

BAFTA A Life in Pictures: Kristin Scott Thomas

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Ian Haydn Smith: Good evening ladies and gentlemen. My name is Ian Haydn Smith, and I'd very much like to welcome you to this BAFTA Life in Pictures with Dame Kristin Scott Thomas. First of all, congratulations all of you on making it here today. I'm never very good with maths, but as far as I've been able to calculate, Kristin Scott Thomas' performance as Clementine Churchill in *The Darkest Hour* is her sixtieth credit in a feature film. And that's just part of a body of work that includes television drama and also acclaimed stage performances, that has rightly seen her championed as one of the finest actors of her generation. She's the rare feat of being as feted in French language cinema as she is in English film productions, and she has been nominated for an Academy Award, for four BAFTAs, she's won one. She's the recipient of four *Evening Standard* Awards, a European Film Award, an Olivier along with four other nominations. She's also been recognised by the Césars along with the Lumière and Globes de Cristal awards. In 2005, she was awarded the Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur in France, and in 2015 she became Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire. Besides the welter of recent performances that she's given, she's also preparing to direct her first feature, an adaptation of Elizabeth Jane Howard's *The Sea Change*. And of the roles that she's played, she's said, "I don't want to be a bouncing board for men to flex their muscles and look brave and courageous and understanding while I just look bleary-eyed in the background." Let's take a look at some of those roles.

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

Could you please welcome Dame Kristin Scott Thomas.

[Applause]

I noticed you just skulking in the doorway, lurking. Um, I want to start with a story that might be apocryphal of you being around—

Kristin Scott Thomas: What does that mean?

IHS: Um, not entirely true.

KST: Oh, plenty of those.

IHS: Your being around nineteen years of age, studying teacher training at the Central School of Speech and Drama and wanted to appear in a production of that Scottish play, and you were told by someone that you shouldn't because they didn't think you were very talented, and if you wanted to act perhaps you should go to an amateur dramatics society.

KST: Yes. This is correct.

IHS: So in the course of the last twenty odd years or so, have you bumped into that person?

KST: No I think she's dead.

[Laughter]

IHS: OK!

KST: Yeah, it's alright. Actually they've engraved my name on one of the steps there, which is rather pleasing.

IHS: So moving on from that moment in time—actually let's—

KST: Actually it was incredibly upsetting and difficult because I'd dreamt of doing this all my life, I'd drummed up enough courage at nineteen, I think it was—eighteen, I can't remember—to actually sort of commit my idea to somebody else and had had a meeting with somebody from the—lots of the teachers were encouraging me and everything, and then to just be told, you know, "Forget it, you're rubbish," was really quite difficult. But then it wasn't the first time and I mean it wasn't the last time I'd be told to forget it. I suppose it was a good way of training for being an actress, because you hear that quite a lot.

IHS: But you did something quite remarkable. Some people might give up, some people might say, "OK, I'm just going to go to another drama school," you went off and worked in France and then you went to study acting at ENSATT, you actually went to another country to study acting, which is more than a minor challenge.

KST: Um yeah, I just, I think because I felt so sure that I was rubbish, having been told I was rubbish, I thought that they wouldn't notice how rubbish I was if it was in a different language.

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[Laughter]

And actually it's worked really well.

IHS: I've often read when you talk about this period that there was a teacher there that inspired you—

KST: At school in France? Oh yeah, definitely. He's called Marcel Bozonnet, he's a theatre actor who subsequently became head of the Conservatoire National and then he became—I can't remember the title exactly of it, but he's the L'Administrateur général de la Comédie-Française. So, and I was a pupil in his first bunch of pupils, his first year of teaching, so we did OK.

IHS: So moving on from there, having graduated, did you initially feel that you wanted to focus solely on theatre, or was it just whatever acting that you could—

KST: Yeah, no, I wasn't interested in film at all. I remember being bitterly disappointed when people would say, "Oh you should really—you should make movies." I thought, "Oh god no, I don't want to make movies, I want to be on the stage. I want to be—I want to be a proper actress."

IHS: This is clearly warming you to a BAFTA audience by saying this...

[Laughter]

KST: Well those were the days that—well anyway, I thought differently. I hadn't yet become a movie sort of lover, and living in France was a fantastic opportunity, especially living in Paris, because it really is heaven for people who like films because there are films on, there are cinemas everywhere, and they show all sorts of funny things and you don't have to schlep across town to go and see some film that hasn't been shown since 1956 because it'll probably be shown in a theatre much nearer. You know, it's great like that.

