tied back out of face, safe jewellery, script [if necessary], notebook, pencil and eraser, music, water), full of food and rested.

Keep the space clean and uncluttered. Respect the props and costumes. Keep the space free of food (except water).

Take notes.

#### The Fundamentals

We are all on the same team. Be generous with each other. Be sensitive with each other.

Do fully always. Don't stop, modify.

Do not apologize for or justify your actions. Keep moving forward.

Avoid asking questions or for clarification. Listen carefully and respond with action. If direction is weak, the director will suffer the consequences.

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<sup>14</sup> These rules and 'The Hierarchy of Proposals' are the most recent versions available, provided by Alex Maclean via email to Karen Morash, 3 January 2016.

Yes, AND / Prove us wrong with action. Take what is offered and take it further. If you don't like something, propose something new. Just do it, don't talk about it.

Seek electricity.

### **The Hierarchy of Proposals**

1. Active proposals (*Just do it. Surprise everyone.*)
  
2. Tries (*very quickly instruct others that are needed and then do it. Surprise the rest.*)
  
3. *The Book of What Ifs (for the big ideas)*

**Discover theatre.**

## Appendix D

1.

### **Email correspondence from Scott Graham to Karen Morash, 10 June 2011.**

Bryony's stage directions are an evocative and important part of her writing. Interestingly Her process with us has meant that she is present at a much earlier stage in the devising process. On Beautiful Burnout (and Stockholm and It Snows) Bryony was part of initial research and develop sessions. This could mean interviews, visits, talks but also a lot of physical choreographic work. Steven and I would set devising tasks to our actors/dancers and Bryony would largely observe. There is very little writing at this stage.

What Bryony does beautifully is capture some of the ideas that emerge from physical tasks and place them poetically within the text. This was most obvious within Stockholm where each stage direction referred to a devising task from the workshops. She laced these suggestion/ideas through the text seamlessly. We did not know how or when we might use all of them before Bryony presented her text.

What this shows is a writer responding to suggestions, capturing the essence of them and then recreating that suggestion, as you say, beautifully within her text.

For example, from Stockholm

They unpack and sort the shopping brilliantly.

They show us that they could unpack shopping for England.

Olympic Standard Unpack Team.

and

They start to drink one another  
They start to cut each other up and eat each other.  
And pour each other and drink each other  
They savour and devour each other  
during which

and

THEY fall asleep.

They throw their sleeping shapes in their pattern.

Even in their sleep, there is territory, negotiation and danger.

Once, only once during the whole thing, they are both awake at the same  
time. At this moment, they look at each other

Eyes close

The shapes continue

As they sleep .

A terrible dark hole opens somewhere .

And THEY are in [the cellar]

These are Bryony taking what had already been created in the development workshops

and bringing them into the world of the production. We offered these scenes as tools to get Bryony thinking and writing, and with the last example we were never fully convinced it was a scene in itself but Bryony has seen the potential of these physical sketches and made them an intrinsic part of the show. She has found that in these cases actions can speak louder than words and has been unafraid to suggest that a different theatrical language other than text should take precedence here. That was so liberating for myself and Steven. Bryony laced her work with these moments, having absorbed two weeks of wordless physicality (which was intended to inspire words) she found a way of beautifully capturing physical potential and opening a door to possibilities rather than dictating the physical language.

This process finds Bryony a writer open to the possibilities of the theatre. The initial development sessions she attends and finds so useful are attended by us as directors/choreographers, the designer, the sound designer and the lighting designer and all of their expertise feeds into Bryony's writing, especially her stage directions.

I have heard another writer talk about near writers block coming from the fear of having to invent the universe for a new play. With us Bryony does not do that. She is part of its creation but she embraces that universe and she gives it order. It is a much less lonely place for a writer.

So the suggestion/stage direction does not come to Steven and I as a cold, shocking challenge/request but as something we already know but might not have known where to use it.

[...]

Bryony's process on the shows we have worked on might not be indicative of her general process as we bring a lot of stuff to the table early on. Bryony runs with this like no other writer and brings back so much in response but it might be worth investigating the different ways she works.

There is certainly no doubting her suggestions have a lovely poeticism to them.

I hope this helps. I felt it was worth highlighting Bryony's open and generous part in the creative process and how she takes a lot of her inspiration from within a collaborative process. We have found this to be a rare and priceless ability.

