

Emma Thompson: A Life in Pictures sponsored by Deutsche Bank

24 November 2013 at BAFTA 195 Piccadilly

Boyd Hilton: Hello my name is Boyd Hilton. I'm a critic, journalist, writer, that kind of thing. I am delighted you've all come to this very exciting event. First of all I'd like to thank Deutsche Bank for their continuing support of BAFTA's A Life in Pictures series.

When I got an email a few weeks ago with a heading A Life in Pictures Emma Thompson, I thought 'oh, a chance to see one of my favourite people talking for an hour and a half at BAFTA, that's going to be good.' And then it turned out they actually wanted me to host the event. I thought, 'well, it's going to be one of the greatest days of my life', because I grew up watching Emma in her early days as one of the members of the alternative comedy scene, with Fry and Laurie and those people. And then to see [her] over the years grow into one of our greatest actors in the world, surely has been a pretty incredible story, so I'm incredibly excited, I hope you are too. Before we welcome our guest of honour, let's remind ourselves of her pretty incredible career.

Montage of clips

BH: Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Emma Thompson.

Emma Thompson: Thank you. Do you know, I watched that montage, and I thought, wasn't I lucky to be born with a good set of teeth, just here. I think that's accounted for an awful lot.

BH: So it's all down to the teeth?

ET: Mostly, yes. I remember Brian Blessed seeing Howard's End and saying to me afterwards 'Are they all your own teeth Emma?' Yes, unfortunately they are, the bottom set aren't too good they sort of come out like the Alien's. You know, in that thing where they just suddenly come out. Anyway it's horrifying watching all that

BH: Good hair as well though, you have to say maybe hair and teeth?

ET: What, my natural blonde you mean?

BH: Yes it's fabulous.

ET: So glad to get back to that.

BH: Let's start by saying that you grew up in a family of creative people, and actors in particular, your mother and father. So were you ever going to do anything but be an actor, was there ever anything else you thought, oh I could do that rather than being an actor?

ET: I did consider being a hospital administrator, because I was at Camden School for Girls, in Camden Town. Yes, we were known as the bolshie ones. This was the 1970s you know. God I've suddenly gone Goon Show, all sorts of things come out of one when the past is presented on a platter like that. Anyway, what was I saying?

BH: You were saying that you went to Camden School for Girls.

ET: Yes I went to Camden, and there was a woman came, I think they do it a lot more now, but someone from the outside world came to speak to us. She was a hospital administrator, and she had very good shoes and was very articulate. And I thought 'That looks like a good job to me.' So I went home and said to my mum and dad, 'What do you think?', and they said 'good stuff.' I think that they were quite excited that I wasn't going into the theatre.

BH: Avoiding showbusiness...

ET: Yes, exactly, but then I...It all went horribly wrong. I went to the Avignon Theatre Festival when I was 16 and I found a production of Andromache which I loved, and went to see many, many times, and I remember getting up in the middle of the night and writing to my father, and saying 'I really can't turn my back on this business'. Because the people who came to our house were actors and directors, mostly that. Not many writers. Although some did come, Alan Bennett actually, and my Godfather was a

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writer/director called Ronald Eyre, who was a gay man from Bradford, hugely articulate and clever. So I was surrounded by creative people and I don't think it would ever have gone any other way, really.

BH: No, when you get to hang out with Alan Bennett, that must be pretty...

ET: 'Hang out' is not quite the term. I would hang around peanuts, because I was a child of course, you recall.

BH: Was Alan not interested...

ET: 'Mr Bennett would you like a salted peanut?' If you call that hanging out, then yes, I did a lot of that.

BH: So Mr Bennett, I'm obsessed with Alan Bennett now, the whole peanuts/Alan Bennett interface. So you didn't get to discuss much with Alan at the time, you probably wouldn't remember?

ET: I was only about eight.

BH: Ok, fine. So when you went to Cambridge and joined the Footlights, was that a kind of thing that you thought, 'Oh I must go and join this classic institution, that's given us so many great talents over the years', or was it something that you fell into?

ET: Yes, no I didn't know about the existence of Footlights, no I didn't. But, Ok, I...oh god! I used to do a drama class when I was little, and I was very much in love with a man, well a boy who's best friend was very funny and we used to do sketches together, and it was the first time I'd ever done sketches. And the first sketch I ever did on stage was a piece by George Melly, the jazz musician, which was based on Lenny Bruce's How To Relax Your Coloured Friends At Parties. This brilliant piece called the Hampstead Hostess, which if you can believe it now, it's very difficult to believe, this was about 1973 maybe, no...yes, I was born in '59, so about 1972 something like that.

And it was about a Hampstead hostess talking about how marvellous it was to have a black person at her party. I know, you just go 'Oh my god!' but there you go. Lenny Bruce did it first, and then George did it, and it was that experience of making people laugh, that was the first time it ever happened and I was 14 years old. So my friend, Martin, who also did sketch show, went to University, went to Cambridge and became president of Footlights. So my first term I met him in a pub, the Brown of Beef, with Rory McGrath, Jimmy Mulville, Griff Rhys Jones, that lot. Because they were a bit older than me, but still there.

BH: They formed Hat Trick and all of that.

ET: That's right, yeah. I saw my way through University doing radio sketch shows, with Griff Jimmy and Rory, something called 'Injury Time'. So I started with them and then I met Stephen and Hugh in the first term as well, and then they joined Footlights. Hugh came on to audition, and I'll never forget it, because he was dressed in a lot of khaki and had that kind of sloping, slightly uncomfortable elegance that he still has, and I said to Martin, 'Oh he's a star.' And he ended up playing the Emperor of China in Aladdin. In which I appeared as Aladdin wearing fishnet tights and my mother's zip-up suede boots. And Hugh was just brilliant as the Emperor of China, which he played as someone who was sitting on a chair the entire time trying to get someone's attention: 'Could I have a...would it be alright if I..', and he was hysterical, of course. So I grew up with that lot.

BH: And what was it like being, I have to ask, what was it like being...there doesn't seem to be too many women in that group, apart from you, so were you pretty much the only woman in that group, around that time?

ET: Well there was Jan Ravens, who was at Homerton, and came and I think was president of Footlights when I was there. So there was Jan, and of course Sandi Toksvig. And Sandi and me produced the first all-female review in

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Cambridge, which we called 'Woman's Hour'. Which we did for a week, and which came back by popular demand.

BH: Of course.

ET: Of course.

BH: Is it true that Lily Tomlin was a big influence at the time?

ET: Yes Lily Tomlin was who I wanted to be.

BH: Right.

ET: There's a piece by Lily Tomlin, and a Jane Wagner, called Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe. Which I adored at the time, and she was a great influence because she did characters, and she did comedy. Comedy to me was the noblest of all aspirational arts, and I still think it is. And I'm thrilled that my daughter's an absolute stand-up comedian aficionado. And I tried stand-up until I realised that if I carried on doing it I would be dead of a heart attack before I was thirty, because I've never...nothing is so frightening, nothing. I remember standing, 1984, miner's strike, we were doing a benefit for the miners, obviously, not for Thatcher.