IHS: And your first work for film or television, it was the French TV series, I believe *The Investigations of Commissioner Maigret*.

KST: You really are going back!

IHS: I know, well we're going to move forward...

KST: I was the second blonde hairdresser. And I still get twenty-five Euros a year in royalties from that.

[Laughter]

IHS: Dinner's on you! And then you followed it with *Mistral's Daughter*, one of the many TV series from that period. And then Prince came along and *Under Cherry Moon*. What was the experience of working on that like?

KST: Well it was the first time I'd ever really done a proper film. I mean... You know with a full crew and really important people everywhere, and I was treated in the way they treat leading actresses, which was very strange to me. You know, given cars and hotel rooms. I'd never been in a hotel before I did that film, so it was all sort of new and a huge experience—and to be working with somebody who was at the time a kind of living God in pop music, you know he was so popular at the time, it was very strange. It was very sort of strange and I was learning my craft at the same time, you know, knowing that I had to do the same thing twice and if you kept your arms like that then in the next take you can't do it like that. All these things I had to sort of pick up on the way. And my acting is appalling. Please don't comment.

IHS: However... I'm not commenting. However it did earn you your first nomination for a Golden Raspberry.

KST: Thank you.

IHS: Which you lost out to Dom DeLuise in *Haunted Honeymoon*.

KST: Oh that's a pity.

IHS: But shortly after that you won your first of four Evening Standard Awards for Most Promising Newcomer in *Handful of Dust*.

KST: Yeah.

IHS: And I'm just—I know people talk about *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, which we'll come to shortly, as a major breakthrough, but I remember seeing that film when it came out and was stunned by your performances and the three main performances are incredibly powerful. And I just wondered what the impact of that film was for you at the time.

KST: It was just so important, it was incredibly important to me to play that character. I think how it works for me is I'm less concerned with the end result and whether the film is a success or not, as I am with just doing it. That's the bit I like. And playing Brenda Last was a revelation because having the play such sort of narcissism and somehow justify it and make her believable and yet so wrapped up in herself that she could have become incredibly unlikeable, but you have something about her, you have to stay with her, you have to follow her through the film. So that was quite a challenge and it was very exciting for me. I loved doing it. And also, you know, the whole thing was so brilliant. I mean I was a huge Evelyn Waugh fan anyway, so, and working with Charles Sturridge was a great beginning.

IHS: And at that moment in time, what was your approach with roles you were being offered? Were you quite picky or were you—

KST: Well I wasn't getting offered anything! I think I begged Charles to hire me for that.

IHS: Within a couple of years you appear opposite Hugh Grant in *Bitter Moon*, you—

KST: I think I begged Polanski for that, too. I did quite a lot of begging. Yeah, I did a lot of television in the gap between *Handful of Dust* and *Bitter Moon* and got better about keeping my arms in the same place. And I loved doing *Bitter Moon*, I'd always wanted to work with Polanski and this part came along and I was really, really worried about it, though, because he didn't say anything to me for about a week. He just sort of nodded and grunted when my takes were over, so I thought, "Well she's right, I was rubbish. She was right I am rubbish." And then he sort of said, "What's the matter?" and I said, "Well you never say anything to me, it's awful and I don't know..." and he said, "You're doing it right, just relax." So that was my first sort of lesson in not taking it all too, not seriously but personally, I think.

IHS: And over time has your attitude towards relationships with directors changed? Do you prefer to have a lot of conversation in advance or do you like the freedom of being able to interpret the role as you see it first?

KST: Well I think it depends on who you're working with. I mean I recently worked with some people and had such a great relationship with Sally Potter or Joe Wright or

the chap I just finished working with on this French film I just finished yesterday, day before, where there is—of course there's conversation but I don't feel sort of the need to be manipulated anymore, I feel more generous with them. I think that's just age and maturity you just sort of somehow relax into it and don't feel so worried about revealing too much or being seen, I don't feel worried about being seen anymore; I feel that I can just sort of play the part without telling everybody what I'm really like.

IHS: Well one of the things that we've become used to now is going to see you in a French film, in an English film... Earlier in the career I think I recognised you more as an English actress just because the French films didn't travel as much. How easy was it for you to navigate this course of starring in a French film then coming and starring in an English? Was it just as easy then as it is now, or...?

