

# Parlour Song

by Jez Butterworth



**PROJECTS PACK**

compiled by  
Charlie Payne

**ALMEIDA**  
PROJECTS



Toby Jones and Amanda Drew  
Photo: Simon Annand

## Welcome to the Almeida Theatre's production of *Parlour Song* by Jez Butterworth.

*Parlour Song* is the story of a man, whose possessions are being stolen. As the play goes on, more extraordinary things are stolen and the background unfolds. Ned's belongings are going missing, he suspects his wife, and confides in his neighbour, Dale, who confides this story in us as the audience. It's a simple story, both funny and unsettling.

The musical title resonates throughout. If this play was a song, it would be in the spirit of the blues: the basic plot of many a blues song being: my baby left me, she stole all my stuff, she's gone off with my best friend, and I want to kill her. Jez Butterworth has taken that story and woven it into a very English version, a parlour song itself being the Anglicisation, or the 'gentrification', of the blues.

The dreamlike qualities of the play, and this production, lift the characters from their familiar setting. In a way, it's like Brookside – it's an affair, in a housing estate – but the aesthetic of the play is much more progressive and purely theatrical in its ambition: running through the lyrical language, the abstracted symbolism of the sparse set and the use of projections.

This is a very current play which scratches under the surface of 21st Century suburban life to reveal a terrible fragility, the underlying 'wildness' of Britain that is being chipped away by the relentless homogenisation of the countryside. Where we increasingly dwell in identical houses at the edges of identical towns, each with the same identifying factors: a Romanesque out-of-town Tesco's, a concrete and glass shopping centre, mock-vernacular housing estates, tree-lined roads. And where the pressure to conform, to be good, upright citizens requires us to suppress a darkness innate within the human psyche – can love exist without its inverse hate? Can hate and violence be inherent in love? *Parlour Song* suggests these questions. And our country's 'blandification', says Ian Rickson, 'should be fought'.

We very much hope that you and your students are also able to draw energy both from the play's ideas and the power and skill with which they are presented. For more information about Almeida Projects please visit our website:

[www.almeida.co.uk/projects](http://www.almeida.co.uk/projects)

We look forward to welcoming you to the Almeida Theatre soon.

**Charlie, Natalie, Anne & Samantha**  
Almeida Projects



Under the artistic directorship of Michael Attenborough, the Almeida Theatre presents an eclectic programme, ranging from redefined major classics to the cutting edge of brand new work.

## ALMEIDA PROJECTS

Almeida Projects is the Almeida Theatre's community and learning programme. Inspired by the main-house productions, Projects deliver a range of high quality, innovative activities to make the theatre accessible to young people, inspire them creatively, and encourage an exploration of the power and potential of theatre. By opening up its doors to local young people, Almeida Projects aims to demystify the craft of theatre making and the act of theatre going.

## PROJECTS PACK

This pack aims to provide an insight into our process in taking the production from research stage to performance. We hope you will use it to help you in your own investigations into the play both before and after your visit to the Almeida Theatre.

## INTRODUCTORY WORKSHOPS

Before you see the production, one of our Projects Team may be visiting you for a workshop, bringing you insight into some of the techniques explored in the rehearsal room, the challenges the play presents and some questions. The sessions are designed to be practical and participatory so please come energised, ready to work and wearing appropriate clothes and shoes.

## GROUP HOSTS

When you come to the theatre, you will be met by one of the Projects Team who will be on hand to answer your questions and listen to your feedback about the production. Please do take advantage of this opportunity to find out more about how the production has evolved, and to share your thoughts and opinions about the play with us.



Photos: Ludovic des Cognets

## PROJECTS PACK

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## Parlour Song By Jez Butterworth

### Cast:

Dale	Andrew Lincoln
Ned	Toby Jones
Joy	Amanda Drew

### Creative team:

Director	Ian Rickson
Design	Jeremy Herbert
Lighting	Peter Mumford
Music	Stephen Warbeck
Sound	Paul Grootius
Video	Jeremy Herbert Steven Williams
Casting	Fiona Weir
Dialect Coach	Penny Dyer
Assistant Director	Lootie Johansen-Bibby
Production Manager	James Crout
Company Manager	Rupert Carlile
Stage Manager	Laura Flowers
Deputy Stage Manager	Maddy Grant
Assistant Stage Manager	Kerry Lynch
Costume Supervisor	Laura Hunt
Wardrobe Supervisor	Catrina Richardson
Wardrobe Deputy	Eleanor Dolan
Chief Technician	Jason Wescombe
Lighting Technician	Robin Fisher
Sound Technician	Howard Wood
Theatre Technician	Adriano Agostino
Stage Crew	James Couper Adam Smith
Production Carpenter	Craig Emerson
Set built by	Miraculous Engineering
Production Photography	Simon Annand
Rehearsal Photography	Bridget Jones
Wardrobe Work Placement	Marie-Madeleine Hadley

### For Almeida Projects:

Director, Almeida Projects (Maternity Cover)	Anne Langford
Director, Almeida Projects	Samantha Lane
Projects Co-ordinator	Natalie Mitchell
Projects Administrator	Charlie Payne



The set of *Parlour Song*  
Photo: Simon Annand

Jez Butterworth's first major play, *Mojo*, was produced at the Royal Court in 1995 and directed by Ian Rickson. It was followed by *Night Heron* in 2002 and *The Winterling* in 2006 both also both at the Royal Court and directed by Ian Rickson. Butterworth was commissioned by New York's Atlantic Theatre to write *Parlour Song* which had its first production in the Spring of 2008, directed by the Atlantic's Artistic Director Neil Pepe. The Almeida Theatre's production is the European Premiere.

*Parlour Song* tells the story of Ned, Joy and Dale, over the course of late summer, in their suburban homes on a new-built estate on the edge of an English town. Ned is a demolitions expert living a seemingly contented life with his wife Joy, and yet "everything is disappearing" Ned tells next door neighbour Dale, who narrates sections of Ned's story to the audience. He doesn't just mean that his marriage has gone stale or that he's out of shape, but that random items of his personal possessions are going missing. He suspects his wife, whom he fears has lost interest in him and who doesn't like the idea that he has won the contract to demolish her local shopping centre. As the hot summer temperatures rise, without any sign of rain, Dale has a brief affair with Joy. As Ned struggles to repair his life and keep hold of his possessions, his anxiety gets worse and the fear of a terrible dream forces him to insomniacal wanderings. Joy asks Dale to run away with her but on the night she plans to leave, Dale discovers Ned in the garden and learns the horror of his violent dream.

Once this crisis has been reached, none of the characters is quite capable of changing their lives and so they return to busily papering over the cracks that briefly revealed themselves one summer.

The symbolism of the vanishing objects, the endless drought and the demolitions create the theatricality that tells the simple and rueful tale of a stultifying marriage and an unsatisfactory life. The blues of middle-age disappointment and angst in a home that is interchangeable with each of its neighbours sing their sorry tune. But Ned's desperate attempts at understanding and redemption bring a strong vein of comedy to this mystery play.

A detailed plot synopsis follows.



Andrew Lincoln  
Photo: Simon Annand

*My stuff. My possessions..  
they're disappearing.*

**Ned**  
Scene One

*Did you know there was a  
forest right here? Five years  
ago. Right where you're  
sitting. It was here for a  
thousand years. Now it's  
gone. We're here.*

**Ned**  
Scene Two

## EVERYTHING IS DISAPPEARING

The play opens with Dale telling the audience that “it started small.” We then see Ned and Dale watching television in Ned and Joy’s lounge. They are watching a video of the demolition of a cooling tower outside Leeds. Ned tells Dale about the three main areas of a demolition site. A surtitle appears: EVERYTHING IS DISAPPEARING.

The subject changes to Dale’s dissatisfaction about his own career as a car washer, comparing its mundanity to the excitement of demolishing buildings. He complains about the foreigners who work for him and about his money worries. Ned changes the subject by telling Dale that he is going to be in the paper for demolishing the Arndale Centre, their local shopping centre. They discuss this for a while before Dale gets up to leave. Ned asks him where he is going – he wants to show him another demolition video. Dale reminds Ned that he has seen the footage before – in fact, he has seen all of the demolition tapes before. He proves this by explaining exactly what happens during the Kilmarnock demolition. Dale senses that something is wrong, but makes to leave again, although Ned then interrupts him to tell him that “everything is disappearing.” He goes on to explain that all of his possessions are somehow vanishing from his house. He asks Dale to swear on his life that he’ll tell no one about it. The scene ends with Dale, again, reiterating that fact that “it started small.” He lists some of Ned’s many belongings that have mysteriously disappeared. He asked Ned if anyone else had a set of keys, and Ned told him that there were only two sets – his and his wife Joy’s.

## FACE IT, IT’S A DEAD DUCK

Ned and Joy are eating dinner. Ned comments on the lack of rain for the past sixty days. He also persistently asks Joy if she is enjoying her food. She insists that it is perfect in every way. Ned tells Joy about the fact that they have replaced one of his demolition sites with eighty houses that are identical to the one that they currently live in; the only difference was that he saw a huge rat in one of the houses. He says that this made him think – which confuses Joy and she asks him what it made him think about – but he cannot answer her. He changes the subject and tells her that his company successfully got job to demolish the local Arndale Centre. This annoys Joy, as she does her shopping there. Ned tells her that everything has its time – including the Arndale Centre.

Ned then changes the subject again and asks Joy if she has seen his cufflinks (the twenty-four carat gold ones that were a gift from her). This also annoys Joy - she is annoyed that he has ‘misplaced’ them.

Ned changes the subject again by telling Joy that he’s made dessert. She says she cannot manage it because she’s in discomfort and that she’s going to bed. Ned fusses that there may have been something wrong with the food, but Joy insists that it was fine. Ned then suggests a game of Scrabble, but Joy ignores his request and goes straight up to bed.