BH: Not for the Tory government?

ET: Me, Ben Elton, John Hegley & the Popticians, French and Saunders, and me. And I remember standing backstage, it was at the Young Vic, and my heart was beating so hard, I really did think I was going to have a seizure. And then I thought 'Do you know what, I don't know whether I can do this for a living, it's too frightening.'

BH: What kind of material did you have?

ET: Well, I was - and am - very feminist. So a lot of it was that. I did a whole set, I remember, on Nelson's column at a CND rally, 64,000 people. And I did a lot on herpes, which was big at the time. It seems to have gone away now, everyone had it in those days and you were supposed to

have it forever. But now nobody seems to have it at all, so I can't understand where it's gone? 'Herpes, where is it?' that's going to be the name of my autobiography. And then, anyway, it didn't go down very well, so the rest of the week I went round on the tube, as I still do, thinking every time anyone looked at me I thought 'you were there weren't you, and you hate me'. Because when you go down like a cup of cold sick as a stand-up, you realise that it's you that they hate, personally. Not anything else, it's your material, it's what you've written, they hate you. You. It's not like that was a bad performance, you were shit, that's fine, I can deal with that, but you know.

BH: So you avoided comedy clearly, but did become...you were kind of part of the alternative comedy scene I remember *Alfresco* that kind of TV show.

ET: Which was deeply alternative in that everyone just said 'this is shit'. We got absolutely hammered.

BH: Did you?

ET: Yes, because we were all mates with Rik Mayall, you know Jen and Dawn [French] and all that lot, and they were very, very successful in their field. And Alexei Sayle and Keith Allen, father to Lily, and all of this lot. And they seemed to me to be the gods and goddesses of the universe and I would never be able to aspire to that.

BH: Oh really?

ET: Yeah.

BH: So *Alfresco* was on ITV, maybe that was the problem?

ET: No the problem was that a lot of it wasn't very good, I think that was probably one of the main issues. But there were some very good things in it.

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BH: So what do you think was the key in the transition from Footlights and doing TV sketch shows and that kind of thing to becoming an actor and doing *Tutti Frutti* and *Fortunes of War* and those kind of things?

ET: Well that was accidental, because Robbie Coltrane was in *Alfresco* and this thing *Tutti Frutti*. John Byrne wrote for Robbie, and they were looking for the girl and she had to be Scottish or be able to do Scottish, and Robbie said to the producer, 'I'm working with this bird at the moment, she's quite funny and she's half Scottish, so you could probably get her to do a Scottish [accent] do you want to see her?'. And that's how it happened. I went to see them and did my Scottish accent, which wasn't a problem because of mum, who's from Glasgow. And they asked me to do it and while I was doing it, *Fortunes of War* came along, and that was just one of those odd things, and I had orange hair from doing *Suzi Kettle*, so that's why I had to wear a wig that looked like a cow pat stapled to my head. My friends used to call it Emma's wig.

BH: We know you hate wigs don't you? You are wig averse.

ET: I am wig averse actually.

BH: We will see it later as you refuse to wear one for *Saving Mr Banks*, which we'll get to later.

ET: Yes.

BH: So you won a BAFTA for both of those roles, *Tutti Frutti* and *Fortunes of War*, so did that feel 'Ah now I've arrived I'm winning awards and stuff for this acting', did that make a big difference?

ET: No, no, I don't think you ever think that. It was a lovely evening, in those days you used to have dinner, so we all had dinner and I remember Mel Smith was there, and he was lovely and the directors of the two thingamys and people like...I know, *Jean de Florette* and *Manon des Sources* had just come out so Daniel Auteuil and Gerard Depardieu were there, so it was all very heady.

And then we had to go home in a taxi with this heavy thing in your hand and you thought 'that's nice', I think it gave me confidence. It did. But then after that I did my own television series, for which the response was very different, so you know it all went downhill really from then on, which was good.

BH: Do you think it was good? You did do that TV series which...would you use the words poorly received?

ET: In some quarters it was. What had happened was because of the BAFTA I came to people's attention through acting who didn't know in fact I had spent the last 7 years doing comedy. And Michael Grade, who ran wherever it was at the time, said 'well do you want to go back to comedy or do you want to continue to act?'. And people were saying you can go to Hollywood, you can do that', and I said 'But I'm a comedian, I want to be a comedian, of course I want to do my own show.' So Humphrey Barclay, who has famously in our industry championed not only women, but also black actors and comics, and for a long time now he's one of the only producers who's really represented those two rather large groups. So he said 'let's go for it'. But the problem with it was that because of the acting it was too out there, it was made too big of a thing. It should have been on at 11pm on BBC Two, people could have found it for themselves. But because they'd spent money on it they wheeled me out and said 'Look! Look! Look! And now, dada dada!'. And that was the difficulty because like any comedy series there were good things and bad things, but it was odd in the sense that it didn't have a laugh track. Have you seen it?

BH: I remember seeing it at the time yes, and it did feel odd. I remember that felt odd.

ET: There was some really odd stuff and I look at it now and I think 'oh that's interesting' because the comedians coming up now like Catherine Tate and Katy Brand are doing this same kind of thing, but much later on. And you go 'ok so it's

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taken time'. So it's still - you talk to Catherine, talk to Katy, talk to any female comedienne, the struggle is still very out there, it's still very much the same thing. I mean Christopher Hitchens has an essay in his book saying why women aren't funny. I mean get to fuck Christopher, oh you have, sorry....you know what, it's still the same thing [that] being a woman means you're not allowed somehow to be funny, or if you are you've got to be in somewhere or other grotesque, because you are just stepping on toes and you're interfering with some kind of response that doesn't include laughing at, with, by or from.

BH: Yes there was an article about Sarah Silverman recently, with the same kind of attitude to her I think you faced way back then, and it's still being faced that she's too rude and too blue. So it's incredible that people are still making those judgements about...

ET: Well as Sue Perkins said recently it would be a great day when on the comedy shows on television and Edinburgh: 'and now a female comic, and now a woman comic'. What? You know it's extraordinary that 30 years later it's still the same.

BH: Yes, I now want to mention one of my favourite films of that time, *The Tall Guy*.

ET: That's my first film.

BH: Your first film which [was] directed by Mel Smith, sadly no longer with us of course, starring you, Rowan Atkinson, Jeff Goldblum. Great cast it's really funny, isn't it?

ET: And Richard Curtis' first screenplay.

BH: Richard Curtis' first script, a brilliantly funny kind of undervalued somehow film.

ET: But it's a cult movie, which is what's nice. When [Kate] Winslet came up to audition for *Sense and Sensibility* some years later she said she'd seen it 12 times.

BH: I think I have as well, yeah.

ET: Oh well you need medication then.

BH: No it's really entertaining film. It's got *Elephant the Musical* in it, a musical about the *Elephant Man*.

ET: I know. It's a beautifully written thing.