2.

**Email correspondence from Tom Espiner to Karen Morash, 11 August 2010.**

Our collaboration started on a very exciting week long retreat in Shropshire in John Osborne's old house. The Arvon Foundation had initiated a new scheme called the Dark Room led by Ed Collier and Paul Warwick. The idea was to bring a relatively young company to work with an established writer for a week in a removed countryside setting with no pressure to deliver any finished project but simply to explore ideas and share skills and processes.

Sound and Fury were the first company to embark on this project and we were paired up with Bryony (this was done through a selection process that involved answering questions, submitting ideas etc and then it was down to Paul and Ed and Bryony to match us with an appropriate writer for the week).

The people involved in this initial week were: Bryony, Mark Dan and myself(although I could only be there for some of the time) as the core Sound and Fury team, Tim Crouch (more there as an actor rather than a writer), Hannah Wringham (from the Shunt Collective) and visual artist and designer Mark Anstee with Ed and Paul observing the project.

This was a very fruitful and enlightening week comprising of improvisations, discussions, exercises and spatial and sound exploration. Bryony introduced some very interesting writing exercises which she led in the most effortless way and opened some areas of creativity for us that we hadn't really explored before. Also she shared a real curiosity in experimenting with form, in how to engage with audience and space in different ways, and in exploring the different manifestations of life on board a contained environment such as a submarine. These are all things which are arguably not the conventional playground for a writer. The fact that Bryony was embracing these elements as well as sharing her writing toolkit as it were was really exciting for us. And I think that she was excited by the processes too was also an important factor for us - it is a two way thing. I might be wrong here, but I am not sure that this is very commonly found in writers of Bryony's stature.

As I am sure you know we are a company that use sound as a crucial part of the mise-en-scene and in doing so aim to engage the audience in innovative ways, but also weave the sound design into the fabric of storytelling and dramatic structure. Also we have a past history of staging productions in total darkness which not only heighten the aural sense in terms of sounds but also immerse the audience in the action and environment of the story and harnesses the power of the imagination. It also allows for an interesting sense of intimacy between the performers and audience and has made us consider less conventional forms of staging and lighting. Whilst these are all exciting elements to explore theatrically we are very wary of falling into the style over content trap and as we are first and foremost a theatre company we are keen not to lose touch with cogent story telling and dramatic structure. Bryony seemed the perfect writer to us to be able to work and be excited by these various strands.

The key thing to say here also is that she was never really entitled The Writer in these early stages, she was more the Head of Writing. This emphasises the nature of collaboration

on the project that Bryony was willing to participate in. There was a sense that she was nurturing any writing /text based ideas that we might have too, that by setting some exercises she could release more ideas from the group as a whole - in this way it was a shared project and her expertise in this field was invaluable. All of these things are more about her approach, personality and process than her output as work.

In terms of her work - I think that she has a great sense of humour that plays out brilliantly in her work and works so well in theatre. This humour sits in very well in some of the darkest places - it brings out humanity in her characters, it engages the audience and it sticks the dagger in brilliantly dramaturgically (examples in Kursk might be masturbation discovery quickly subverted by Kursk explosion, or end of mission party in toilets interrupted by New Dad Mike being summoned to Captain's cabin for tragic news, and even as New Dad Mike is being given the bad news in the mess Donnie Black's and Donnie Mac's exchange over poetry ... : D Mac "What the fuck is that?" D Black "Fucking Haiku Mate. Something big and meaningful in a condensed space. Fucking Poetry"). The humour is unsentimental but makes emotional scenes far more rich and complicated and in fact more real. If I am honest I think as a company we perhaps struggle with humour and Bryony's lightness touch was really key for us.

Also I think her sense of economy in writing was really exciting - it made everything more bullet like and gives us much more to work with and to interpret. Of course economy is partly to do with the expertise of a writer but I think also in Bryony's case there is a sense of poetry in her economy.

## Appendix E

### An excerpt Marion Partington, ‘Salvaging the Sacred’, with Corresponding Text from Bryony Lavery’s script *Frozen*

#### ‘Salvaging the Sacred’<sup>15</sup>

We had waited 20 years to know where Lucy was and we still couldn’t have a funeral. The investigation team at Gloucester kindly made the practical arrangements.