KST: Yes. I've always sort of balanced both. What happened, how I got into the French thing was because after the disaster that was *Under the Cherry Moon*, when everyone promises you're going to be a star and I believed them, then I decided I actually didn't want to stay in Los Angeles and I didn't want to stay on that road and I didn't want to be in showbiz, no I didn't want that. I wanted to go back to Europe and make the sort of films that I enjoyed watching rather than the ones that I didn't enjoy watching. So I had to start from scratch, so I went back to Paris and then got asked to do a Swiss film, actually, called *La méridienne*, which was in Cannes and did very well and so it sort of went from there. And I would do sort of a French film then an English TV show then a French film... I did a lot of TV as I said earlier, and French films. Never French TV.

[Laughter]

IHS: No. One of the French films you appeared in in '94 was *An Unforgettable Summer*, in which you also spoke Romanian.

KST: Yeah.

IHS: And is it true that you were expecting to be dubbed and then you saw the film and it was actually your voice?

KST: Yes, and it was actually my voice. Yes, that was amazing. I remember telling Mike Newell that I was going to do that and he was

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fascinated that I should be making a film in a totally foreign language. And it was, it was a huge adventure. Eugène Ionesco's daughter would come round to my house for six weeks every day and go over and over and over the screenplay with all these really complicated pronunciations and I just learnt it like a parrot basically. And then got to the set and was working with these amazing actors and this incredible director Lucian Pintilie—I don't know if you saw *The Oak*, has anyone seen *The Oak*?—his films are really quite special, very, very powerful and kind of disturbing. But this man was very, very demanding and difficult, a proper Eastern European film director. He shouted and everybody worshipped him, drank a lot and this kind of thing.

[Laughter]

And you know, "You cannot work today you are too ugly," that sort of thing. I loved him, absolutely loved it.

[Laughter]

And I saw the film the other day, actually, I watched it again, and it's absolutely fantastic. It's a fantastic film; I'm really proud of it and not just because I speak a funny language, because it's just the most beautiful film.

IHS: I thought Roger Ebert summed it up perfectly when he said, "This is the most Joseph Conrad adaptation not based on a Joseph Conrad story."

KST: Really? Is that what he said?

IHS: It's an incredible piece of filmmaking, but in the same year you appeared in *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. I'm always curious about a film that has become iconic in some way of what the reaction of the people involved in it was when they first read the script.

KST: Well I just thought it was fantastic. I laughed, I thought it was really—it was just the first time I'd ever read anything like that and I think it was the first time most of us had seen anything like that. The talent of Richard Curtis is extraordinary, and this role, it was just screaming at me, you know, "You have to play this part." So I went up for the audition and I don't think I did very well and Duncan Kenworthy didn't want to hire me and then he changed his mind and it went pretty well.'

IHS: I think it did.

KST: But it was fun making it because we were all sort of shoved in together and it was a very low budget. And there was a sort of feeling that something really exciting was happening, but we were all grumbling like crazy about spending hours waiting for people to stop shooting party scenes, you know, one endless party scene.

IHS: OK, we're going to see a clip from one of those party scenes. This is the scene where Fiona finally opens up to Charlie.

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

The film was an enormous success. You received a huge amount of acclaim, critical acclaim; you won a BAFTA. How much did things change?

KST: Enormously. Yeah, people started actually wanting me without me having to go and beg. No it really did change everything and I was asked a lot to do—what happens is you make a film that's very successful and then people want you to repeat the same thing over again because they know it works and they know they'll get their money's worth and whatever. So that's what happened: I got asked to play a lot of rather less good Fionas, and so I had to fight against it, which is why I went off to do that film in Romania.

IHS: And also following that, it's always interesting I think to look at a landmark moment, whether it's a director or an actor's career, and see what they did afterwards, and in 1995 you appeared in a French production, *Belle Époque*, Robert Lepage's *The Confessional*, playing the assistant to Alfred Hitchcock, Pierre Grange's *En Mai*, and then you were a superb Lady Ann in Richard Loncraine's production of *Richard III*. And it strikes me all that within the space of a year that there is this conscious attempt to say, "OK, I'm drawing a line under Fi and I am going to do something else just to show you my range."

KST: I don't think it was just to show anyone my range, it was more just because you just get bored of doing the same... You've done it, you don't want to do it again. There are some times when you go back and revisit characters at a different stage in one's life and theirs,

obviously. But it's just not fun doing the same thing again. So it wasn't so much about showing off—I have to admit I have done some roles to sort of see if I could do it. Sorry, just thinking how awful that will be—

IHS: We'll come to it.

KST: But no, no, no, it wasn't just to flex my muscles it was frustration and boredom and wanting to keep going and try different things. Yeah.