BH: Yes, how as your first film how did it feel – what was the experience like? With all those people like Richard Curtis and Rowan what was it like?

ET: Oh it was great. I knew Rowan because we...Stephen and Hugh and I had been doing a Footlights show in Edinburgh and we won the first Perrier Fringe Award which made us all yell, because we just thought 'fizzy water? It's Edinburgh! Why can't it be whiskey? That's just naff.' And we were very rude about it at the time. It was Rowan who came to give us the award in the form of a bottle of Perrier I think. It's a huge thing now so good for them, they started something excellent. I knew them all, we all grew up together. I can remember having supper with Richard in some flat that he owned and shared with Curtis and Atkinson, all that lot. They were a little bit older, but only about two years older and those are the people you aspire to being.

BH: Absolutely. And that's a great comedy film. A really funny film and role, but then you started doing some big serious films. Let's start with *Howards End*, the Merchant Ivory film. How did you get that role? Did they approach you or did you audition?

ET: I think that it was a very normal process in the sense that I did go and audition. But it's the only time I've ever written to somebody to say 'I really do know who this woman is, and I can play her. Please let me.' I wrote to James Ivory who I like very much. I've never minded auditioning, I'd audition happily for anyone anytime now, it's nice. So I said 'yes I can do it, honestly', and [he said] 'well how do you know?'. But it wasn't so

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much that, it was just knowing, knowing who she was.

BH: So you were a fan of the E.M. Forster book, you'd read the book?

ET: Oh yes it's the most extraordinary book and I was, I suppose, a fan of an era when women thought that because of the vote, because of suffrage, because of education that things would change for women. A hundred years later we know better. Anyway.

BH: Well before we talk about that further let's have a look at a clip.

ET: Oh a clip!

BH: Oh yes!

ET: God, watch out for the teeth guys!

Clip from *Howards End*

BH: Anthony Hopkins, pretty good, what was it like working with him? Was he a scary figure? I mean he's scary in the films.

ET: He'd just played Hannibal Lecter I think, so yes. I think my mother gave him a note saying 'this is my daughter, please don't eat her'. No, he's the most wonderful man, Tony and that's why we went on to do *Remains of the Day*, we were thrilled to be working together again. I mean those scenes were so much fun to play, we would block them together and play them with such...it was just a joy. I learned a lot from him and from Vanessa Redgrave who was in *Howards End*.

BH: I mean in terms of the [performance], that seems like a classic Thompsonian performance to me, because [it's] incredibly naturalistic, quite difficult dialogue but completely getting to the heart of that woman. Did you feel you knew her completely when you read the book?

ET: Yes I did. I did, I felt very, very connected to her fighting this fight against morals and morays in society that made no sense whatsoever. I still don't think many of them make sense to be honest, so I think there's a lot of work. I don't think anything has changed radically so I absolutely felt that I could inhabit her in a very powerful way and you know, look at the scene, look at what she's saying. Look at the hypocrisy that walks and stalks the world today exactly like that.

BH: And obviously it's a Merchant Ivory film and you went on to do *Remains of the Day* which we'll look at in a minute. But also Ruth Praver Jhabvala [wrote] the scripts. I mean her scripts were incredible, did you learn something from her about adapting these kind of great, great books?

ET: Oh god yes! I mean she was the first person I went to when, because of seeing a sketch in the the much, much shat upon series that I wrote, Lindsay Doran, the producer of *Sense and Sensibility*, asked me to write *Sense and Sensibility*, to adapt it. So I went to Ruth and asked 'what do I do? I've got no idea where to start.' And she said 'adapt the whole book and then see what works'. Which was terribly interesting, because I thought, 'oh that hadn't occurred to me', so I did that. So the first script was 500 pages long, they're supposed to be about 90. Then you work out which bits work dramatically and it's very peculiar, because in books there will be moment that you remember. For instance, in *Howards End*, if any of you have read the book which is just the most wonderful thing ever, there's a famous scene where they talk about 'only connecting', 'only connect', that's the famous Forsterian phrase. Jim Ivory was just desperate to get that scene in and there was never any money. We were always shooting up to the hilt, and the crew would ring me and say 'have you been paid yet Em?', and I would say 'hang on yes I think I have' and then they would relax because it meant that they would be paid that week. It was that kind of edgy. I mean Ismail would turn up with bundles of money in plastic

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bags. It was fantastic really in many ways for those of us who could still eat. But she [Ruth] was hugely, hugely influential, she just said 'that's how to do it'. And that scene never ended up in the movie, we shot it but it got cut because a lot of the time you watch Margaret connecting all the way through the film. So [what] I realised with the process of adaptation, is that the powerful things in a book that you need to release onto film are sometimes not found in the book, because it's a very mysterious journey.

BH: And you won an Oscar for that, your first Oscar, I mean how did that feel? A young actor, first Oscar, what's it like?

ET: It was surreal, actually, because it's not like it is now, I mean the Oscars now is very big. There's Oscars parties, everyone's aware of it, but I mean when I was a girl - I mean I wasn't a girl I was 32 I think, - it was a very far away thing. It was an iconic object that existed very far away and belonged to people like Cary Grant and Katherine Hepburn, even to another age. I didn't really take it in. I wasn't in that world.

I was in the comic world, I didn't really think about it. So I went with my mum and we had to dress up and get proper frocks and everything. You get dressed up at about 11am in the morning, it's ghastly! And then you get into a limousine and sit in that for a couple of hours. Mum was wearing a dress which had a long train I remember, and everyone who trod on it was thus choking her. A la Isadora Duncan who was famous, so she would just turn around [and go] 'argh' and there would be Plácido Domingo or Al Pacino, and they would be apologising to my mother and then we'd all have a chat. So we got to meet an awful lot of people because of that particular sartorial decision and it was great when I got it. I remember Tony was up there opening the envelope, and my mum turned around and said 'you haven't got a chance in hell!' She always likes to put down a mattress, you know, in case of disappointment. The odd thing was not so much getting up and standing on stage and looking at the front row and everyone

sitting there was famous, everyone you know from Meryl to...just everybody. But it was going backstage that made me realise the truly, the truly iconic quality of the Oscar, because I had to haul up my tights - spanx did not exist in those days - and I handed it [the Oscar] to a security guard. I've never seen a face on him like it, I could have been handing him the Ark of the Covenant, it was extraordinary. And I thought 'Oh'...and I looked at it in a different way after that. I thought 'oh, I had no idea.'