Dale delivers another monologue. He and his wife, Lyn, live six feet apart from Ned and Joy. Their houses are identical, albeit mirror copies. Although it’s generally a good area there are some unsavoury characters. Dale has previously warned Ned to lock his doors and windows as one of these “maggots” could be the thief of his possessions. Ned is confused by this: why would someone steal his stamp collection but leave the X-Box? Dale deduces that Ned is the kind of person who gets stuck on an idea and it festers. He goes on to tell us that two months ago Ned knocked on his door in his



Toby Jones  
Photo: Simon Annand

*Basically I'm looking for core fitness. Strength. Stamina. And I want to lose the tits.*

**Ned**  
Scene Three

pyjamas, and came into his kitchen and drank a boiling hot cup of tea but said nothing. Ned is sleepwalking. Dale wakes him up and all of a sudden Ned asks Dale to help him get fit.

### **EACH YEAR THE BIRDS COME BACK**

Dale is helping Ned to exercise, but Ned is struggling and starts to cry. Dale tries to calm him down, but Ned is being very harsh on himself. Dale changes the exercise to skipping and Ned manages this. He tells Dale that his goal is to get more stamina and, "lose the tits." Ned then reminisces about his honeymoon in Gloucester, where he finds a fifty pound note in the street. He remembers the romance of Joy's suggestion to take half each and buy each other a present. The story goes as follows: Ned looked in all the antique shops but couldn't find anything, so he started to wander out of town. Eventually he came across a yard with an old bloke selling various objects, and under some blue tarpaulin he found a soapstone birdbath. Coincidentally it was twenty-five pounds! So he lugged it back to Gloucester. Joy loved it. The morning after they put it in their garden, they witnessed a pair of chaffinches drinking from it. Indeed, from then on, they regularly witnessed birds splashing about in the water.

Throughout this encounter, Dale doesn't seem to be taking Ned seriously. He mocks the, "magical mystery twenty five pounds," and Ned thinks that he's missing the point. Ned eventually tells Dale that this morning, the birdbath had disappeared. Dale asks Ned how his marriage is. Ned, after some pressure from Dale, admits that recently things have not been so good. Ned reminisces about how he and Joy used to stay in bed all day and play "sexy" Scrabble, but then that stopped and they haven't played for years. Dale asks what Joy bought Ned with the magic twenty five pounds and Ned tells him that it was a tie with hot air balloons on it.

Dale tells us about Ned's inability to sleep because he is plagued by a reoccurring dream. He won't go to the doctors about it because it would affect his work – they wouldn't let a man on sleeping pills near a demolition site. Joy has no idea about Ned's dream.

### **AN UNQUENCHABLE THIRST**

Ned is in bed listening to an instructional sex tape. He starts to follow some of the suggested actions, but is caught in the act by Joy, and so pretends that he is doing some kind of dance. He notices a plaster on Joy's finger and is concerned that she has had an accident. She tells him that she did it chopping lemons. She then confronts Ned about some pills that she has found in his cabinet. At first he says they are vitamins and then he says that doesn't want to talk about it. But Joy insists. He says that he got them from the internet and Joy reminds him about his job and the fact that his contract explicitly states that he must not take mood altering drugs; and reminds him of the implications of that – if he is caught he'd be suspended without pay and that would mean defaulting on their mortgage payments and ultimately losing the house. Again, he tries to persuade her that they are vitamins, but she is having none of it. In the end he admits that they are hair pills. Joy laughs at this - she has only ever known Ned as bald. She laughs again and mocks him for the fact that they clearly aren't working.

Ned abruptly changes the subject and tells Joy that the lawnmower has gone from the shed. Joy stops laughing. He says that the tandem he bought for their wedding anniversary has also gone. Joy is outraged – she cannot understand how these items can have gone missing when there is a big padlock on the shed. Ned suddenly changes tack – and asks Joy why she was chopping



Amanda Drew  
Photo: Simon Annand

*I tried to grow lemons last year. Up the allotment. I was growing the lot. Potatoes. Turnips. Runner beans. It kept getting hotter and hotter. I bought this little lemon tree from the garden centre. Went up every day to water it. Ended up with one rock hard green bullet. Like a brussel sprout. Then the tree died.*

**Dale**  
**Scene Five**

lemons earlier (the padlock was broken off by a chisel which has blood on it). Joy says that she was making lemonade because she woke up with “an unquenchable thirst”. When Ned asks to try some, Joy reminds him that he’s just cleaned his teeth. He counters that he can easily brush them again, but Joy insists that it’s gone – she disposed of it all because it was undrinkable. Ned questions this. He then goes on to question her about the knife that caused the cut. To placate him, she suggests that he kiss her cut finger better.

### I TRIED TO GROW LEMONS LAST YEAR

Dale is helping Joy to get her electricity working – she has a tripped switch. Dale suggests that the four of them have a BBQ. He asks where Ned is, and Joy tells him that he’s demolishing a children’s hospital in Tring. He also says that Lyn, his wife, wants to catch up with her. Joy asks him if he can spare a lemon – she’s in the mood for a gin and tonic.

Dale talks about his allotment – in particular the fact that the drought has caused his lemon tree to die. Joy didn’t realise that Dale had an allotment. She asks to see it.

The following scene opens with Ned exercising. He works himself up into a frenzy, before, exhausted, he collapses. Dale enters and asks Ned if he’s been drinking enough – he looks very red. Ned seems obsessive about getting feedback from Dale. Dale tells him that he’s doing well. Ned is pleased. He says that last week, his records showed that he was morbidly obese, but now he is just extremely fat. Dale tells him that it won’t have changed too much since last week, but Ned is adamant. He asks Dale to test his fat, and shouts at Dale when he resists. Ned apologises for his outburst: he doesn’t know what’s wrong with him. Ned then recounts his food diary to Dale. It is apparent that at the beginning of the week he wasn’t eating very much, but by the end of the week he wasn’t eating anything (in fact, from Thursday, the total sum of food consumed was two raw apples and three cups of coffee). Dale asks Ned when he last slept, reminding him of his dream. Ned insists that they change the subject. He starts to talk about the records that he keeps for every time he goes away for work or entertains clients. But the diary suddenly changes and focuses on his encounters with Joy – small things, like making her a cup of tea and her smiling; touching the small of her back and her not pulling away; laughing together at something on TV; and finally waking up with her on top of him, but calling out a stranger’s name. This upsets him. He loves her very much, but he’s scared of what he’ll do to her if she’s having an affair. Ned tells Dale he woke up that morning with a blank Scrabble piece stuck to his forehead (which must have been left in the bed). Ned is in some despair, asking Dale, “who plays scrabble on their own?”

The following scene takes place in Ned and Joy’s bed where Joy and Dale are playing Scrabble. Joy is winning but Dale won’t be defeated. Joy tells him that he has no chance with the letters that he has left – she knows which letters he has because he always mouths them when he takes them out of the bag. Dale finishes the game by shouting, “earthquake” and spills the board everywhere. Joy tells Dale to go home – it’s six o’clock – but Dale says that Lyn is playing squash with a friend. Joy comments on Lyn’s change of hair colour – does Dale like it? He says it brings out her eyes. Dale notices a crack above the window. He says that they have the same crack – but it goes the other way. He also comments on the fact that you can see the motorway, but that Joy and Ned’s view is more pleasing.

He asks Joy why she never asks him anything about himself. She starts a torrent of banal questions like, “what’s your favourite colour?” which annoys Dale. He answers the last one – “what’s the scariest



Toby Jones  
Photo: Simon Annand

*You've lived for years in the one house. For years. You know which window sticks, which floorboard creaks. Which tap drips. The cold spots, the damp patch. You know it. Like the back of your hand... Then one day, you're in the house... And you look round and there's.. There's – A door. A door you never saw before. Was it always there? How could you not notice it. How could you not have seen it before? Would you open it?*

**Dale**  
Scene Seven

thing you've ever done?" – by telling her that at the age of eight he got his head stuck in a hole. He also says that he'd rather be eaten by a lion than a shark. Joy admits that the scariest thing she's ever done is have this affair. Dale asks Joy about the time that he saw her sunbathing in the garden – did she see him watching and deliberately remove her bikini top? She says that she couldn't possibly say, but they start to talk dirty to each other. This is interrupted by Ned on the answer phone, recounting the mundane activities of his working day. He rings off with, "Night night, cuddly toy." After a moment of silence, Dale tells Joy that Ned thinks she is stealing his possessions. He asks her how she is doing it. She evades his questions. Finally, he asks, "going somewhere are we Joy?" and she replies with, "I don't know Dale. Are we?"

Dale delivers another monologue about the fact that you can live in the same house for years and years and know every nook and cranny but then suddenly wake up one day and notice a new door. Was it always there? And would you open it?

What follows is a series of short scenes. We first see Ned watching his demolition tapes alone. We see Joy asking Dale to leave with her. She asks him to meet her in the Arndale Centre car park at midnight. If he's not there, he'll have lost her. We then see her leave Ned – he says he'll wait up for her.

#### IT STARTED TO RAIN

Dale tells us why he didn't leave with Joy. It was for a combination of factors: his job, his wife and kids (the first time he has mentioned his children). He watched her leave her house – she didn't look up. She stood at the end of the road for thirty minutes and then turned round and walked back to her house. He says he felt sorry for her. He went into the garden and he saw Ned, shaking.

Ned asks Dale to help him stay awake. He is afraid of his dream. He tells Dale his dream: It starts outside in the freezing cold, surrounded by tall pine trees. Suddenly, walls grow up around him, brick by brick, followed by wallpaper, light switches, fittings, carpet beneath his feet, and finally the ceiling closing overhead. He's enclosed in the middle of his bedroom and he turns round and sees all the things that he has lost – the room is full to the brim of all of his possessions. A figure is sleeping on the bed – it's Joy. He picks up a pillow, and mothers the sleeper to death.

Joy then recounts her experience of standing at the end of the street, listening to the sound of the cars whizzing by. But this fades and suddenly she is standing in a forest. It's raining and the wind carries her forward. She begins to run. But when she opens her eyes she is back in the middle of her bedroom.

Dale then delivers his final monologue. He marvels at the fact that you can live six feet away from some people and never cross paths. But he, Lyn, Joy and Dale are still as thick as thieves. Only the other day Joy and Lyn went for a drink, and he bumped into Ned yesterday and penciled in a BBQ; they didn't talk about his dream. Dale did ask Ned if his things were still disappearing, but Ned just brushes it aside. He tells Dale that they blew up the Arndale Centre. The occasion drew a big crowd. The building came crashing down in a giant pile of dust, and, suddenly, the skies opened and it started to rain.