I would like to thank the dear man who allowed us to go beyond merely sitting in a chapel of rest next to a full-sized coffin covered with a purple cloth fringed with gold tassels. I will never forget the look of understanding that came into his eyes when I emphasised that I wanted to place some special objects in with Lucy’s bones. I know that some people might not understand my need to do this, but I have been pleasantly surprised by the number of people who did. It was a chance to love and cherish what was left of her. It was a chance to act in a situation that was still out of our hands. It was a chance to reclaim her from her murderers and the hugely disrespectful, wretched hole in the cellar of 25 Cromwell Street.

The mortician unscrewed the coffin to reveal two cardboard boxes. The larger of the two was exactly like the boxes I keep my A4 files in, pale grey do-it-yourself ‘archive system’, about 12 inches deep, 15 inches wide and 20 inches long. I felt a moment of panic. I pointed to the smaller of the two boxes, which was plain brown with a hinged lid, and asked, ‘Is her skull in there?’ As he nodded and began to lift the lid, I was filled with the knowledge of what to do. A feeling of strength came over me.

As we drew nearer, I gasped at the beauty of her skull. It was like burnished gold and it was a part of Lucy that had survived to tell the tale. At that moment I was full of the joy of

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<sup>15</sup> Marion Partington, ‘Salvaging the Sacred’, *Guardian* 18 May 1996  
<[proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?index=159&did=17327095&SrchMode=3&sid=1&Fmt=3&VInst=PRO&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=PQD&TS=1303988525&clientId=48828&aid=3](http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?index=159&did=17327095&SrchMode=3&sid=1&Fmt=3&VInst=PRO&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=PQD&TS=1303988525&clientId=48828&aid=3)>  
[accessed 20 April 2011]

finding something that had been a part of Lucy after all these years. Not a glimmer of fear, not a morbid thought entered the experience. I lifted her skull with great care and tenderness. I marvelled at the sense of recognition in its curves and proportion. I wrapped it, like I have wrapped my babies, in Lucy's 'soft brown blanket', her snuggler. I pressed her to my heart. Before I placed her skull back, I laid a branch of heather entwined with sheep's wool from the top of Plynlimon in the bottom of the box. I visualised the space and beauty of that wild mountain top on a summer's day: the brown peat, the sheep, the warm wind, the distant range of receding mountains, close to the sky. A place Lucy would have loved; a place that feels close to our Welsh roots; a place of freedom. I offered it with so much love.

[...] The mortician stood throughout this ceremony holding the lid of the larger box, nodding with approval. At one point he said, 'I wish more people could be doing this.' When we had finally finished, he screwed down the lid of the coffin. We asked for some time to ourselves, turned the fluorescent light off, lit a candle, and stood in silence holding hands. I found myself thinking of every member of my family as if they were gathered there too. I was in another dimension, as if time had been transcended. Somehow we were united again within the 'still point of the turning world'. Something had been shifted. A step towards peace had been made.

### ***Frozen***<sup>16</sup>

Scene nineteen

[...]

**Nancy**

[...]

Mortician showed us straight into the chapel of rest.  
Her coffin,  
Ingrid says, 'We've got some things, we'd like to put  
them with her. . .'  
I thought he'd draw the line at that,

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<sup>16</sup> Bryony Lavery, *Frozen*, in *Plays 1* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), pp. 94-197 (pp. 158-60).

but no . . .  
 he takes a screwdriver out of his top pocket  
 unscrews the lid  
 takes it off and stands with it.  
 There's two cardboard boxes . . . different sizes . . .  
 [...].  
 Ingrid points to the smaller one . .  
 up the . . . up the head end . . .  
 and says, 'Is this the skull?'  
 He nods,  
 'Go on' she says to me, very quiet, 'open it'  
 It's  
 it's  
 it's beautiful  
 [...]  
 I take it out and hold it in my hands  
 and  
 I can feel her head  
 its shape and texture and . . .  
 resilience  
  
 and I'm *flooded* with its . . . *Joy!!!* . . .  
 [...]  
 In there, we put a piece of gorse off  
 her nature table . . .  
 sheep wool wrapped in it . . .  
 place she *loved* to go to . . .  
 [...]  
 And then . . . all the lids go back on.  
 He screws the lid back on the coffin  
 and I say  
 'Thank you.'  
 And he says 'No problem.  
 I wish more people could be doing this.'