So then we went off and you have to talk to the press and all of that. Then we went back to the hotel and we were staying in a room next to mum about the size of this chair, and the following day lots of flowers started to arrive. It was like a chapel of rest by the afternoon. If we'd just laid down on the two tiny little truckle beds like that, you could have come in and paid your respects and it would all have been over and that would have been lovely. Then I had to take it home, and I wrapped it in a pair of socks and stuck it in my hand luggage because I thought 'I'm not sure about putting it in a suitcase'. [It] went through the security camera thing at LAX clearly looking like some nuclear warhead so I was asked to go out and they took it out. Again it was a Spielbergian moment because this thing came out, they took the sock off and they just went 'woaaahhh, it's an Oscar!' And everybody, all the security people, all the Americans were kind of passing it around you know. I got it onto the aeroplane, the captain of the bloody aeroplane was down and said 'can I hold it?' I said 'is someone flying the plane? Take it! Just keep your eyes on the road for gods sake!' That was an extraordinary thing, and then when I got into Heathrow, I was walking through customs and all I could hear was these little squeaking noises. I was thinking 'oh what's that?' and looking in my bag. It was all the customs officials behind the screens shouting 'Emma! Emma!' So I could hold the Oscar up to these screens. That was the best bit, that was the most extraordinary thing when you realised what a powerful object it is.

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BH: Yes absolutely, life change, does it change your life?

ET: No of course not.

BH: But you had great fun with it.

ET: I had great fun with it and you know the legend? The Oscar legend of course goes that if you get an Oscar you don't work for at least a year afterwards.

BH: You did.

ET: I think I did but I can't remember what I did do, but I must have worked, I must have worked.

BH: Let me have a look. Well a year later really you were doing *the Remains of the Day* I think with the same creative team.

ET: Yes with the same creative...

BH: And with Antony Hopkins.

ET: Yeah, with Tone.

BH: And we've got another clip of that, so lets have a look.

Clip from *Remains of the Day*

BH: *Remains of the Day* has to be the best film about repressed emotion, loneliness I guess.

ET: Well I mean actually about the deformity that servitude inflicts upon people, the deformity of character. My grandmother was a servant from a very young age, she went into service when she was about 14. I was fascinated by this story *Remains of the Day* because of her, because she...well first of all she would be tested, money would be left on the stairs to see if she would take it or not. Then there was a housekeeper who came down the stairs and thwacked her with a hairbrush opening her arm up. She bore the scars to the day she died, because she left a broom with the bristles down, because it squashes the

bristles. Then she was sent to work with a family, a man and wife who were childless, during the First World War. And when the big ships came over, the wife would go away to her mother's because she was frightened of these things, or this was the story. Leaving my grandmother in the house alone with her husband, who would make his way up to the attic and rape her, really. And she didn't know really what was going on, she didn't understand why or what was happening, having not received a sexual education of any kind. And then she became pregnant with my uncle Fred.

She went to her family and they said 'we'll help you to keep the child', and they found out later on that this couple had done it before because they couldn't have children. So it was a form of surrogate motherhood they had designed for themselves because it was not allowed, but it did of course involve rape. This was just something that had happened in our family and she of course was in service to these people, she didn't know what was going on, she had no information, another huge area of difficulty in our world today, and she didn't feel able to say no to this. So I was fascinated by the fact that of course this character, both of them, actually have denied themselves a normal existence, because they are in service to the existence of another. It was part of our lives, part of our heritage actually and you see us being fascinated by it in *Upstairs, Downstairs, Downton Abbey*. America is fascinated by that, when what in fact it is is slavery of a kind - you know it's being indentured and serving and not being able to have your own life because it is in direct contrast, you know it's not possible, it's just simply not possible.

BH: So when you're doing those scenes, those incredibly powerful scenes, are you using that personal knowledge you had from your family, in some way?

ET: No, no you can't be conscious of anything like that, you're just playing the scene. I remember that scene very well because it was so powerful I didn't know how to play it at first, there was

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much brighter light. And Tony finally turned around to Jim and said 'can we make this like one of those afternoons, Sundays when there's a fly buzzing dying quietly in the windowsill and there's nothing much going on, and there's nothing that needs to be done and the energy's very, very low and then suddenly introduce this electrical sexual erotic energy,' and Tone is second to none at playing that really because he's like a little volcano himself. So you get this sense of if he could just do what he wants to do, which is take her head and kiss her, they would be free, but of course he doesn't. And they are never free.

BH: Incredibly powerful film, now we have to move on to the other thing you won an Oscar for, you are the answer to the great film trivia question who's the only person who's ever won an Oscar for acting and writing. You won that Oscar for *Sense and Sensibility*, let's remind ourselves with this clip

ET: Oh god, let's hope it's still good.

BH: I think it will be.

Clip from *Sense and Sensibility*

ET: You know what Hugh said when I started crying all the way through he said 'are you going to do that are you going to cry all the way through my speech', and I said 'yes, yes that's funny, it's funny.' And he said 'no you can't, you absolutely can't, you'll ruin it.' I said 'I won't I promise you I won't', and it is funny, that's what it was designed to be, funny.

BH: But incredibly moving at the same time.

ET: And that's the point! That the most moving things are often also funny in life and in art.

BH: Yes. And is it true that when you were first approached to write the screenplay, that you said you'd rather do *Persuasion*, you wanted to do a completely different book?

ET: Well I did. I said to Lindsay Doran, who's sort of my mentor in all things screenplay, I said really *Sense and Sensibility*, it's [Austen's] first novel, it's quite arcane, the language is very complex, the story didn't seem to me to be as interesting as *Persuasion* or even *Emma*. And I just...I did, I said...and she said 'no, no this is the one, believe me.' And of course she was right, she was right, there's so much to it, it's great.

BH: And were you reluctant to star in it? I mean you spent years working on the script.

ET: Yes five years on and off, of course I wasn't reluctant! I was hoping I would get it, I didn't know whether I would. But when we found Ang Lee because he was...Taiwanese, he'd done *Wedding Party*, but also *Eat Drink Man Woman*, which is a fantastic movie, in Chinese, and Taiwanese, and there's a line in it where one of the sisters...it's about sisters and food, if you haven't seen it then do see it, it's a wonderful movie. This sister says 'what do you know of my heart?' to the other sister, and it's exactly the same line that Eleanor uses in *Sense and Sensibility* in the script that I written. So I said 'of course you must be right, this must be the right guy', and he wanted me for Eleanor so that was ok, even though given the fact that Hugh's a year younger than me, it was really...and mostly I'd played with people who were several decades older than me because that's how it worked, and still works you know, I thought 'oh is that going to wash even though we're pretty much contemporaries?'

BH: I think it washed - you got away with it!

ET: Yes we got away with it.

BH: And what was Ang Lee like? Ang Lee is known as being quite a challenging kind of director, is that fair? Quite a strict disciplinarian in some ways.

ET: Really is he now? Well I haven't worked with him since then. Well so this was...well he didn't speak English very well and this was his first movie

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in the English language. He loved Jane Austen, he loved the script. We all rehearsed together, we did all sorts of Tai Chi and he would do pressure point stuff on us, he really hurt us actually. And when we came to start shooting, on the first day Hugh and I had a scene together, which we shot outside and we finished doing it, and Ang said thank you and we stepped aside and then we had a little chat between us, then we went up to Ang and said, would you mind if we did that again, over here, which is normal. That's normal behaviour for actors, you can do a scene and then ask, it's fine to ask to do it somewhere else or in a different way, it's fine.