## NED

### *Toby Jones*

Ned, 40, is a demolition expert. His job involves a lot of travel and time away from home. He has been living in the same new-build house for many years, with his wife, Joy. They had their honeymoon in Gloucester. Their marriage has recently gone a little stale. Ned is a bit of a hoarder, although recently his belongings have started to disappear. He suspects his wife, Joy. He is overweight and wants to get fit.



## DALE

### *Andrew Lincoln*

Dale and his wife, Lyn, live next-door to Ned and Joy, just six feet apart, in a house a mirror image of their neighbours'. Dale and Ned are good friends. Dale has had a number of odd jobs since college, and now runs a number of car washes, where he employs foreign labourers. Dale enjoys keeping fit and also has an allotment, where he once attempted to grow fruit and vegetables.



## JOY

### *Amanda Drew*

Joy is married to Ned. She does all her shopping in the local Arndale Centre. She feels detached from her suburban life, and finds it hard to relate to her husband.



The Almeida Theatre - empty space  
Photo: Lara Platman

**A BRIEF HISTORY:**  
The Almeida Theatre seats 325 people, and re-opened in 2003 after extensive refurbishment. The building dates back to 1837, and was originally the Islington Scientific and Literary Institution. During the war it was used as a Salvation Army Citadel, and was later a toy factory, before it was converted into a theatre in the 1970s.

**Design is one of the most thrilling aspects of theatre craft. The look of a show helps to set mood, atmosphere, time and place. Design elements for any production include set, lighting, sound and music.**

At the Almeida Theatre the set design is the first and last thing the audience sees. As soon as the audience enters they can see the set and this, together with any sound effects, or music, will begin to determine how they will experience the production. This initial impression helps to set the tone for the story to come. When the play is over and the actors have left the stage, the empty space remains visible to the audience, often still lit.

The designer, therefore, has to consider what impression he wants to make on the audience before the play begins. The designer will look for clues in the play text and will liaise with the director and the playwright about these.

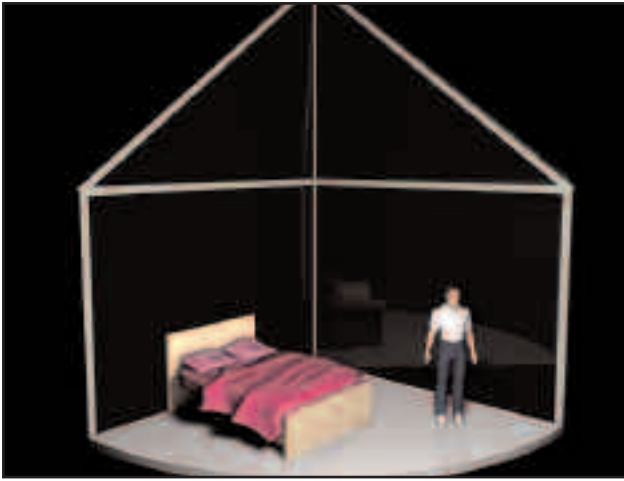
There are also practical considerations for the designer, such as how big the stage is; what kind of flexibility is required in terms of entrances and exits; and whether the play is set in a specific time period. The designer often has to be very creative designing a set which calls for several different locations.

### Designing for the Almeida Theatre

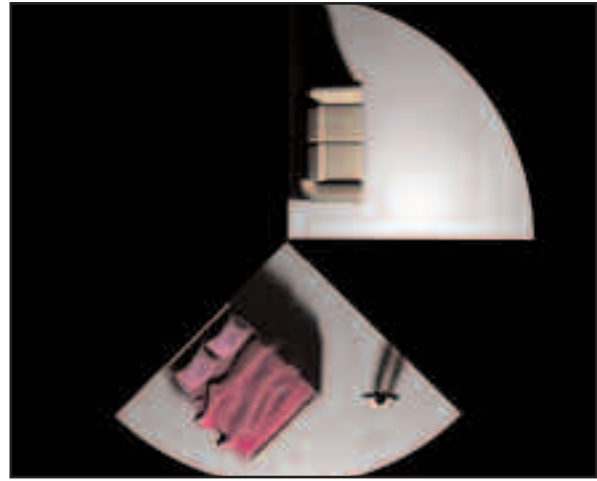
The Almeida Theatre was not purpose-built as a theatre so does not have the specialised architectural features which typify most purpose-built performance venues: a flytower, orchestra pit, wings, offstage area (indeed our “back stage” is actually “sub-stage” in an excavated basement directly below the stage floor).

This means that our designers and production teams have to come up with ingenious solutions to create innovative sets in our “found space.”

The building is famous for its large curved brick wall at the back of the stage. This feature of the building is used as part of the set design for many of the Almeida’s productions. Even when the actual wall is not visible in the set, the brickwork is often echoed as a feature in the design.



From front - with revolve turned



From above - with revolve as left

The model box - set for *Duet for One*  
Designer: Lez Brotherston

The design for *Parlour Song* rises and responds to the dreamlike language of the writing. Especially influential in the design for the set was the need to accommodate the idea of things inexplicably disappearing into, and re-appearing out of the dark. These transformations are part of what director Ian Rickson believes is the music of the play.

The decision was made to use a set with simple flats constructed largely from gauze, which can be lit so as to be opaque as well as transparent. They also decided to use a revolve on the stage, so as to aid the fluid transformation of the space – there not being any room above the stage, or any wings, for flying scenery in.

The set is essentially a black box, however the gauze set defines three distinct playing spaces. The shape of the flats is reminiscent of a child's drawing of a house – a simple geometric shape, that is functional as well as aesthetic – for structural reasons, the 'house' shape supports the weight of the gauze very evenly and makes it perfectly proportioned for projecting light and images onto.

The effect of the revolve was designed to appear almost like the pages of a book turning, and the projections add to this effect – as if the story of *Parlour Song* is unfolding for the audience straight from the page. The dreamlike quality of the design is needs to be able to evoke a fluid sense of time and space, being flexible and adaptable enough to change between very static locations without losing the lyrical flow of the text.

The stage is fringed at either side by green foliage, evoking a sense of the audience being 'outside' looking in. The bushes, as living plants, add a sense of the 'real' to the set, important when its evocation of the suburban semi-detached house on the bland new-build estate it's actually quite abstract. At the start, images of a forest is projected onto the gauze, that we discover used to exist where Ned & Joy's house now stands, whereas once this disappears, they appear confined by the trees, by the nature outside. This echoes Jez Butterworth's idea in the play that suburban Britain is subduing our innate wildness beneath bland assimilation.

The surtitles between scenes, which in this production are projected onto the gauze set, are actually written into the script. The director and designer made the choice for this production to use projection as a means to convey them, hence the shape of the set having been designed to be perfectly proportioned for thus purpose, for projections to appear clearly on the gauze even as it revolves.

Lighting is a big factor in this production, in the clever interplay between the light and dark spaces. The lighting has been specifically designed to highlight definite areas of space and then have them disappear back into the dark. It is a very theatrical technique, and visually echoes the dreamlike, ethereal qualities running through this production.



Jez Butterworth

Jez Butterworth rose to note during the 'angry gos', a decade of theatre writing renowned for its linguistic and thematic brutality, dominated by a visceral style of writing designed to confront audiences with what was seen as an increasingly violent and isolated society.

Unlike other so-called 'brutalist' writers of the 1990s such as Martin McDonagh, Sarah Kane and Mark Ravenhill, Jez Butterworth's writing evokes brutal and savage worlds in a style of language rather more poetic than visceral or overtly confrontational. The violence in his writing is often communicated through felt threats of unknown tensions, often undefined but nonetheless overbearing.

Jez Butterworth was born in 1969 in north London. He developed an interest in theatre during his early teens. He began writing plays whilst studying at Cambridge University, where he was an active member of the drama society, both acting and directing as well as writing for the stage.

The premiere of his first play, *Mojo*, at the Royal Court Theatre in 1995, propelled Butterworth into the spotlight. The play was an instant hit with audiences and received great critical acclaim. Set in the clubland of 1950s Soho, *Mojo* captures the atmosphere of the infant British rock and roll scene, a seedy world of double-dealing, ambition and matter-of-fact violence, with small-time gangsters aiming to hustling up the underworld hierarchy. *Mojo* won the 1995 Olivier Award for best new comedy, and, after a successful stint in the West End, was made into a film in 1997, both adapted and directed by Butterworth. Butterworth followed *Mojo* with two plays set in rural England, *The Night Heron* in the Fens, and *The Winterling* on Dartmoor. These plays delve deeper into less familiar, more subtle tensions of life in remote parts of England, exploring the depths of deception interwoven into our closest relationships.

Both *Parlour Song* and the forthcoming *Jerusalem* take a tentative step back towards the city, uncovering a darker side to British suburbia, beyond that imagined by the soaps and sitcoms that dominate our perception of the suburban life on television.

#### Plays

*Jerusalem* (2009)  
*Parlour Song* (2008)  
*The Winterling* (2006)  
*The Night Heron* (2002)  
*Mojo* (1995)

#### Screenplays

*The Last Legion* (2007)  
*Birthday Girl* (2001) also director  
*Mojo* (1997) also director

*"I used to live right round the corner from the Almeida. There were tons of pubs on Upper Street but we chose to drink in the bar here... The beer was ruinous. We'd buy one rolling rock between us, and talk about what a play was."*

*I still don't know, but I have a hunch plays are the same as songs. If so, this one's a blues song."*

**Jez Butterworth**  
on *Parlour Song*



Ian Rickson in rehearsal  
Photo: Bridget Jones

Director Ian Rickson has a long history of directing Jez Butterworth's plays. Here he writes why he is interested in *Parlour Song* and Butterworth's theatre.

I am so excited to be directing *Parlour Song*. My big break was directing his first play *Mojo* on the main stage of the Royal Court in 1995. In our weekly script meeting, the artistic director Stephen Daldry was saying "We need to find our summer hit!" My agent had sent me Jez's play and our writer-in-residence said "Stephen, I have it here". After bribing Stephen to let me do it - that's another story not fit for here - we were off and I've had the pleasure of directing all of Jez's plays in the UK. It feels so greedy. I do worry. Am I too proprietorial? Should someone else have a go? I hope not. He is a creative lifeline to me.