## Appendix F

### An Excerpt from Malcolm Gladwell's Article 'Damaged', with Corresponding Text from Bryony Lavery's *Frozen*

#### 'Damaged'<sup>17</sup>

'He [Joseph Franklin, a serial killer] talked about his tattoos. "This one is the Grim Reaper. I got it in Dallas") [...]'

#### *Frozen*, Scene Eight, p. 123

#### Ralph

[...]

*Pulls up his trouser leg, down his sock ... reveals a fresh tattoo.*

This is 'The Grim Reaper'  
seventy-five quid  
three hours twenty-three minutes  
two needles  
five colours!  
it's a traditional design  
big with bikers  
you get the sickle *and* scythe  
Brilliant.

#### 'Damaged'

In his confession to the police, after he detailed every step of the synagogue attack, Franklin was asked if there was anything he'd like to say. He stared thoughtfully over the top of his glasses. There was a long silence. "I can't think of anything," he answered. Then he was asked if he felt any remorse. There was another silence. "I can't say that I do," he said. He paused again, then added, "The only thing I'm sorry about is that it's not legal." "What's not legal?" Franklin answered as if he'd just been asked the time of day: "Killing Jews."

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<sup>17</sup> Malcolm Gladwell, 'Damaged', *New Yorker*, 4 November 1997  
<[www.gladwell.com/1997/1997\\_02\\_24\\_a\\_damaged.htm](http://www.gladwell.com/1997/1997_02_24_a_damaged.htm)> [accessed 28 April 2011]

***Frozen, scene twenty-two, p. 169***

[...]

**Agnetha**No *remorse* then, Ralph?**Ralph**

Remorse. So what is that . . . remorse?

[...]

**Ralph**

I can't say that I do.

*Pause. Thinks.*

The only thing I'm sorry about is that it's not legal.

**'Damaged'**

"I also check gross motor co-ordination. I ask people to spread their fingers and hold their hands apart and look for choreiform movements, discontinuous little jerky movements of the fingers and arms." [Quoting Lewis' colleague David Pincus]

***Frozen, Scene Eleven, p. 135*****Agnetha**

[...]

Can you hold your hands apart

like . . .

and spread your fingers . . .

Good . . .

*He copies her.*

[...]

**Ralph**

Oh no, clever cunt.