Ang went very quiet, in fact everything went very quiet, we got through the day and everything, but it was a bit sticky. And I found out that not once in his entire life had anyone asked him for anything, that actors are absolutely slaves to the director [in his country]. They do not speak to the director, they do not speak when not spoken to, they do not ask to do anything else, they certainly do not make suggestions. That's out of the question. So it was a bit of a 'mare, I was up at 2am writing apology notes and he was doing the same thing. I think we must have passed each other in the night unwittingly and pushed notes under each other's doors saying 'I'm so sorry I didn't realise.' And from then on we had the most wonderful time because his notes were so brutal and funny, I remember one of his first notes to me was 'Don't look so old', and then there was another one, he said to Winslet, she said 'I don't know, was that alright?' and he said: 'It's alright, you'll get better.' Then my favourite was to Hugh, he said 'Yeah, ok, now do one...' and I'm doing his accent now, he couldn't speak English then, he had [a] very strong accent, 'now do one like bad actor' and Hugh said, 'that was the one I just did.' So we laughed, oh how we laughed.

BH: Absolutely. But you don't mind that, you don't mind that kind of...

ET: No, I much prefer 'don't look so old' to 'that was so great'. If it's so great, then where do you

go? James Ivory was bliss as well because you'd finish a scene like that and he'd come towards you, and you'd think 'yes, what?' And he'd walk right past you and do this to [move] something, and he'd go back to do it again, because the position of the vase was what was irking him. He'd do this all the time. Ang used to hold his hand to his face all the time, perhaps it's a thing with directors. He'd do this and go 'I don't know? Just do it again.' And I like that, I like that.

BH: So you don't mind directors who are really into the visual, the look.

ET: Absolutely. I can act, I know what I'm doing more or less, I expect them to edit what I do, 'that's a bit much', or 'can you tone it down' or 'could you stand over there?' even. But they're the ones who've seen it visually, that's what's so glorious about directors.

BH: You won an Oscar, as I said, for writing, that must have been...were you now shocked, you were winning awards for your writing as well as your acting?

ET: Well it was unexpected, certainly it was. The Oscar itself, the thing is you do get a hint about winning the Oscar because there's a lot of award ceremonies that go on beforehand so there's a sense of where it's kind of going. Because if you get a lot of those, you've got to get your speech ready just in case. But as I say to people who haven't prepared anything and go up and go 'oh god I don't know what to say', why don't you know what to say? There's one chance in four you're going to get this, how much work is it really to put a speech together that you learn, then forget, then you can pull out if the unimaginable happens and the 25 percent chance of winning occurs? You know it's unnecessary to be quite as unrealistic really. It's a performance as well you know, try and make it funny. One gag, one good point, and get off quick.

BH: Brilliant advice for the BAFTA people and the Oscar people. As well as doing a lot of we've

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seen, some great clips of big serious challenging roles, you're also doing Hollywood stuff, you did *Junior* [with] Arnold Schwarzenegger. Do you also enjoy doing big Hollywood, I use the word 'cheesy' in quotes, but big mainstream [films]?

ET: *Junior*, but what else have you got on your list of those kinds of movie?

BH: Well later on you do, you know you've done *Men in Black*...

ET: 15 years later I did *Men in Black 3*. There are not many though.

BH: Maybe not no, but do you enjoy that kind of big Hollywood experience?

ET: The two that I've done I had a nice time with, yes. Sorry, just to sort of get it all in perspective. Yes I did *Junior* and I loved doing that, because they paid me a lot of money for it. I was thrilled with that, not being paid a lot of money for doing any movies up until that point. And I was fascinated to work in that environment with Ivan Reitman who of course had made some great comedies...

BH: [Like] *Ghostbusters*...

ET: ...*Junior* not being one of them, but there you go. And also working with Arnold who was, well amongst other things, orange, the first orange person I'd ever met. But nice you know, very nice and was very honest about not being able to act.

BH: Oh really? how did he say [that]?

ET: 'I'm not an actor! I'm a bodybuilder so you help me, yes?' I said 'yes that's fine.' I said 'will you help me with bodybuilding?' And he said, 'of course.' So I have an entrée into his gym at any time.

BH: Perfect.

ET: I think not ladies and gentlemen. Not after recent events...

BH: He did become a right wing politician.

ET: Well there's that, and plus the...well, anyway.

BH: Yes, anyway, moving on. I want to talk about Richard Curtis and your relationship with him. We'll have a look at *Love Actually* in a second, but Richard Curtis gets a lot of, I think, unfair attention and criticism, particularly in this country about his films being sentimental and all of that. I mean what's your feeling about his work?

ET: Well Richard makes films that are designed to make us happy from beginning to end, which we stopped making decades ago. We're funny aren't we about comedy, we don't take it seriously. Oh, the irony! And of course those are the most difficult things to make. I was doing a big old thing with Janet Maslin the other day, and she said, 'well *Love Actually* is like an anthology', and I thought it was a very good description of the film. I remember when we first saw it in New York Hugh Grant coming up behind me and saying 'well, either that's very good, or it's the most psychotic thing I've ever been in.' And I sort of knew what he meant, because Richard's the most unusual man. And he's just built it seems to me of the milk of human kindness. Actually made of it. I've never known anything else to come forth from that man. So that's what his movies are like, and we can't cope with it, because so many of us are bitter, twisted, cynical little islanders who can't cope with the idea of happiness, never mind someone trying to present it on film. Whereas we get very overexcited when we make films that show truly how utterly miserable the course of human life can be. And I like those films too, don't get me wrong, I really do. I loved *Naked*, I like *Nil by Mouth*, I loved *War Zone*, I loved those movies, but there has to be a balance surely. So you know he's...if all those other filmmakers represent the nature of our philosophical filmmaking world, then he's kind of Montaigne. He's the one who says 'read whatever you want then forget about

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it.' And I'm really not sure what I believe in, but you know love is nice, actually, when you come to think about it. And maybe we should consider it just for a moment. Just for longer than two seconds before we flick it off like a bluebottle. So I think that is what the problem is.

BH: Absolutely I think you're right, he's like a one-man antidote to cynicism isn't he? But of course ironically we have got a clip of *Love Actually* which is the most miserable moment in the film. Lets have a look then.

ET: Steel yourselves.

Clip from *Love Actually*

BH: Whenever I see that, I always think that is the best crying on screen ever, I mean it's just incredible. Everyone, I told everyone, boasting, that I was interviewing you for this event. And everyone I spoke to said 'you have to ask her about that scene in *Love Actually*.' First of all how many takes did you have to do of that kind of thing? And do you have to do that every time you do a take?

ET: Yes we did three or four, very funny, Richard Curtis behind the camera, completely undone [he] couldn't speak. So I said 'do you want me to do it again?' And he was just...[silence]. You cut out actually before what I think is kind of the best, which is when she straightens the bed, which I think is just, that kind of came out of it, and then just went downstairs. I mean how many people in the audience have done that? Everyone, you know, we've all done it. I mean when you have children, you can't show them when you're upset, and we often are in life. It's perhaps one of the duties, the conditions of parenthood, that you don't visit those emotions upon your children if you can possibly avoid it.