There are many things I love about his plays, and the first that comes to mind is a subtly radical thing: he affords eloquence and articulacy to all his characters, regardless of their class. This is so creative in the rehearsal room, when you've cast right. It's like putting together a band who can really 'play Jez'. But it's not just about musical technique. Jez's plays work because they speak directly to the unconscious. He is able to orientate an audience into deep realms of fear, betrayal, and longing with this seductive surface on top. It is both highly sophisticated and completely natural. He is a true poet of the theatre.

What's *Parlour Song* about? A difficult question – I find myself sometimes asking writers this. It's a natural question for someone to ask when they're about to part with their money for a ticket.

I think it's about one aspect of what it is to be human now, where there's a lot of pressure on you to function, and to be compliant, with the way the world is, and to be 'good'. And it's difficult for the main character of the play, Ned, to deal with his darkness; and it's all being kind of repressed into a terrible dream, where he fears he kills his wife. And I think to be human is to accept that we may have some hatred in our love for people, and that we fear loss and abandonment, and I think the play is fraught with – like the best plays – loss. I mean, literally, he's losing all his things. We believe his wife is stealing them, as some sort of provocation, to get him to engage with her; I think if she could remove all the objects, and maybe even remove all the bricks in the Barratt Home they live in, and maybe even all the clothes – they could face each other, like Adam and Eve, and maybe be able to have an actual intimate connection. But actually, in this sort of anal retention, he's blocking and dredging up all this stuff and clutter and being 'nice', a protective barrier between them, which I think, if you're stuck in Welwyn Garden City, if you're the wife and don't work and you haven't got children, I don't know, it must be stultifying.

I think it's about something contemporary which is to do with a feeling of fragility in the way we live, and underneath surfaces which appear neat and orderly, there is something animal, something wild, something untamed. This image of where Ned goes to a building site where they're building exactly the same houses as he lives in and there's a rat there; and I think there's this notion of underneath the surface is something animal, something wild, something untamed.

Politically, with Jez's work, at the moment there's this feeling that, a worry about, that in England there's something really wild, and free, that we're covering up. Most towns look the same with their mock roman Tesco's, or whatever, and that sort of 'blandification' of an island that's full of roughness, and deviance – mongrel nation, with all our different races, right from way back. And are kind of homogenising and diluting that – by stealth – with shopping centres, and a soft play type banality. And that should be fought.

**That crack above the window. We've got the same crack, but it goes the other way. But we've got that. We've got that crack.**

**Dale  
Scene Seven**

We spoke to Jez Butterworth and Ian Rickson at the start of the rehearsal period about *Parlour Song*, their feelings towards the play and what it means for it to be performed at the Almeida.

**Jez, can tell us a bit about how you started to develop your ideas for *Parlour Song*?**

**Jez Butterworth:** Well, the initial idea came from listening to a lot of Blues, and it struck me that Blues songs - certainly the 'murder ballads' - have a fairly simple structure, a fairly simple narrative, and that I could just strip a simple plot from any song and tell its story. So this is kind of like a revenge story, where someone thinks that the person they love is straying; it's the theme of a thousand songs...and that they are going to be left alone, and that if its true, they're going to kill them. A parlour song is an Anglicisation of a Negro spiritual or a ballad or a work song; they would be reformed for piano, and you'd play them in your parlour in middle-class England. And I imagined that that sort of letting in of a powerful spirit into your home could create these kinds of problems.

**What attracted you to the play when you read it, Ian?**

**Ian Rickson:** Well I'm attracted to everything Jez writes, because I've been the beneficiary of his plays in this country; I think he's a really unique, gifted writer, who is very bold, and musical, and soulful. And what's fascinating about this play is that it's quite different tonally and formally to the other plays which are driven by much more conflict; whereas this play is, on its surface, impressionistic, playful and dreamlike, and isn't driven by overt conflict. The conflict is seething under the surface, but on the surface people seem more oblique and tentative about the deeper desires that drive them. I really like that tension, that the play is fraught with a yearning, a longing. It's shot through with loss and there's a fear of underlying violence. So it's very easy for me to be attracted to it on a number of levels, and also as you ask with any new play, what is its urgency now? - it seemed to me a very evocative play about what it is for some people to be human now; where there's a culture of fragility, people are concerned about money, about keeping things together, and that there's this animal, frightening, wild underbelly to everything that people yearn for and are frightened of.

**Would you agree with that, Jez?**

**JB:** I think so, yeah... I grew up on a new-build estate, where the house next-door to ours was exactly the same as our house but a mirror image of it, and that's really where the play takes place, in these two homes where there are these two couples living. They're friends and they have barbeques together, and it's really about their relationships and how they unfold over the course of the summer. I think that most of the stuff I've written up until now has wanted to escape my roots, overtly, but of course they're always there, and I think what I've done this time is stage something very much in the kind of environment that I grew up in, but as I say open the door to this very cold wind of the Blues that just whips up... You're forever hearing of these stories where someone lives at the end of a cul-de-sac for years, and then they murder everyone in their home, and everyone always expresses surprise... and I feel that's bubbling under this play in a very real way.

**IR:** It's funny that we were both brought up on new-build estates; I was brought up in a Wimpey home in Charlton in London, and there you were up the road near Watford. And what that world is like and how it forms you, and the connection between the uniformity of the location and how individual everybody is, and also the groupings that come from that. There's this great intimacy in the play; they're six feet apart, the two houses that we focus upon; the strange intimacy of that, and the collisions and connections it creates.

**JB:** I find them very fascinating environments, those new-build areas, because what was once fields and... there's this one near us where we live now, the street's called 'Tumbling Fields' - it's not tumbling fields any more, it's a housing estate! Where we lived the street sort of stopped, and they were going to build some more houses in the field that was there, and of course they did. You had this thing that you were very young and you were witnessing an area growing up that didn't pre-exist you, you pre-existed it, and then these families would appear, and what was just a field or a corner of a field with a copse of trees there, and now they're bringing a baby into this home. I found it very very alarming when I was young to discover that people made their own space in this way; it didn't pre-exist, it was malleable. Then everyone went into their homes and they never came out again! So it had this very odd atmosphere when I was very young, and it really affected me. And of course when you live in a cul-de-sac you can only really enter it from one perspective, you walk into it and it is a dead end. Literally.

**Are you worried about the creation of new homes, estates, new-builds across England, that all look similar? Do you have any attitude towards that?**

**JB:** No I don't. I think that so long as there's some... if you fly over this country we're not short of green space, and it's not like no no no they shouldn't build these houses because of course they should, and families like I grew up in should be moving into them and hopefully having as vivid and as exciting an experience as I had. But yeah, this is the way that I think the majority of people are going to live in the future; we are going to be a much more suburban culture.

**IR:** But there's this forest growing underneath. In the next play, *Jerusalem*, there's this feeling that a local council wants to make banal what is wild and rough and primal about England, and tame it.

**JB:** Yes. I am really drawn to that... I was about eight before I realised we were surrounded by countryside. I realised there was this real wildness all around, and that collision really struck me. I made a film once called *Birthday Girl* where a man lives in exactly that environment, where out the front of his house is his town and out the back of his house is the countryside, and he would disappear over his fence and be in the wild. And it always felt like that. I think they're magical places... I have no beef with the suburbs, and I'm certainly not trying to satirise them in any way, I've got an enormous affection for them. And I think I understand them as well. I thought a great deal about where we were living when we were growing up, and I think that there are so many more varied and vivid portrayals of the suburbs than everyone out the front mowing their lawn... I just think that there are so many off-the-peg ideas to characterise a way in which millions and millions of Britons live. It must be varied.

**IR:** And punk came from the suburbs... The suburbs actually is quite a fertile place for certain forms of art – and that wildness you get in punk is sort of seething there in the play, however uniform the surface is.

**And what would you say about the style that you write in? I think that's a massive selling point to our audiences because I think it's so different to many other writers. So how would you describe that style?**

**JB:** The plot of *Parlour Song* itself, written a different way, could be the plot of a soap opera perhaps, and if you didn't write it the way I've written it, it could be banal, it could be a cliché. I just began writing and looked for any area that started to really, really vibrate and resonate in my head. So I was generating lots of material, and the further I got into the play, the harder it got to 'speak' – the harder it got to write something that actually moved this thing on in the same kind of slightly haunting – I think very haunting – register. And so for instance a scene like the one at the crux of the play, between the wife and the neighbour, wouldn't write for weeks and then suddenly came – and you work out what these people are actually going to say to each other in that kind of an environment. And there's a lot that could be said and yet it's got to be exactly the right thing, because of the register the play takes place in. It's a tightrope walk just to keep this thing like a song, like a poem, keep it alive and keep it ringing in an audience's head, keep it fraught and as exciting as can be, with material which, let's face it, wasn't very promising. You feel like, these couples, you wouldn't go to them for any other reason but the drama that's unfolding in that particular summer.

**IR:** Well I think the style of the play is, in the best way, devious, because it lures you in, it's ticklish and it's very accessible; and then it unsettles and moves you. And I think that deviousness is a high art in the theatre, particularly when it creates a kind of dream logic, where you're lulled into a familiar location, a known story, but it drives you into the unconscious.

**JB:** I think that's true. I think when I hear people say "it's a dream play" I sort of run a mile, because it seems like it's licensed to be looser, rather than tighter, with your narrative, and I feel like the more that you're going to try to get an audience into a kind of twilight state, hinterland, like that liminal state between where they experience things for real and where they imagine things, you've got to really be on your game, you've got to absolutely have a real firm grasp on what story you're telling. I really feel like you want to grip people, as if they are having like the most riveting dream they possibly could experience, in the dark, in this case with other people in the Almeida Theatre.

**Do you think the theatre at the Almeida adds to that – will it keep that tension, being such a small auditorium?**

**IR:** Well I think that the Almeida Theatre space is one of the most evocative theatre spaces in London, because it has something of the dream about it. It's intimate, yet there's a kind of epic quality – it's a found space and I think that can only add to the feeling of what the play is doing.