IHS: I'm just—I don't know, I guess it's not the case, I wasn't thinking about showing off I just think it's the challenge, I guess. It's more about showing the range than just taking on material. For instance *The English Patient*, which, if I'm correct in my research on this, the role of Katharine Clifton is something that you chased after?

KST: Yeah. I really did on that one. But that was another funny thing, because I'd read the book and I was completely and utterly obsessed with the book, and I'd heard there was going to be a film about it and I just wanted to be involved in making it. And I even said to Duncan Kenworthy at the time, I said, "I would do anything on that film. I'll be a runner, I just want to be part of making that story into a film," and I sort of thought I'd be rather good as Hannah, and then I got the script and they said, "Would you read for Katharine Clifton?" and I thought, "I'm not Katharine Clifton at all, they've got this completely wrong. Fiona, *Four Weddings*, miserable..."

[Laughter]

You know, "I can't play this character!" But, and then I went up for it and we did—I met Anthony, Anthony Minghella, and we had a disastrous lunch where I explained to him why it would be a terrible idea to hire me, and then I wrote him a letter and I signed—I was very pleased with myself—I signed the letter, "something, something, something. I am K in your book." You see, because that's what she says to him.

[Laughter]

So then he gave me an audition and doing the audition was—I've never had so much fun in my life as doing that audition. We turned up in this strange, I can't remember what the building was, and I bumped into another

actress on the stairs and she shot daggers at me but I smiled and walked up, and I was very, very late because it was an evening where I was getting... Anyway, whatever that's boring, but I was very, very late because I couldn't get a cab. I arrived anyway and there was Ralph and I'd never met Ralph before and we just sat down and read it and when we looked up from the thing, there was Anthony just beaming and he said, "Ooh can we do it again?" So we started again. And it was such fun and it just felt so brilliant and right and it was just obvious that this should happen. And then of course they lost all their money because they found out the powers that be didn't want me, and then Harvey took over.

IHS: And we look at it now as this piece of epic cinema, but to watch the film again what's remarkable about it is how intimate it is. What was it like actually working on it? Did it feel like an incredibly expansive production?

KST: It did in the way that everything was broken into sections. So for instance all the stuff in the monastery was shot in a completely different place, time. I had nothing to do with any of that, so it was like one film was being made in the monastery with Kip, with the patient, with Hannah. And then there was another film that was being made in the desert, which was an extraordinary experience; shooting that there was wonderful, I mean I couldn't think of anything better. And the words were so good in that film, I mean the dialogue was so good and it was just so beautiful, such a beautiful adaptation. So it was—but you didn't get the feeling you were doing something... I was convinced that it was going to be really important for me, this film, because I was so emotionally attached to the role and so emotionally attached to the story as so many other people were. The number of people who have come to me since then and said, "But you know I actually am Katharine Clifton." So many people have said this to me. And so it is something that really, really touches people, and that's what it did for me but I have the advantage, I'm an actress and I can go and do it. But so it didn't feel like we were doing something huge it felt very—it did feel like we were alone and trapped in the middle of nowhere in the desert.

IHS: We're going to see one of those sequences now from the desert, and you'll see what's so beautiful about this is we have this expansive canvas of the desert backdrop but

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this is the moment where Katharine and Laszlo have just spent an evening together in a truck that's gradually being covered in sand, and the relationship has shifted from something somewhat irascible to a relationship that's somewhat more tender.

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

As much as I love this film and I also love *The Talented Mr Ripley*, I always have this sense of sadness watching these films because I think Anthony Minghella was truly one of the great poets of British cinema, and I think you can draw a line from Michael Powell, what he did, to Minghella. And it's very timeless, that's the thing.

KST: Yeah, it still works very, very well. We saw it last year—was it last year?—the twentieth anniversary. There was a big screening of it in Rome and it's still just as powerful, it's still just as moving. It's beautiful. Proper, proper laster.

IHS: Proper cinema. Um, the period following this saw you not necessarily move to Hollywood but appear in bigger Hollywood films with some fantastic directors. That lasted a couple of years and I know you've gone on record before saying the way of making films in Hollywood isn't necessarily something that you like, but while it lasted in that period did you enjoy it?