BH: Does that kind of thing come, I mean I use the word easy, but do you have to work hard at getting that moment, or did it kind of happen?

ET: I think when you know something like that's coming, because there's a moment like that in... there was a moment like that in *Saving Mr Banks*. I think that most artists and actors are fundamentally inconsolable, which is why they do what they do, and why they get a lot done. Because, there it is. I honestly think that most people have a great well of sadness to draw from, it's probably a collective unconscious apart from anything else. But we also have a well of joy, those things are available to us. But actually what is interesting is that when I was a young actor and I had to do something sad, I remember having to cry in *The Fortunes of War*, so I thought back to the death of my father, and the death of my godfather, I was in my twenties and...oh my god, I've just caught sight of my bra strap. Is there no-one in the audience who could have told me I was revealing my underwear whilst at the same time trying to entertain you all?

BH: It's fine.

ET: It's because I'm wearing a posh sack. Where was I?

BH: When you were doing *Fortunes of War*, you were thinking back.

ET: Yes I used to think about sad things in order to weep. But for a long time now I don't have to do that because the character is feeling sad. So the trick you're playing on your own psyche as it were, becomes easier to play. So you become a master of your own magic tricks, and it is a sort of strange magic thing because you do all your research and a magician's trick is quite a good analogy. It's only just popped into my head. Because most magicians who do a good trick have had to work on it for months and months and months to make it look like it's not a trick. Same sort of thing really.

BH: It is, yes. I was speaking to Richard Laxton who directed you in *Effie Gray*, which hasn't come out yet. But he was saying that that clip is proof amongst many others, that you get to the humanity of the role, that you kind of find the

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human within. Do you ever think about it in that way? Does that ring a bell at all?

ET: What else would I be looking for is my question?

BH: But he was saying not all actors do. That he watches films and he sees actors not getting that.

ET: I don't know what else one would look for. I don't see the point...it doesn't make sense not to look for the humanity, isn't that the point?

BH: I guess that finding it is the [thing].

ET: Ah, well that's a whole other matter.

BH: We move on to a very interesting film called *Stranger than Fiction* which I think is a really underrated film of recent years. It's a completely unique American Hollywood film, but interesting, and saying a lot about writing. You play a writer with writer's block, and what I was going to ask you, you look in pain. As soon as you arrive on screen in this film. Is that something you wanted to get across?

ET: She was heaven to play, I mean really heaven to play. It was a Zach Helm script, brilliant script. Lindsay Doran produced it, she has a sense for great writing. And this very, very twisted tortured writer, which oddly enough Travers is as well, who essentially is committing suicide over and over again in her books. She creates characters and kills them, creates characters and kills them. She smokes all the time. Actually one of the people I tried to base it on, was it - oh dear I'm going to have to say who it was now aren't I - otherwise you're all going to be very cross.

BH: Yes.

ET: Well I worked with Judy Davis once, and she's a wonderful actress. Arthritic with tension, and she smoked like this, there was this tension in her all of the time and that's probably one of the reasons she's such a great actress. But I

remember her smoking and I remember thinking I want to do Judy smoking, because there was something about the relationship with cigarettes that was as it were, ironically, the only thing keeping her alive.

BH: Lets have a look at a clip.

Clip from *Stranger than Fiction*

BH: What I love about that film is that your role is a very interesting female writer, it's kind of unusual to get that kind of role isn't it? I mean, when you got that script did you just think 'oh god, I've got to...'

ET: Yes, I mean it's a gift, manna from heaven, you know. You're not a wife, you're not a mother. I remember in my 30s after *Howards End*, I was offered several parts which I call the 'no don't go and do that brave thing, stay at home with me' parts. You know the ones I mean, where you're the wife or the girlfriend or the mother, saying 'no don't go! Think of the children. No don't go and do that brave and interesting thing that everyone's going to watch in the movie, just stay here with me. Stay here with me because I'm interesting.' And of course there's always a point to that but that's a trope, it's not a character though, it's just a cipher, so there were so many of those and still are. But once you've worked out what they are you can see them coming in the movie. You can see as soon as a woman comes on film, she's going to be the one to tell him not to do it. Because you know, who's the hero, he's always the man.

BH: And you also got to act with Dustin Hoffman in this film, and went on to do *Last Chance Harvey* with him. What's he like? I mean he seems just like kind of an incredibly lovely man, from the outside I mean. I've never met him.

ET: He's fantastic to act with, absolutely fantastic. We loved each other so much and we were so lucky to get another film to do together. And you know he's been through his difficult patch and he's alright now, he's fine. He went into therapy,

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very good, I'd highly recommend it. And he was heavenly, you don't get this from many actors who are in their 60s and as big and as famous as he is and was. He was late - well he wasn't late - he was in traffic once when we were shooting *Last Chance Harvey*. And he was getting more and more anxious because he thought he wasn't going to get to set on time, and it was the O2 Centre, we had to get across a bridge. I was in another car so I was there already. He got out of the car, took his shoes off and ran in his socks the rest of the way. To get to set on time. So there's none of that bizarre entitlement at all. None of that. I mean he can lose his rag, absolutely. But he just wants to do it all the time. You know he just wants to serve and be there and do it all the time. And those are the people you want to work with. You find there are some even young actors who really can't be bothered any more and you think let someone else. You know let someone else do it who really wants to do it.

BH: What do you do with someone like that? You know someone you feel isn't pulling their own weight.

ET: Well, you know. I say something, oddly enough, I know that's surprising. If people are late I say 'well you can't do this, because it's disrespectful to your crew. These are people who work very hard to make sure your image is up on screen and you just can't do this, because it's not unreasonable.' I don't know what I would do if I had to work with someone who was late in a kind of psychotic way. Like Robert Redford, who's weirdly late. Even when he's directing.

BH: So do you think in that one film he did, where he's the only person in the film, in his new film, on the boat...

ET: Do you know what, how did that work?

BH: It's making me think about that film in a whole different light.

ET: Yes, I'm really fascinated now. I lost my rag with John Travolta because he had this

turnaround thing. This is what happens. You see this star system is not a good system, it's all hierarchical, and I think that's just revolting. Revolting for people who are actors to become grand. Out of the question, just not excusable and very unattractive to watch. Anyway John is not like that, he's not grand, he just has this turnaround. The turnaround is when you do your 12 or 14 or 16 hour days, and if you do go over, you have something in your contract to say that you don't get called until an hour later the next day. So you do get your full 10 hours or 12 hours to get some sleep to get some rest. So he had this turnaround, so we would all have to push work for another hour. And one day we just couldn't help working late because it was some location that we couldn't get again, so we worked until 2am, and we didn't start again until 7pm in the evening and I was so cross. John came on set and he was very good. He said 'Are you cross with me Em? Are you pissed?' And I said 'Yes I am! Yes. So shall we just get on with it, it's the middle of the night.' So there's not a lot you can do with that, there's a star system there, and there it is. Luckily as well as our bit of cynicism and twistedness, we also don't do that here.