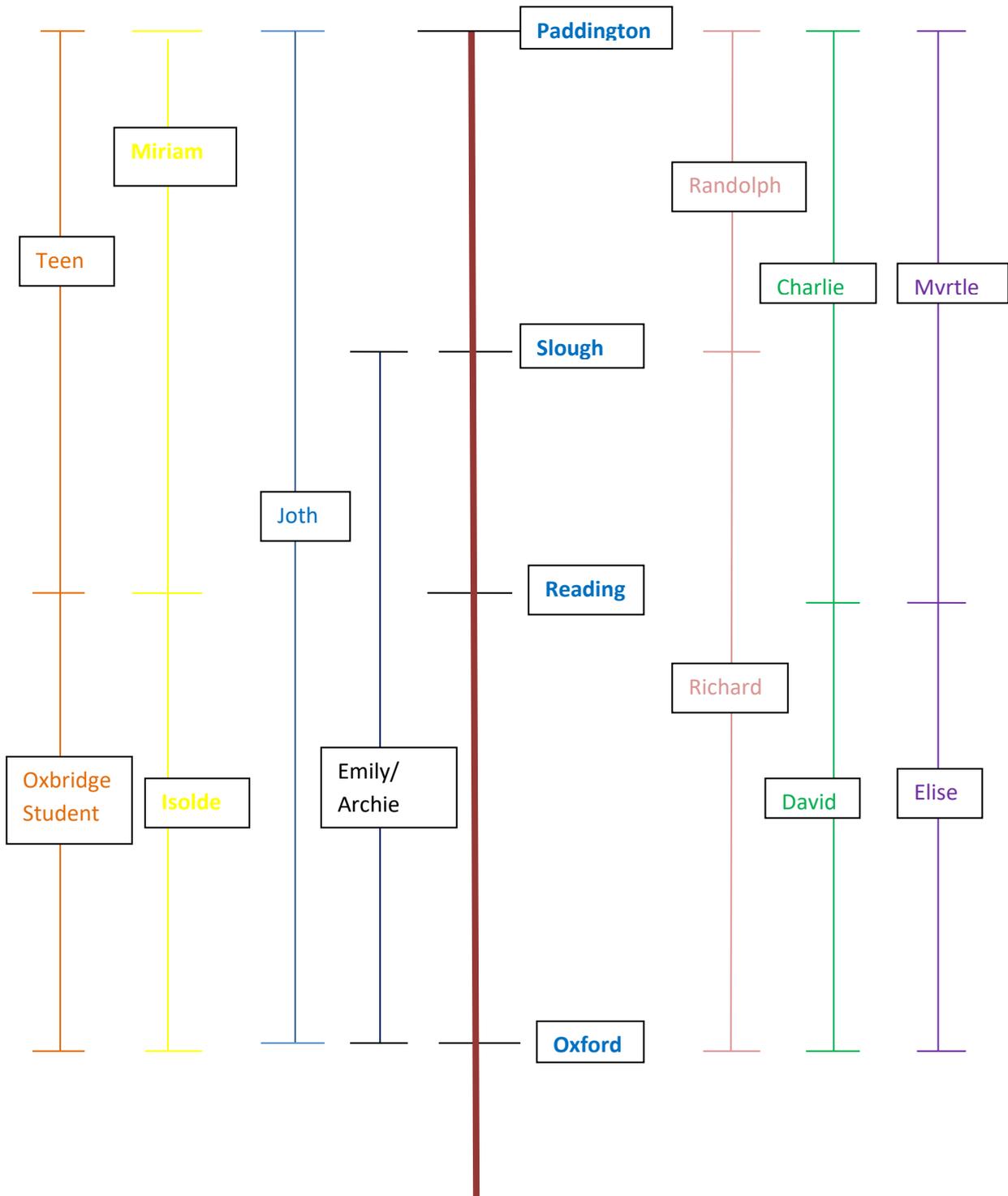
What are you after?

**Agnetha**

I'm looking for discontinuous,  
jerky little movements . . .

*As his fingers, arms jerk . . .*

## Appendix G

Character Map created for *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill*

## Appendix H

### Deleted Scene from *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill*

**Elise** *sniffs the air.*

**Elise** (to **Richard**) Sorry, do you mind ... (*mimes opening the window*)

**Richard** Of course.

(*He opens the window, sits down and goes back to his paper.*)

**Elise** Thank you. Much appreciated. It's just that I'm a bit ...

**Richard** Short?

**Elise** Far away. I would have to lean, you see.

**Richard** I do see. You certainly wouldn't want to have to lean.

(*Back to his paper. Elise sniffs the air again, somewhat like a wild animal. She smells herself and not very subtly takes in the odours of those around her.*)

**Elise** (to **Richard**) I'm terribly sorry, but do you think you might have ... trod on something?

**Richard** Sorry?

**Elise** I have a very sensitive nose, you see, and I am fairly certain I am getting the whiff of something akin to *dog faeces*.

**Richard** There are tissues in the loo.

(*Back to paper.*)

**Elise** No, you don't understand. I'm fairly certain the pong is coming from you. From your shoes. I have some medicated wipes in my handbag. I could offer you some-

**Richard** If there is a smell, it's not coming from me. My shoes are clean.

(*Back to paper.*)

**Elise** But I'm fairly certain. (to **David**) Can't you smell it?

(*David shrugs and retreats behind his book.*)

**Richard** Well fairly certain isn't definitely certain is it? And I am definitely certain that I didn't step in dog shit.

**Elise** Really, that kind of language isn't appropriate for a public space.

**Richard** I apologise profusely. Can I get back to my paper?

*(Elise nods reluctantly. Richard goes back to his paper. Elise starts gagging. She leans close in to Richard and gives him a good sniff.)*

**Richard** Are you completely bonkers?

**Elise** I'm sorry but there really is quite a disgusting smell coming from your direction, and you remind me awfully of a man I used to know, more of a pen friend now, who constantly had 'dirt' on his shoes, it wasn't his fault really, people simply don't pick up after their dogs in Canada, which is a criminal/ act in this country but not-

**Richard** Regardless of how much I remind you of your pen friend, I DO NOT HAVE SHIT ON MY SHOES!!

**Elise** That's quite enough. Put a cap on it. At least move them back underneath your seat.

**Richard** For goodness sake woman!

**Elise** Please remove them from this general vicinity so the rest of us don't have to put up with your unbearable stench.