**How was the casting process for you, are you excited about working with the actors in the play?**

**IR:** I think that there are writers that attract a certain type of player. Harold Pinter's work requires certain instruments to play it, and I think it's the same with Jez's work, that you need actors that have the ability to play a particular tune through language, to be receptive to his idiom and his sense of music, and that's part of the joy of casting, finding those instruments. In the middle of the play you've got Toby Jones, playing the character Ned, and Toby is such an intelligent, compelling, interesting person to watch, he doesn't look like an actor, he looks so interesting and he has such depth as a performer. And his wife Joy, played by Amanda Drew, has such a brilliant ability to be ambiguous, yet completely real and focused, which is quite an achievement. And then their neighbour, Dale, played by Andy Lincoln, who is the guide, throughout the evening, has such charm, and soul, and a brilliant lightness of touch, which is such a beautiful quality for Jez's language. So when you're casting, you're thinking, 'what ingredients can we find to make the meal', the recipe that makes the script.

**JB:** I think it's superbly cast. I can spot in an audition straight away if they can make it ring the way I need it to sound – it's like being able to sing in a register I suppose. And I don't really know what it is, I can't really put my finger on it, but they can just do it, and you pick the ones that can for this type of work. I think they're all very accessible performers as well. I think they're very, very good messengers, very good storytellers all of them, and coupled with the fact that I think this is actually the most accessible play I've yet written; it's kind of a mystery story, it has a simple almost like 'whodunnit' motor working inside of it, that I think really, really draws you in, and I think they tell that beautifully, so far in the rehearsals they're telling that beautifully, so we're really excited about it.



Toby Jones in rehearsal  
Photo: Bridget Jones

**Assistant Director on *Parlour Song*, Lottie Johansen-Bibby, gives us an insight into the rehearsal process, from read-through to opening night.**

## Week One

It's been a big week. The cast and creative team have come together for the first time at the Almeida to confront this very beautiful, very poetic and very moving play. We've been really lucky that we've had Jez with us for the whole week, so we've all been able to quiz him, get his point of view on things and also get a better understanding of some of the ideas, contexts and atmospheres of the play.

On day one, everyone feels a bit hyper – not least me: I'm so excited to be working with such a talented team. Toby, Amanda and Andy all arrive, and we are greeted by the stage managers and the creative team. Stephen, our composer as well as Jeremy, our designer are here today too, and we start the morning with getting to know each other. We play the categories game: in pairs, Ian asks us to speak for a minute to our partner on a range of topics inspired by the play. We have fun telling each other about 'shopping centres we have known and loved', 'experiences with rodents' and 'objects we have lost'. After the ice has thawed, we read the play together, with different people taking different parts.

In the afternoon, we have the meet & greet with all the Almeida Theatre staff, and then Jeremy shows us the model box. He shows us imagery – prints and footage which help to locate the atmosphere of the play in a slightly dream / nightmare suburban world.

We are reading through the text, discussing in detail the characters, associations, blurred and concrete facts, and making tiny adjustments to the text with Jez. The language is so rich and tightly woven, and the image systems are beautiful. The characters are really complicated, not least because Jez is fascinated by internal conflict, and the fact that we are almost always dealing with conflicting desires in ourselves.

Ian asks the actors to do short improvisations to help get understand the experiences and memories of the characters – for example Amanda and Toby improvise the honeymoon in Gloucester - the moment when they light a candle in the cathedral and the moment the £50 note blows down the street towards them; Andy improvises a day with the Kosovans at the car wash, and suddenly has a far better understanding of the stresses of not being understood in his daily life.

We also have some guests during the week. Ian has brilliantly managed to get hold of Dr Darian Leader, a psychotherapist who has recently published a book *The New Black* about depression, melancholy and grief. Loss is such a central theme in the play. In many ways these characters are barely functioning while their sadness and frustrations express themselves only in dreams. Darian has some very interesting thoughts on the characters, and the actors find it really useful to have him the rehearsals. We also have our fitness levels put to the test, when Alex, a personal trainer, comes in to show us the ropes – Ned/Toby has a huge exercise moment in scene 6, and Dale/Andy has to act as Ned's trainer, so the more moves they can get down the better.

We end the week feeling tired but excited - ready for the next task which will be getting the text on its feet.

***Me & Lyn, Ned and Joy, we live six feet apart. It's the same house. But round theirs everything's backwards.***

**Dale  
Scene Two**



Amanda Drew and Ian Rickson in rehearsal  
Photo: Bridget Jones

*I'm always in the Arndale Centre. The Chemist is there. The newsagents is there. Tesco's is there. That's where I go. That's where I shop.*

**Joy**  
**Scene Two**

## Week Two

When we arrive on Monday morning, the whole feel of the rehearsal room has changed. Stage management have been busy preparing a mark-up of the ground plan, so we can start to get a visual idea of the main circular playing space, the curved apron, and the two moving quadrants. This week is all about starting to get the scenes up on their feet and embodying the characters, so we will be working through the play scene by scene.

The actors have already done a brilliant job of becoming familiar with the text, so we can really play with different actions, intentions and obstacles of the characters. The actors are searching for objectives in every mini section of the text, but Ian has also set them the test of searching for a 'super-objective' – the big thought that perhaps forms the kernel of why they do everything they do. The characters are complex and ever-shifting in their intentions, partly because they move so dizzily from their conscious to their unconscious, but there are some things about the need to find connection and the need to feel alive that are emerging for all the characters.

We spend a whole session on Thursday on character work and physicality. It's the first time that the whole company is together this week, as apart from scene 7, the whole play is a series of duologues. Ian leads some exercises which focus on the 'social masks' under which the characters hide their inner selves. The actors use the demarcated spaces of inside and outside the marked up circle, to represent a move between their most vulnerable, private states and the fronts they put on when with others. More about the characters' psychology emerges from an exercise where the actors place their characters on a scale of 1 – 10 in response to various questions like 'How well do you get on with your mother?' 'How much TV do you watch?' and 'How often do you think about death?'

We have another special guest in the rehearsal room this week – John Woodward, Vice President of the Institute of Demolition Engineers, who has come to share his expertise about demolitions. He speaks to us about his job, and shows us some great footage of a 5 tower block demolition in Glasgow which he was responsible for co-ordinating. He is extraordinarily generous with his thoughts, and Toby in particular



Andrew Lincoln and Toby Jones in rehearsal  
Photo: Bridget Jones

**Dale:** *How did you get that birdbath out? I'm just curious. Because, by all accounts, that was one weighty, weighty bath. Seriously, how did you nick his birdbath?*

**Joy:** *Strictly speaking, it was my birdbath.*

## Scene Seven

finds the visit invaluable as he constructs the inner life of Ned. Penny Dyer, dialect coach, also visits to watch the actors. She gives some specific feedback, and helps the actors with the accent of a 'just-outside-the-M25' suburban community. She speaks for example about the vowel sounds which are a blend of the sounds of London, where historically these families would have come from, and the sounds of the rural countryside onto which these new communities have built.

The walls of the rehearsal room are starting to take on a life of their own, helping us to understand the world of the play. We have worked on creating a chronology of the play, a family tree which including all living creatures mentioned in the play and a map which details all the places mentioned.

### Week Three

Ian used a brilliant image to describe the honing process of what we are doing in the next stages of rehearsal: it's like the crafting of a cricket bat. If a ball hits an untreated slab of wood, it won't make much of a journey; but as you sand, and vanish, and work, and polish the wood, you prepare dynamic surface, which, when the moment of impact arrives, will send the ball flying through the air.

This week, we've been through all the scenes again adding detail and making sure there is a thought at the root of every utterance. We've looked at how the quadrants might move between scenes, as, courtesy of the workshop, we've had two moving quadrants in the room that replicate the revolve on stage. We've looked at what Dale's physical journey might be during his speeches and in relation to the quadrants, and we've looked more at the physicality of the characters, their rhythms of operating, and how they disguise their inner fears.

We are still puzzling over the question of who is stealing Ned's stuff. Although there are clues in the text, it is also deliberately ambiguous. Part of the allure of the play is that it leaves the audience in 'the corridor of uncertainty', to use another cricketing metaphor which has become popular in the rehearsal room. We have tried playing scenes different ways; but the relationship of Ned and Joy is so rich and complicated, and their scenes get ever more so as we go on. They are constantly playing games with each other, taunting each other further into fantasy, as their need for connection, for belief, and to not be alone, triumphs over their need to hear the truth.

We look at Laban's 'efforts' in relation to the characters. In improvisations, Amanda, Andy and Toby explore where their characters lie on the continuums of direct-indirect, sustained-changeable, and light-heavy. We then continue to work physically on the idea of sleeplessness, and Ian guides the actors through the journey of experiencing and coping with sleeplessness. It leads into a brilliantly revealing writing exercise, in which the actors have a minute to write their characters' responses to stimuli like 'I am...', 'People are...' and 'Life is...'. Even the handwriting is revealing.

Laura Hunt has been to visit to talk about costume with the actors. Ian and Jeremy decided not to design costumes in advance, as they wanted them to grow organically as the characters grew. Everyone has had some very clear impulses for their costume: Andy has already been trying out his gold chains and khaki shorts in rehearsals. Amanda has had some beautiful ideas for jade green dresses for Joy, which somehow echo the colour of the



Andrew Lincoln and Toby Jones in rehearsal  
Photo: Bridget Jones

forest; and Toby has been thinking about Ned's sportswear – should it be all new, bought especially for his new self-improvement drive, or old stuff that's been years in the back of the wardrobe?

On Friday, we manage a very respectable run. Ian still not sure whether we will have an interval, but we try it today with a break between scenes 4 and 5. The piece really is in good shape, and the actors are pleased. And we still have two weeks in the rehearsal room to continue preparing for the match!

#### Week Four

The highlight of week four has undoubtedly been our field trip to 21 Hammerskjold Road, Harlow. Ian really wanted to give the company a sense of the house, the estate and the kind of town where Ned, Joy and Dale live, to help embody the reality of their lives and to give them an experience to feed on for their performance. Our Stage Managers amazingly managed to charm the sales reps of Barratt Homes, and on Wednesday, as if by magic, we found ourselves in The Madison, a four bedroom show home on the outskirts of Harlow. In exchange for a photo shoot, the show home was ours for 24 hours, to rehearse in, to sleep in, and to drink gin and tonic.