BH: So that was *Primary Colors*, we should say, where you weren't playing the Clintons.

ET: We weren't playing the Clintons, that's right. I met Bill Clinton years and years later. And said hello, we'd exchanged correspondence actually, indeed after the Monica Lewinsky affair. About the treatment he'd received at the hands of [Ken] Starr, and all that ridiculous stuff. I said 'It's odd we've never met'. And he said 'But you did that awful film.' And I said 'Which one?', and he said '*Primary Colors*'. And I said 'But it's not about you', it's about the press'. And of course he'd never seen it, and of course it was not entirely, the film is really about the Fourth Estate and its disastrous effect on modern politics. That's what it's about.

BH: Absolutely. Maybe he'll see it now.

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ET: I doubt it very much, but there you go, it doesn't matter.

BH: It's time to get to your new film, and what's interesting, I was reading, Variety did a big special on you, with the cover and everything. And in it you said you hadn't, up until you got this script you hadn't been offered that many lead roles. You'd done a lot of supporting things. I mean is that true, it seems astonishing to me that you of all people weren't getting that many.

ET: No, no I wasn't. I mean it was partly through me removing myself and being a mum, so I wasn't able to take big roles that took me away so much. But no, roles like that are very thin on the ground, as any woman in her 50s will tell you.

BH: So when you got the offer of the role playing P.L. Travers the author...

ET: This script by Kelly Marcel is one of the best scripts I've read in a long time and I just as with most things I've said yes to, I said yes immediately, because you'd make the tea for a great script that will make a piece of art that will be worth your while paying upwards of £10 for heavens sakes. It's expensive to go to the cinema now. One of the reasons I always loved making films is that it seemed to me to be relatively democratic in relation to the theatre in terms of the price of the seats. Anyway, where was I?

BH: You were saying that you were prepared to make the tea.

ET: Yes, absolutely. Great scripts are very few and far between.

BH: We've got a clip, but we should say again, back to the wig thing, wig averse, this is your real hair isn't it?

ET: Yes unfortunately Frances Mathias, a wonderful hair lady, I said 'She had curly hair, didn't she?' she said 'Yes she did, but I don't think we should perm it. We're not going to give

you a perm.' I said 'Oh, thank god.' I did have a perm, ill-advisedly at the age of 17 and I knew what it was going to look like if I had a perm. And she said 'I think we should do more of a kink, you know how Annette Bening looks now' and I said 'Yes, she looks marvellous, that's great!' So I said, 'Ok then, go on, kink'. So we went to the salon, I thought 'smells like a perm to me'. You know, really strong smell, permy smell. I thought 'Bloody hell,' you know, before I passed out. Because that's what it does, perm juice or whatever it is. The fucking thing came out, and I just said, 'What [do] you mean! It's a perm!' I said, 'It's a full perm!' And Frances said, 'Well, do you think you can live with it?' There's no choice, unless I ironed my head every morning! Anyway it is a fantastic decision because it is frightful and very much a part of the character. It helped me a lot, I really didn't have to do any acting at all.

BH: I don't think that's fair, but we'll see from this clip.

Clip from *Saving Mr Banks*

ET: She was a cow.

BH: Yes, well director John Lee Hancock is quoted as saying that you told him it was the hardest role you've ever had to do, is that right?

ET: Yes, it was really because she was so complicated, and she was so inconsistent. You know you look at some of those other roles and you see that essentially they have a moral arc that goes much the same way throughout the film. You know how Margaret Schlegel is going to behave, because she is, as it were, an honest decent woman who's going to respond to the outside world. And you know how Karen in *Love Actually* is going to behave. You know how they're going to behave. You didn't know how she was going to behave. From one minute to the next. So I thought that everyone is going to think that I'm just making mistakes, that I didn't know who it is. That I'm just making it different for no good reason, so it was the inconsistency, but

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of course that is what made her such a blissful, joy to embody.

BH: Absolutely. I think what struck me watching the film is that I think before you see it you might think, oh a Disney film about one of the best Disney films ever, is going to possibly you know, soft soap on it, but it doesn't at all. That clip we just saw where your character's talking about Dick Van Dyke and all of that, it's kind of an incredibly refreshing look at her, and her attitude towards Mary Poppins isn't it?

ET: Yes.

BH: I mean were you surprised by the extent to which in the end when you see the finished version of the film it feels real and it feels like it's getting something.

ET: Yes, I mean we were all surprised that Disney had let us make it in the first place. You know Walt's there, smoking cigarettes and drinking whiskey and all of that, and it's the first film they've ever allowed him to be represented in, and it's so interesting, because you could just call it 'daddy issues' really. Because really it's about that, it's about the effect of parents, the effects on the soul of the child. It's so interesting that Walt had the mouse and the mouse saved him from his own demons. And that P. L. Travers had Mary Poppins who did the same thing. And that Disney made a beautiful poster. The publicity department made this amazing poster where the two characters, Disney and P.L. Travers, are walking and their shadows are the mouse and Mary Poppins. And in this day and age when we understand the shadow side to our characters it's a beautiful way of showing how a very wounded child can invent someone or something who can take them by the hand and try and lead them gently out of the darkness into the light. I thought it was a remarkable piece of art really to describe what art sometimes does, again back to the fundamentally inconsolable.

BH: Absolutely and I think people may think, oh, it's a kind of, I mean it's fun, it's funny, you've got

the celebration of the music, which is wonderful to see all of that come, but in the end without wanting to spoil it there is a final scene with you and Tom Hanks that is so powerful.

ET: Devastating really. I didn't know that about Walt Disney, anyway better not say.

BH: No spoilers.

ET: They make the film in the end. Oh god, I've spoiled it!

BH: I'm going to throw it open to the audience in a minute, we've got time for some questions. One more thing I wanted to say, we haven't even had time to mention *Nanny McPhee*, which you wrote and starred in, your *Harry Potter* role, those great brilliant family films. It must be a joy to be in those films, and how do your kids and family react to those.

ET: Well they're two very different experiences, I mean with *Harry Potter* I think that if people didn't appear in those films they had their equity card taken away. I mean we all were in those films it was de rigeur. And they were short. I was in 5 days with Alfonso, and then 2 days with David, I mean it was very short. And the costumes were so brilliant, honestly if you'd worn that wig and those glasses you could have played her. If I'd given you the voice, honestly, great fun. But the *Nanny McPhee*, it took 9 years to make that movie, from the moment I picked up the book to the moment we walked into the movie theatre, so it's a whole two different things completely. But no the *Nanny McPhees* were labours of great love and commitment. I think a lot of children's entertainment are deeply cynical and empty, yet they're the most important audience. Woe befall you if you don't do your best for children because they take it in. So you've got to make it the best you can make it. And it's got to be truthful and it's got to be honest and as P.L.Travers says, you don't have to sugarcoat the darkness, they know it well. Just make it so that they can receive it.

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BH: Thank you, well it's time to face...

ET: The music...