KST: No I didn't. I didn't like the size of everything. It was all too big, it was all too many people, too many people to please. You never really knew who you were working for: Am I working for the director? Am I working for the producers? Am I—publicists? Who am I actually working for? And I found that quite disconcerting. Having said that, it was pretty fantastic to be working with Sydney Pollack or Robert Redford, who's the most fantastic actor's director. So I was incredibly—I was aware, and I enjoyed that bit, but it was just the whole sort of thing about it all. You know, I prefer fifteen people in Shepperton or something. Shepperton doesn't exist—anyway—the Isle of Man. Does anyone go to the Isle of Man anymore?

IHS: They've made a few films on the Isle of Man. Good tax breaks, apparently. Different subject. Would you be tempted back?

KST: I think my attitude has changed so much since then, because I've just grown up. And it was very difficult at the time, because from a personal point of view my heart was in Europe, you know, that's where my family was, and it was very difficult for me to be chasing this Hollywood mirage all by myself the other side of the world for months and months and months at a time. Because there was no budget restriction, or there didn't seem to be, they just, "Oh shall we finish at lunchtime today? Yeah let's finish at lunchtime, there's this really great place I want to try out and it closes at whatever." So we'd finish, we'd stop shooting before lunch and everyone would go off and have a wonderful lunch. And it was the most extraordinary thing for me because I'd only done these really, really struggling little films with no money and suddenly there was a completely different attitude, which I found really frustrating. And so it was difficult, it was difficult for me and I regret that now because I think if I had been more present, focused and didn't have half my brain the other side of the world and my heart the other side of the world, then maybe I would have been able to, you know, function better as an actress and as a sort of professional entrepreneur. But it was a difficult time. So but you know I did those films and I learnt a lot from them and I'm very glad I did them.

IHS: The only reason I asked that is that for years you've been at the top of my list as the potentially best Bond villain that we could have. I think you would be just fantastic playing that.

[Laughter]

If you ever get asked, you have support for that. Staying with another director, an American director, Robert Altman, who you worked with on *Gosford Park*. And any time I watch that film I feel there's this sense that someone's trying make an anti-period period piece.

KST: Yes.

IHS: And what was the experience like working on that with him?

KST: That was heaven. That was absolute heaven. I'll never forget the way he—because he was very tall, wasn't he, and he had these amazingly long hands, and he had two cameras and he would stand there towering

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above everybody and direct these cameras and he would push people around and shove the camera operator and make him go over there and the other one, he'd make sure the dolly was... It was fantastic how he did all that, all the movements with the camera and how—such a technician. And with us, he would give us all a little lecture in the beginning and then he'd look around the room and he'd say, "One of you is the weakest link," which is always reassuring when you're with all these dames and knights and what-have-yous. But he was so clever with dialogue and so clever with characterisation and he was just a really, really brilliant director. Much missed.

IHS: And at the same time, you went back to France and appeared on stage in *Berenice*.

KST: Was that the same time?

IHS: Yep, 2001.

KST: Gosh.

IHS: It's interesting because I remember reading at the time some journalist saying, "You've turned your back on Hollywood, you've gone to appear on stage, this is it."

KST: I love all these dramatic statements one makes.

IHS: But did you feel this sense that you had this calling, that you wanted to go back after perhaps spending long times in the trailer on Hollywood productions, to do something that was perhaps a little more—

KST: Yes, I wanted to sort of get grounded again and get back in my business, which is being an actress rather than being a film star, so to speak. And yeah, I felt that was very, very important to me. In fact I remember, now I remember when I learnt that I was going to do *Berenice* I whispered that to someone on the set of *Gosford Park* and then I stepped out of my trailer and suddenly all these actors came tearing out of their little two-way can things and said, "Oh you're going to do Racine, are you? Where are you going to do Racine?" And it was all like, they were all really, really excited about the fact—all these actors, these are proper actors; they want to be on stage, they want to be doing Racine.

IHS: And then in 2004 you came over to the UK and appeared on stage for the first time.

KST: Yeah.

IHS: And in 2008 you received an Olivier for your performance in *The Seagull*. Was—obviously you'd acted on stage in France for quite some time—

KST: No, no, no, I hadn't.

IHS: Oh had you not?

KST: I'd done one play before I did *Under the Cherry Moon*, literally just before, and then I did *Berenice* and that was it. And I've never acted in French again on stage. So I don't know what that means, but...

[laughter]

But I always find that when you come off a play, it's much better to make a film, you're much better at filming, if you see what I mean. People have to tell you to talk a bit quieter, sometimes I get reprimanded for being too expansive, but—you know, because your acting muscles are all warm and you're ready, everything's firing away up there. So it's always much more fun doing a film when you've just finished a play.