*(Richard takes off his shoe, stands and shoves it into Elise's face.)*

**Richard** Here you go, take a good long sniff. Smell any shit on that? No? Well maybe it's the other one!

*(He takes off his other shoe and threatens her with it.)*

**Elise** Get off, you horrible man, you're nothing like/the man I used to know. He was a gentleman and you're just a ... stinking ... smelly ... Stop it!

**Richard** Or maybe the smell is coming from my ass. Shall we see? Can you smell the shit in my ass?

*(He turns around and waggles his bottom in Elise's face. She climbs up in her seat to get away.)*

**Richard** Why don't you stick your sensitive nose in there and take a good whiff! Lovely.

**Elise** Guard! Guard!

**Richard** God? I don't think He can help you out. He probably has shit on his shoes too!

**Elise** No, the guard, you stupid man. I am calling the guard. Guard! Guard!

**Richard**        What century are you living in, you hysterical old bat? There haven't been any guards on trains for decades. Maybe the trolley boy can help you. And God. Together they are an unstoppable force against dog shit.

**Elise**            *(past the point of sense)* Guard!! I am being assaulted!

*(Richard, realising the state she is in, climbs out of his seat and puts his hand on her arm in an attempt to get her down off her seat. She does not like this.)*

**Richard**            Calm down. I was just being a bit silly.

**Elise**            Don't touch me! I'm an academic!

**Richard**        I came on this journey hoping for a few quiet moments before my brother's funeral, but clearly that is not going to happen. How about I move to another seat to save you the terrible fate of being enveloped in the scent of the imaginary dog mess on my shoes. Good day.

*(He goes off to another seat. As Elise watches him go, her face changes and we see that all she really wanted was a bit of a chat. She looks bereft. David turns to her.)*

**David**            Are you okay?

*(She nods vaguely. After a moment — )*

**Elise**            Would it be very inconvenient if I asked to switch seats with you? I'd like to sit by the window.

**David**            Of course. It's fine.

## Appendix I<sup>18</sup>

### Audience and Actor Questionnaires

#### Audience Questionnaire for *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill*

1. What aspects (if any) of the production did you enjoy?
2. What aspects (if any) did you dislike or find confusing? Why?
3. Are there aspects of the production you would have like to have seen more of? Less of?
4. *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill* was devised by the company. Did the production have one ‘voice’ or did it feel fragmentary? Is this an effective way of making a play?
5. Any other comments?

#### Collaborator Questionnaire for *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill*

1. Do you feel a sense of ‘ownership’ of the play (and your character, if applicable)? Why or why not?
2. Which aspects of the process of developing the play did you enjoy/find useful? Which did you not enjoy or feel were a waste of time?
3. Do you feel devising is an effective process for ‘making’ a play? Why or why not? Would you like to take part in another devised production?

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<sup>18</sup> The methods for distributing questionnaires are explained in Chapter Five.

4. What are your general impressions of the play itself? Are there aspects which you wish had turned out differently?

### **Audience Questionnaire for *Playground***

1. Do you think the script for *Playground* was devised (developed and written in collaboration from the early stages with a team of actors and directors) or written by the playwright on her own? Why?
2. Which positive (if any) aspects of the writing stood out for you?
3. Which negative (if any) aspects of the writing stood out for you?

### **Actor Questionnaire for *Playground***

1. Have you participated in a devised production before (even just in the R&D stage)? If so, and thinking about your experience with *Playground*, what do you see as the benefits/drawbacks of devising versus the traditional method of creating a theatrical production (i.e. using a script written by a playwright in isolation)?
2. Did you feel a sense of ownership for *Playground*? Why or why not?
3. Thinking about *Playground* and other scripted productions you've worked on, what do you find rewarding about the rehearsal process? What do you find frustrating?
4. Please share any thoughts about working with playwrights. Do you prefer them dead or alive? Present or absent? If you could teach a group of playwrights about working with actors or directors, what would you tell them?

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<sup>1</sup> These items have been alphabetically listed by title for simplicity and in order to avoid the notion of fixed authorship.

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