BH: Yes the music, and yes the gentleman there.

Question: Thank you, my name is John Thompson, so I'm always impressed with someone called Thompson doing really well, so thank-you very much. I have to ask you though [about] the *Magic Roundabout*, and the effect it must have had, your father and [his] imagination on you and the fact of what you've gone into.

ET: Absolutely, I think that my father had a hugely important influence on both of us growing up because of course he wrote the *Magic Roundabout* not for a minute did he write it for children, he wrote it just because he was asked to take these little moving films, so he wrote what made him laugh. And if you watch them or read the transcripts, they're all referencing Harold Wilson, and the winter of discontent, and politics of the 1960s. He used phrases like 'hoist with your own petard' and you would get people writing, 'how could you use these phrases for children who do not understand them?' So he wrote back a letter, he got out the Oxford English Dictionary, and he looked up all the longest words he could find and he put them all into the letter that he wrote back to this mother. He got a letter from a little boy saying once, 'My mother hit me, because I called my sister a mollusc.' So he had to write back to explain that mollusc was not in fact any form of insult really. He was the sort of person who would talk to a baby as I am addressing you. He was very down the line dad, so his humour and his rigour, a self-taught man, who loved words and loved the use of words and how they worked. Everything about that was hugely influential. Good question thank-you.

Question: Hi there Emma, I really loved your portrayal in *Wit*, I thought it was absolutely wonderful. I just wondered how you found breaking that 4th wall and addressing the camera directly in such a difficult role.

ET: Oh it was alright...it goes away. You just don't think about it really, it's a nice thing to do. Brecht did it ages ago, and now we're all quite happy with it, it's just another game to play and talking into the camera is a very intimate thing to do because the camera is such a powerful thing. The relationship with a camera on a set is so powerful, the circle that is created by light is so powerful. And I think that those tribes who said so long ago when people turned up with cameras, 'No you can't take my picture, because you're taking away a bit of my soul', were right. They do, or at least they see it. So if you get a chance to speak directly into it, it's like talking to a very, very close friend, and you must be even more honest because you're connecting to the heart of it, rather than being observed. It's interesting the different focus.

BH: Mike Nichols directed you in *Wit*. I'm glad you mentioned it because I have a brilliant quote from Mike, that I wanted to mention earlier, and I'll mention it now. He said: 'All the best British actors start as comedians. To be able to be funny in character is the essence of acting', about you, which I thought was very interesting.

ET: Well it does help I think. Humour in everything helps. I can't really cope with anything that hasn't got any humour in it at all. It's a bit like eating without salt and pepper, there's just something unleavened about it something bland about it. And it doesn't mean laugh out loud, it's just that sense of, well, you could go either way, you could laugh or you could cry, that's where I want to be when I'm watching a film.

Question: Thank-you. Emma you were very much identified at one time with a kind of 'British Invasion' of Hollywood, with Kenneth Branagh and Anthony Hopkins and I suppose Kate Winslet. Interesting to hear you talk about the difference between American cinema, American actors and British actors. Also in some sense in Hollywood. What advantages or disadvantages might being British and the perception of Englishness have [in Hollywood]?

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ET: Well, yes a huge invasion. Cor Blimey, yes, five or six of us. But yes I know there was a lot of talk. Wasn't that around the Colin Welland and *Chariots of Fire* area that was kind of earlier than me. I mean me and Ken going off to do *Dead Again* when we were kids, we were just thrilled. American and British, well I've talked a little bit about the star system. Lindsay Doran said to me that I was the only actor who ever turned up on the set, it was for, I can't remember which one now, maybe *Stranger*, and had asked for a smaller trailer because it was just too big. I didn't know where to put my stuff. Without having to sort of spread out, perhaps it's because one lives on a small archipelago. So you're used to small spaces. I don't know... I wasn't being superior, you know, 'oh no I don't want that great big grand thing give me a small one.' Actually it turned out that the smaller ones cost more, so I ended up sticking with a bigger one, because the smaller ones were antique or something. Anyway, that's an interesting question, there is no real difference really between great actors, I mean Dustin Hoffman was just as brilliant and exquisite to work with as Anthony Hopkins, they were both profoundly bonkers. I suppose in Hollywood people live slightly more in gated communities away from everyday life, because I think Americans are more open about rushing up and saying 'oh hi', which of course, gets old, you can't cope with that every day. But it doesn't happen here, it just doesn't happen. I travel on the tube, I walk into town, occasionally what people generally do is they'll get up to leave, and they'll pat my knee as they go by, saying I love your work, trying not to be seen or heard doing it. Of course you know again coming back to humour. I remember being away for some time, maybe doing *Dead Again*, I think we lived in America for 6 months or 9 months, and I came home, went on the tube and was talking about children to the man who was selling me my ticket, because you still had to buy tickets then, no oyster card or anything. Talking about kids, and he said he had five. And I said, 'you don't look old enough to have five', and he said, 'I owe it all to Nivea.' Baker Street station, that's what you have here, it's like Alan Bennett's father

describing a dog as a 'filthy lamp-post smelling article'. No wonder he's such a great writer. If you want that atmosphere you can't have the other thing. You can't have the star thing it just doesn't work. I love Hollywood, I love going there, I've great friends there and some of the most intelligent people I know live there. So I have a wonderful time when I'm there, but it's Lindsay Duran who says, 'They always find a way to make you feel bad.' For instance at do's, you know red carpet do's, there's always some little bit that's been penned off, that you're not allowed into. Or you've got a green ticket, and you think, 'ooh that's exciting I've got a green ticket', then you see the people who are in the line that's going in much quicker have got blue tickets, and you think 'oh I've got a green ticket, that must mean I'm a green ticket sort of person.' So therefore, I mean the thing we struggle with all our lives, which is advertising basically, is the better than, less than judgement that you're making upon yourself and others every single moment of your lives and our children most of all now, that Hollywood is particularly good at. And that's the one thing that I really hate. That. It's just not fair, and it's very unattractive. And we don't do it as much here. And we can do it, if we put our minds to it we jolly well can. But let's not.

Question: I recently completed my first feature film. I wrote it, as it's only sort of a 3rd draft at the moment I need some advice on how to approach it from a different eye, as to how to improve it immensely

ET: Have you shot it?

Question: No, it's just been written as part of my university dissertation.

ET: And who has looked at it?

Question: University tutors and a couple of people that I know. Nobody sort of...

ET: Send it to me, I'll have a look at it. That's a quick answer to a question at least, and it's

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practical advice. I can't tell you obviously because I haven't read it, I don't know if you're a good writer, but I'll read it for you.

Question: That would be lovely

ET: Happily, I'm happy to help. The lady sitting there, Viv, is my PA, give her your details, we'll sort it.

BH: I'm so glad I came to you for the final question, this could be the start of an amazing situation, in a few years time we could be seeing your film.

ET: There you go. That's how it starts.

BH: We have run out of time unfortunately so I just wanted to say thank you so much for letting us look at your Life in Pictures, Emma Thompson.