The scenes had a whole different sensation in situ – Joy's bedroom at the top of the house actually had a view of the M11, so Dale's "You can see the motorway from here" took on an absolute reality. Rehearsing the scene between Joy and Dale in the garden in the darkness added an intimacy and a danger that we'd not experienced in the rehearsal room. We also took a trip into the centre of Harlow, with the actors asked to perform various tasks, like finding a story of interest in the local paper. The place seemed uncannily like the world we see in the play, with its shopping centre in town, its roundabouts and petrol stations, and its proximity to but suspicious relationship towards the countryside. Observing people and place, the actors returned to the rehearsal room with renewed energy and a whole pot of sensory data to draw on.

Toby and Andy have worked hard on the 'exercise' scenes this week. In scene 3, they have to perform an exercise routine while Toby narrates the story of his honeymoon in Gloucester - the juxtaposing of potentially comic movement and the lightness and poetry of his story is a bit of a technical feat. Similarly, his work out at the beginning of scene 6, which sees him moving through six or seven 'circuits' before attacking his sofa with a skipping rope, is a tough physical sequence, and Toby has created something perfectly timed and brilliantly executed.

We were struggling at bit with the end of Ned's dream when he 'kills' Joy,

*Few years back.. We used to spend all day in bed. Drinking tea. Playing Scrabble. Then.. you know.. Between games. All day long. Five, sometimes six games of Scrabble... Then we stopped. We haven't played in years. I'm not sure I'd even remember the rules.*

#### Ned Scene Three



Amanda Drew in rehearsal  
Photo: Bridget Jones

*That first barbecue. I thought you were a ghost. I thought you were all ghosts. Ghouls. In the dark. Laughing. But you're the one warm thing I've touched for years. The only thing that's been there in years. I can barely look at you.*

**Joy**  
**Scene Seven**

trying to find a way for Toby to convincingly 'do' violence without actually doing damage, as he smashes a cricket bat on the figure sleeping in the bed. In the end, and with the help of Jez who has been back with us for a couple of days this week, a brilliant solution has emerged - smothering Joy with a pillow instead of battering her with a cricket bat. Somehow, it seems on theme with the idea of the characters' claustrophobia and the importance of breath in the piece.

Friday ended with the whole creative and stage management teams watching our first run through of the piece. With one more week left in the rehearsal room, the shape is really there and we can now concentrate on fine tuning, especially playing with the musicality of the text - its refrains, rhythms and tempos - so that by the time tech week arrives, the company feel strong, secure, playful and ready to move to the next level.

### **Week Five**

It's the fifth and final week in the rehearsal room, and it's a week of transition. We're somewhere on the cusp of being ready to leave the rehearsal room, but not quite yet ready to move into the theatre. This week is about refining and reminding, but also about developing and preparing to move up to the next level.

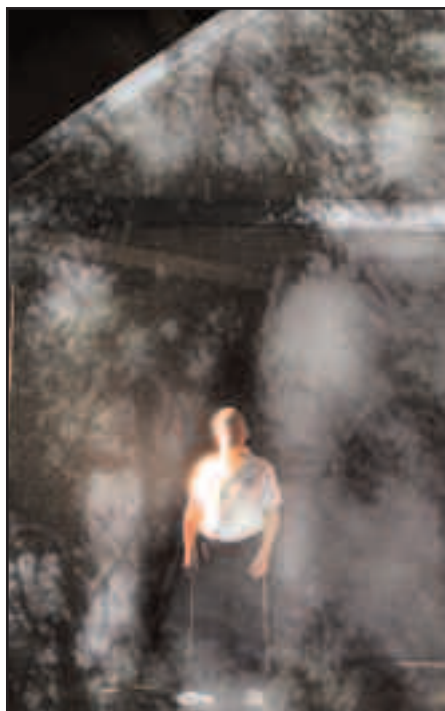
We look at all the scenes again during the week, and the actors try increasingly to pin down the super-objective of their character. Ian looks at each scene, working in detail on each small section of the text. We also have several sessions of line drilling for the actors. Everyone agrees that Jez Butterworth's language is not simple to learn – fluid, shifting and wound in upon itself, it somehow so brilliantly reflects the rhythms and illogical reality of speech that sometime it disappears from the tip of the tongue.

Ian works with Andy on his monologues, particularly concentrating on his relationship with the audience. What is so hilarious, tragic and even childlike about Dale's character, is his ability to compartmentalise: he can somehow manage to be best mates with Ned at the same time as having an affair with his wife; he can be in the middle of one thought, but when another one arrives in his head, he forgets where he was and is entirely hijacked by it.

On Friday, we are able to spend a couple of hours in the theatre, giving the actors a sense of the shape and feeling of the space. There are lots of moments now that really need the audience in order to develop: Toby's 'cunnilingus' moment, for example, is enduringly hilarious, but its real rhythms won't really be found until he is playing to an audience.

The rest of the creative team have been in the rehearsal room much more frequently this week, continuing to plot cues and to make material for props. On Wednesday afternoon, the actors spend a couple of hours over the road in a recording studio breathing into microphones; Steven Warbeck the composer is using breath as a basis for his sound material, given that it is such an important image in the play. Jez is also back with us for a run-through on Thursday, and he suggests a change to the end section of the play, cutting the dialogue between Ned and Dale before Ned tells us his dream; this really helps the flow.

Monday will be our very last day in the rehearsal room. On Tuesday, we move into the theatre, and the technical rehearsals begin. There are nerves but there is also confidence and excitement. The team have worked so diligently, so warmly and so generously together over the last five weeks – it has been a pleasure and a privilege, and we are all excited to see how the next chapter, with the audience, will unfold.



## Brecht in *Parlour Song*:

Dale's **direct address** to the audience **breaking fourth wall**.

Dale's **asides**.

**Cyclical structure** – flashbacks not necessarily in chronological order

**Surtitles** – written into script and projected in this production.

**No clear resolution.**

## Stanislavski in rehearsal:

Actors' research 'homework' into **objectives & super-objectives**.

Breaking down scenes into **units**.

Rehearsal time spent in Barratt Home in Harlow – method/experiential approach: **emotion memory**

The rehearsal process of *Parlour Song* involved exploration into realistic and psychological aspects of characters; yet there are strong elements in the text of *Parlour Song* that are influenced by the theories of Bertolt Brecht. Here, we contrast the theories of these two seminal theatre practitioners.

Constantin Stanislavski worked in Russia in the late 19th Century, and is often regarded as the first great theatre practitioner. Through his professional lifetime, he developed a number of realistic acting techniques and theories into a user-friendly 'System', providing actors with a solid, practical and psychological framework for approaching a character. This approach was text-centred, and instructed actors to find the source of information about their character from what the playwright had written in the script. It put the onus on the actor to create the world of the play through their written character. He believed that if the character was true to the play, the story would in turn be told truthfully.

If Stanislavski puts the actor at the heart of the art of theatre, Bertolt Brecht's career marked the re-emergence of the playwright as theatre's creative centre. Brecht was strongly opposed to the theatrical conventions of his time, namely a strict adherence to linear narrative and a realistic/naturalistic style, as advocated by Stanislavski.

Brechtian theatre articulated popular themes with avant-garde experimentation of form. Standing in sharp contrast both to the psychological and actor-led theatre, as propagated by Stanislavski, Brecht's theatre explored the nature of the psyche in *society*, where personality is seen to be the product of social conditioning, and thus completely changeable. Stanislavski thought of the nature of a character to be rooted in the playtext, which influenced their course of action through the play by colouring the character's over-arching motive, their super-objective.

Brecht's concept of Epic Theatre stems from his belief that a play should not cause the spectator to identify *emotionally* with the characters or action before him or her, but should instead provoke rational self-reflection and a critical view of the action on the stage. Audiences were encouraged to adopt a critical perspective in order to recognise social injustice and exploitation and to be moved to go forth from the theatre and effect change in the world outside. For this purpose, Brecht employed the use of techniques that remind the spectator that the play is a representation of reality and not reality itself. This is in sharp contrast to Stanislavski, whose creation of the Fourth Wall encouraged an audience's detachment from the 'theatre event' and the illusion of actual reality happening in the performance space.

Where Stanislavski lured the audience into the 'real-life' emotional world of a play, one of Brecht's most important principles was what he called the *Verfremdungseffekt* (translated as 'the effect of defamiliarisation'). This involved stripping events on the stage of their familiar, obvious qualities, to create a sense of the distance. To this end, Brecht employed techniques such as the actor's direct address to the audience, harsh and bright stage lighting, the use of songs to interrupt the narrative action, explanatory placards and speaking the stage directions out loud. This is the antithesis to the Stanislavskian ideal, where effects are dictated by the emotional through-line of action within the text, and stage directions feed directly, and silently into the actors' true-to-life performances.

# Context: Stanislavski Vs Brecht

Constantin Stanislavski	Bertolt Brecht
1863-1938	1898-1956
Moscow Art Theatre, Russia	Berliner Ensemble, Berlin, Germany
The System	Epic Theatre
Truth	Constructed representation of reality
Theatre as a high art form	Theatre as a model for political expression
Actor as centre of creative process	Writer as creative core of theatre art
The fourth wall	Verfremdungseffekt: distancing, de-familiarisation, direct address
Actor to 'live the part'	Actor to 'represent' the character
Credible behaviour in believable circumstances	Behaviour dictated by circumstances
Verisimilitude & emotional truth	Political 'truth' of the text
Linear plot	Cyclical narrative
Objectives & Super-objectives Given circumstances	Intrinsically changeable nature of character personality dictated by social conditions
Text as source for all material for actor & director	Text as changeable, adaptable source material
Ensemble company, but individual character research work	Collective and collaborative working method; experiential research in rehearsal
Cathartic climax	Critical reflection and call to action
Stella Adler & Lee Strasberg – The Actors' Studio; dominant Hollywood & screen acting style; naturalistic acting; Michael Chekhov; Dominic Dromgoole – <i>The Actor and the Target</i>	Joan Littlewood – Theatre Workshop; Augusto Boal – Theatre of the Oppressed; Pina Bausch; Caryl Churchill



Toby Jones  
Photo: Simon Annand

Jez Butterworth takes the title of his play from a form of music popular in middle-class homes in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

As Ian Rickson said, on the first day of rehearsal:

“The basic ‘plot’ of many blues songs is this: my baby left me, she stole all my stuff, she’s run off with my best mate...and I want to kill her. That’s basically the plot, the song of Jez’s play.”

And essentially *Parlour Song* is the Blues set in Suburban Britain. The typical blues plot is Ned’s story as narrated by Dale: Ned’s having trouble with his marriage, his possessions are going missing and he suspects his wife of stealing them; Ned’s wife has an affair with next-door neighbour Dale, and she is planning to leave him. Ned’s recurrent nightmare is that he kills his wife – his fear of falling asleep comes from fighting against the subconscious desire to do so.

The heyday of parlour music came in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, during the Victorian era in North America and the British Isles.

Many of the more popular parlour songs were transcriptions (notated versions of sounds or songs) of traditional folk tunes, or African-American spirituals. Blues emerged at the end of the 19th century as an accessible form of self-expression in African-American communities, and can be described as a sub-genre of spiritual. There were various genres of parlour music, including patriotic, religious, and those destined for the stage or music hall. Some parlour songs took well-known pieces of classical music, for example from Italian operas, and added lyrics to the tune. Lyrics written for parlour songs often have sentimental themes, such as love songs or poetic meditations.

In Victorian times, the rise in popularity of parlour music came partly as a result of a steady increase in the number of middle-class households with enough surplus cash to purchase musical instruments and music lessons, and with the leisure time to engage in recreational music-making. Its popularity declined through the 20th century as advances in technology and their use in society and the home meant radio and record-player ownership became more widespread, and replaced parlour entertainment as easy sources of popular music.

Characteristic and popular parlour songs include *Home, Sweet Home*, by Henry R. Bishop and John Howard Payne; *The Old Arm Chair* by Henry Russell; *When the Swallows Homeward Fly* by Franz Abt; *Kathleen Mavourneen* by Frederick Nicholl Crouch and Marion Crawford; *The Lost Chord* by Arthur Sullivan and Adelaide A. Proctor; *Take Back the Heart* by Claribel (Mrs. Charlotte Barnard), *Oh! Promise Me* by Reginald de Koven; *I Love You Truly* by Carrie Jacobs-Bond; and *The Rosary* by Ethelbert Nevin.

*Joy don’t know. She don’t know about the dream.  
(Beat) Joy don’t know the half of it.*

Dale  
Scene Three



## Arndale Centres in the UK

Aberdeen  
Accrington  
Bolton\*  
Bradford\*  
Doncaster\*  
Eastbourne  
Jarrow\*  
Lancaster  
Leeds, Armley  
Leeds, Crossgates \*  
Leeds, Headingley  
Luton\*  
Manchester  
Middleton\*  
Nelson\*  
Poole\*  
ShIPLEY  
Sunderland  
Stretford\*  
Wandsworth\*  
Wellingborough

\*Name now changed

The concept of urban regeneration is not a new one. Back in the early 1960s, the arrival of an Arndale shopping centre was seen as the resurrection of many a moribund town centre. This new style of indoor shopping revolutionised the British high street.

In the 1960s, damage and disrepair from two world wars still scarred many British towns. Many buildings that had been repaired or rebuilt were once again in need of attention, due to the poor quality and scarcity of wartime building materials. Arndale Centres were intended to give the modern consumer a convenient form of shopping, in towns which had previously offered shoppers nothing but rambling, often war-damaged high streets.

Shortly after the end of World War II Arnold Hagenbach, a baker with a talent for property investment, and Sam Chippindale, an estate agent from Otley, set up a company called the Arndale Property Trust, the name being a combination of "Arnold" and "Chippindale". The two men established a company which pioneered the indoor shopping centre concept in Britain, inspired by big malls in the United States.

The Arndale Centres were largely successful, but they also attracted a great deal of criticism as they often involved demolishing old Victorian or Edwardian buildings and replacing them with modern concrete constructions in a distinctly brutalist style. In Luton, the entire town centre was demolished to make way for the Arndale development. In Manchester too, it was a very controversial development, obliterating some of the city centre's old streets and alleys, and stubbornly defying all the old Victorian grandeur surrounding it, with its massive monolithic concrete form. Furthermore, this regeneration was never cheap: in Manchester, for example the whole project cost some £100 million - a then unthinkable sum. The value of the Wandsworth Arndale was maximised by the high-rise tower blocks built on top of the mall, which helped it to become, according to some commentators, "one of London's great architectural disasters".

The first Arndale Centre opened in Jarrow, on South Tyneside, in 1961. Each new Arndale successively became the largest indoor shopping centre in Europe. Luton's Arndale centre had this status before being upstaged by the Arndale Centres in Wandsworth and Manchester.

The largest Arndale Centre built to date was Manchester Arndale. Begun in 1972, by its completion in 1979 it was the largest covered town shopping centre in Europe, covering some 30 acres in the old city centre, with 750,000 shoppers visiting it each week. Located in the heart of the city, Manchester's Arndale Centre in many ways dominates the central shopping area of the City. The centre was bombed by the IRA in 1996 and badly damaged. It was redeveloped and modernized and now has over 200 shops, major department stores, restaurants and fast food outlets.

Many Arndale Centres now have changed their names, with the feeling that the Arndale name carries too many connotations, with recent years seeing the exodus of supermarkets, grocers and traditional markets, and the influx of a more shabby selection of downmarket shops. When Arndales were originally built, the concept was to make the walkways dark, so as to allow the shops to shine out. The revamped shopping centres are trying to divert attention from their 'anonymous' grey-clad frontages, and make the indoors lighter and brighter.

The play deals with a number of issues that are particularly interesting to explore in the classroom. Below are just a few pointers for discussion and some practical exercises.

## 1. The Play in Six Stages

Jez Butterworth uses the following surtitles to introduce a new scene in the play:

EVERYTHING'S DISAPPEARING  
FACE IT. IT'S A DEAD DUCK  
EACH YEAR, THE BIRDS COME BACK  
AN UNQUENCHABLE THIRST  
I TRIED TO GROW LEMONS LAST YEAR  
IT STARTED TO RAIN

These surtitles are projected onto the set at the beginning of each scene and each one is repeated as a line by one of the characters in the play. What clues to they give about the play? Can you invent your own narrative around these surtitles? If you were writing a play about your own life, what surtitles would you use?

## 2. The Significance of Objects

Read the following excerpt from the play:

<b>Ned</b>	Anyway, we're walking down the high street, and suddenly I see this thing blowing towards us down the pavement. And I bend down and pick it up and it's a fifty pound note.
<b>Dale</b>	Bollocks.
<b>Ned</b>	On my life. A nifty.
<b>Dale</b>	Get in!
<b>Ned</b>	Just blowing down the street. Just blowing along the pavement.
<b>Dale</b>	Get in! (off watch) Go. (They start skipping again).
<b>Ned</b>	So I have a shuffy round and no-one's looking distraught, no-one's patting themselves down, having kittens, shouting for the fuzz... so I think, "result" and I stick it in my pocket. So I say to Joy, you know, what shall we do with it. And Joy turns to me, it's this lovely sunny day, and she turns to me, and she says this brilliant, really touching thing..
<b>Dale</b>	Oh no. Don't...
<b>Ned</b>	What? (Dale stops).
<b>Dale</b>	She didn't. Tell me she didn't make you hand it in.
<b>Ned</b>	Wait. Wait. No. She doesn't. She doesn't say that. She says.. She says this fantastically romantic thing. (Ned stops). She says that it's a sign. From the God's. From God. Or whatever, blessing our nuptials. And she said to honour the Gods, whatever, we should take half each and go and buy each other a present. Something spontaneous, you know, that we'd remember forever, to remember this moment by. Like if you saw it in ten years time or whatever, it would nourish us. You know, when you think of.. Just two people... in Gloucester... walking down the street...
<b>Dale</b>	Amazing. Magical.
<b>Ned</b>	Just two normal people, find this money...
<b>Dale</b>	Get in!
<b>Ned</b>	It's amazing. And then she says that...
<b>Dale</b>	It's a moment. It becomes a moment...
<b>Ned</b>	Spontaneous-
<b>Dale</b>	With the money.
<b>Ned</b>	Exactly. But it's not about the money.
<b>Dale</b>	Ned. Come. Of course it's not. It's the magical...
<b>Ned</b>	Exactly.
<b>Dale</b>	The magical mystery...
<b>Ned</b>	Exactly. So we buy a Yorkie, something, juicy fruit, break it for change, and agree to meet back in an hour outside Argos.
<b>Dale</b>	I like this. I like this story. (They start skipping again).
<b>Ned</b>	So here I am, walking around Gloucester with this big smile on my face, thinking, this is great. I am a man. On his honeymoon. I'm on my own but it's a lovely day, and I'm somewhere in this old town, and there's a woman walking around performing this magical task, on a quest to honour me. And I shall honour her. Plus you've got the balloon ride to look forward to.
<b>Dale</b>	Yeah but I'm not thinking about the balloon ride at this point.
<b>Ned</b>	Of course not. You're lost in the moment. You're in the zone. I like this story. I like it a lot.
<b>Dale</b>	So I start browsing. Pop in a couple of antique shops, because my first thought was get her something old. I just thought. Gloucester. Olde Worlde. Something classic. Something with soul.
<b>Ned</b>	With...
<b>Dale</b>	With...
<b>Ned</b>	With a past...
<b>Dale</b>	Character...

CONTINUED...

**Ned** A treasure... Exactly. I'm looking at all these bits and bobs. Trinkets, whatnot, but nothing's leaping out.  
**Dale** Whoops.  
**Ned** I go from shop to shop. Nothing's leaping out.  
**Dale** I didn't like to say but you're going to struggle. In most antique shops with twenty five sheets-  
**Ned** I can't find anything...  
**Dale** What are we talking, realistically? Some old bottle? Some tin? "It's filled with the patina of a bygone era". Really. It's a piece of leather, you nit. It's a leather strap. And, you don't even know what it's off. Can I stop you Ned? Two words. Victoria's Secrets.  
**Ned** What?  
**Dale** If that was me with twenty five sheets I'd get straight up Victoria's Secrets. Up the minty end. Get something really cheap and minty.  
**Ned** Dale-  
**Dale** It's my honeymoon, Ned. There's no better time. "There you go love. I'll give you something to... fuckin'... nourish..." *(Beat)* Ignore me. Please. Carry on. Please. I like this story. Ignore me. *(Beat. Ned sighs. Soldiers on)*.  
**Ned** Now I don't know Gloucester. So I go round this one corner, and suddenly, the shops have stopped. I've run out of shops.  
**Dale** And rest. *(Dale stops. Ned too)*.  
**Ned** I'm walking out of Gloucester. And I don't know why, but I didn't turn round. I just kept on walking. It's just petrol stations and roundabouts. Then the countryside. It's like I'm in a dream. But I can't stop walking. *(Beat)* So I'm at this roundabout, fourth or fifth out of town. I come across this yard. And it's just this portakabin, and this old bloke selling all these objects. Stone things. Wood things. Garden seats. Benches. And I'm suddenly drawn to this blue tarpaulin. And this is mad, but I thought, whatever it is I'm getting her, it's under that blue tarpaulin over there, in the rain. So I go over. And I lift the tarpaulin. And underneath, there's this beautiful, soapstone birdbath. Really simple, but beautiful. Not fussy, just beautifully proportioned. Simple. Perfect. So I knock on the portakabin and I ask the man how much it is for the birdbath. And he says it's twenty five pounds. *(Beat)* On my life. That birdbath, the one over there, under the blue tarp, is twenty five pound. *(Pause)*  
**Dale** Did you haggle? *(Pause)*  
**Ned** What?  
**Dale** You didn't haggle?  
**Ned** You're missing the point Dale. It's twenty five pounds.  
**Dale** Of course. The fuckin'.. The magical mystery twenty five pounds.  
**Ned** Exactly. It's perfect. So I buy it. But now I've got ten minutes to lug it all the way back into Gloucester. It weighs a fucking ton.  
**Dale** Fuckin'.. Rocky. Go on my son.  
**Ned** I'm telling you Dale. It weighs A TON.  
**Dale** Fuck off. It's the magic birdbath. It's light as a feather.  
**Ned** It weighs a fucking ton.  
**Dale** I don't care. Put your back into it.  
**Ned** I've got to dead lift a stone birdbath half a mile back into town. So I get back there, absolutely shagged-  
**Dale** Sweating like a dogger...  
**Ned** Pouring.... pouring with sweat and I show it her. And she looks at it, and I know straight away it's perfect. She's got tears in her eyes. And when we moved into our house, the first thing we did, we put that birdbath in the garden. And on that first morning when we woke up there was this pair of chaffinches perched on it, drinking from it. And every single morning when we woke up, we'd go and sit by the window, before breakfast and watch the birds. Robins. Finches, Warblers, Tits. We'd get up really early in the morning, on a spring morning, we'd watch the birds splashing in the water, watch them preening, dancing for each other, in little pairs, each pair perfect. And each year the birds came back, and each year it was the same. *(Pause)* Yeah. So anyway, I come out this morning. There's just a white patch of grass. It's.. the birdbath has gone. It's disappeared.

Now think about the symbolism expressed in this extract. Consider the following questions, to think about Ned's character in the the play:

What does the birdbath mean to Ned? And what does it say about his relationship with Joy? What is the significance of it disappearing?

**Put yourself in Ned's place:**

Is there an object in your life that means something to you? What does it mean and why? How would you feel if it disappeared? Has your relationship or attachment to that object changed over time?

**Explore it physically:**

Now imagine that you are holding that object in your hand. What does it feel like? Can you use it in some way? Show us what it means to you. Now imagine that your relationship to that object has changed – how can you demonstrate this shift in your relationship to the object?

### 3. Same House, New Door

In Parlour Song, Ned is going through a bit of a mid-life crisis. His life has plodded along, following a certain path – as has Dale’s. But what if something changes? Read the following excerpt:

**Dale** You’ve lived for years in the one house. For years. You know which window sticks, which floorboard creaks. Which tap drips. The cold spots, The damp patch. You know it. Like the back of your hand. You could walk round it - Blindfold. Fix a lightbulb. Make a cup of tea. In your sleep. Find your way - Upstairs. To bed. Blindfold. Then one day. One day, you’re in the house. Fixing a bulb. Leaky tap. Damp patch. Cup of tea. And you look round and there’s.. There’s – A door. There’s a door there. A door you never saw before. In your house. Right there. Before you. A door. A new door. Was it always there? How could you not notice it. How could you not have seen it before. Would you open it?

**Now consider the following questions:**

What do you think Dale is trying to say here? What does the door symbolise for him? Is it hope? Freedom of choice? An opportunity to break free from the monotony of life? What do you think lies behind the door? What possibility or path has suddenly opened up to Dale? Is it a good or a bad one?

**Create your own situation:**

Think about a location that is familiar to you. Imagine you are walking around in that place. What can you see, hear, smell? Repeat the same pathway through the space a few times, without altering it. Make sure you are really familiar with it.

**Make a discovery:**

Now imagine that you have discovered something new in that location for the first time. What is it? What does it mean? How have you not noticed it before? Can you interact with it – open it? Look inside it? Go through it? Touch it? What does this discovery mean to you?

### 4. Keeping a Diary

Ned embarks upon an exercise regime and is dieting. He keeps a diary of what he has eaten that week:

**Ned** (*Reads*) Monday. Breakfast. Fruit loops. Skimmed Milk. A banana. Lunch. Grilled aubergine. Two ounces of cous cous. A raw apple. Dinner. 2 Sardines on toast. A raw apple. Tuesday. Breakfast. Two egg whites on ryvita. Lunch. Carrot and broccoli spears, low fat cream cheese. A raw apple. Dinner. One Sardine on Toast. A raw apple. Wednesday. Breakfast. One egg white on ryvita. Lunch. Carrot and broccoli spears. No cream cheese. Dinner. A raw apple. Thursday. Breakfast. Half a mango. Lunch. Two carrots. Dinner. A glass of Lemongrass tea and a raw apple.

**Dale** What about Friday.

(*Pause*)

**Ned** A raw apple.

(*Pause*)

**Dale** Saturday.

**Ned** I was up in Tring Saturday. We’re blowing up a hospital. Busy day. I was busy all day.

**Dale** Sunday.

**Ned** Sunday I wasn’t that hungry. But when I got back about two in the morning, I had three cups of coffee.

**Dale** To recap. Since Thursday you’ve eaten two raw apples. And three cups of coffee.

He also keeps a record of his business trips:

**Ned** NED: Have you ever kept a diary Dale. A diary. A journal. You ever a diarist? I do. Not a diary as such. I keep a record of sorts. Every time I go away, stay in a motel, Novotel, bed and breakfast, I have to keep the receipts and they reimburse me each quarter. You’ve got to be thorough or you never see it back. So I keep a record. Listen to this. Here. (*reads*) 12th March. Newbury services. A bacon sandwich. Apple turnover. Two bags of Cheese and Onion. Can of Lilt. Map of Berkshire. Daily Mail. Fifteen gallons of two star. £7.10. (*Beat*) Funny though. Just reading that, I remember the day perfectly. It chucked it down all day. The M4 was a nightmare. (*Reads*) 17th March. Room at the Travelodge, Sedgemoor Services. £46. Club Sandwich. £3.95. Gladiator on Pay Per View. £8.50. Petrol, £29. (*Beat*) 22nd March. Lunch at the Fight Cocks in St. Albans with three local councillors. The rotisserie deluxe for four people, and wine, £98.60 with a ten pound tip. I remember all these days. Can’t remember their names or nothing. I can see their faces. I can picture them, eating. In that pub.

**Now consider:**

What clues do Ned’s diary excerpts give you about him as a person and the life that he leads? Do they tell you how he is feeling? Can you read between the lines?

**Explore: Verbatim versus Subtext**

Try re-writing the sub-text of Ned’s diaries – what is he really saying here? Alternatively, have one person read the diary verbatim, and someone else play Ned’s alter-ego, interspersing his true feelings within the text of the diary.



Toby Jones and Andrew Lincoln  
Photo: Simon Annand

## Jez Butterworth & British Theatre of the 1990s

- Maddy Costa  
**Blood Sweat & Tears**  
[www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2006/mar/07/theatre](http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2006/mar/07/theatre)  
*Jez Butterworth interviewed by The Guardian in March 2006.*
- Dominic Dromgoole  
**The Full Room**
- Richard Eyre & Nicholas Wright  
**Changing Stages** *A view of British theatre in the 20th Century.*
- Mark Lawson  
**The Grass is Always Greener**  
[www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2009/mar/24/jez-butterworth](http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2009/mar/24/jez-butterworth)  
*Jez Butterworth interviewed by The Guardian in March 2009 relating to the Almeida Theatre's production of Parlour Song.*
- Royal Court Theatre  
[www.royalcourttheatre.com](http://www.royalcourttheatre.com) *some historical context of post-war British playwriting and an excellent bookshop selling many modern texts.*
- Aleks Sierz  
**In Yer Face Theatre**  
[www.inyerface-theatre.com](http://www.inyerface-theatre.com)

## Theatre Practitioners

- Jean Benedetti  
**Stanislavski: An Introduction**
- Bertolt Brecht  
**On Theatre** (Trans. John Willett)
- Declan Donnellan  
**The Actor and the Target**
- Constantin Stanislavski  
**An Actor Prepares / Building a Character / Creating a Role**
- John Willett  
**The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht**
- <http://www.bertolt.com/> *The Bertolt Brecht Website*

## Arndale Centres

- [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arndale\\_Centres](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arndale_Centres)
- [www.shoutluton.com/shopping/page1.html](http://www.shoutluton.com/shopping/page1.html) *Luton*
- [www.manchester2002-uk.com/shops/arndale-centre.html](http://www.manchester2002-uk.com/shops/arndale-centre.html) *Manchester*

## Parlour Music

- [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parlour\\_music](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parlour_music)
- [www.parlorsongs.com](http://www.parlorsongs.com) *A great source of popular American Parlour Songs from 1800s-1920s*



## Parlour Song Projects Pack

Compiled by Charlie Payne, with assistance from Samantha Lane, Natalie Mitchell, Anne Langford and Louise Glover.

*Parlour Song* by Jez Butterworth was produced at the Almeida Theatre from 19 March - 9 May 2009.

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