IHS: It's interesting thinking about you starring in *The Seagull* in 2008; one of my favourite performances of yours around this time that you were appearing on stage was in Paul Schrader's *The Walker*.

KST: Oh yes, I like that film.

IHS: Which is wonderful, and it's interesting because you could look back to the Lauren Hutton character in *American Gigolo* and there are sort of similarities between the two roles.

KST: Do you think?

IHS: More in terms of what happens to the character as opposed to the actual performance and the world that they live in. And I was just curious about the conversations that you had with Paul Schrader around that and also the actual dialogue that you had with Woody Harrelson, because the way that the two of you play off each other in that film is quite wonderful.

KST: Do you know I can't remember any conversations with Paul Schrader apart from... Yeah, no I'm sorry to disappoint but I can't come up with anything. That was shot on the Isle of Man, that was Washington, the Isle of Man, it was hilarious. But working with Woody Harrelson was quite something. And also I was pretending to be American, which is always a bit sticky and makes me quite uncomfortable, pretending to be American. I'm better at it now but in the beginning it was very difficult. But Paul was, you know, he was a very technical director. So he wouldn't give me—I don't think he gave me any kind of instructions on how to act it, but it would be all, "We're going to do coverage and this is how you do this and put the camera there and da, da, da. And we've got to do this again." Because it was all about the shots, it wasn't so much about how I filled them.

IHS: And two of the other people you play opposite in that film: You've got Lily Tomlin

KST: Yeah

IHS: But also Lauren Bacall. I just wondered, it might sound like a strange question, but do you get star struck?

KST: Totally. Yeah, I mean, I think if you weren't star struck by her she'd have struck you. She was quite something, she was fantastic; she really had a kind of—hackneyed expression—but she had such presence to her, you know, and she'd get in front of that camera and she'd be just there. It was fantastic, that. You try to sort of pick up tips from people like that, hints.

IHS: Another interesting aspect of your career since 2000 is that, I think for many British audiences they recognise you as much for your work in French film as they do for your work in English or American productions, and it's also interesting to note that French cinema is much more keen to represent the lives of middle-aged women than English-language cinema. Do you feel that you've been pushed a great deal more in the majority of cases in your roles in French cinema?

KST: Well yeah, I mean no one ever asked me to do a *Partir* or no one asked me to do *I've Loved You So Long* or that funny little thing that I—what was it called? I can't remember the title of it, but no one's ever asked me to play those roles in English, never, ever, ever. So I

don't know whether they just don't make those stories, or I don't know what the cause is, but it's true—I've had a fantastic variety of characters to play in French that I haven't had in English. I mean I may go from strict and mean in *Nowhere Boy* to strict and mean in a posh country house, but it got to a point where it was like that and now it's ironed itself out again and there's more variety, but there was a period when I was really quite sort of disappointed by what I was being invited to do in English and much more excited by what I was being asked to do in French. *Contre toi*, I don't know what *Contre Toi*—the Lola Doillon film, I don't know what the title was in English, but anyway.

IHS: We're going to see a clip from *I've Loved You So Long* now. This is a moment about two-thirds of the way in the film when Juliette is starting to feel more welcome in her sister's house and also has a conversation with Laurent Grévill's Michel.

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

Do you feel that you've become more fearless in the way you approach roles? Thinking about this role, but also working with Catherine Corsini on *Leaving* in 2009, which is an extraordinary performance and it's a tough but emotionally powerful thing to watch.

KST: Um, yeah I think I... Fearless. I think I was probably, I sort of threw myself into things before whereas now I think I'm more aware of what I can and can't do, so I'm perhaps not quite as fearless, or perhaps I choose my fears with more care, perhaps. I think there's nothing more exciting than something that's impossible. But um, I don't know. I can't really answer your question.

IHS: With that in mind, do you find that you're an actor who is satisfied with the roles you play or do you always feel that it's almost this working process, that you could continue and continue with developing a character—

KST: Well I feel that what we do as actors, what my job is, is to go onto the set in the morning and provide the director with a kind of variety of ways to build this character. My job is sort of to give him the raw material to make his thing that he'll do later, that's how I feel that it is. And that's what I like to do. So I like it to be

quite loose. So if he says, "Oh that's great, thank you very much," I'm fine with that. You know, because I don't have this kind of, "Oh no, but I'm sure this character..." That's not quite true, that's not quite true, because sometimes there are cases when I'm absolutely convinced this character would be that way. For example in that film I was very obsessive about that film and that role. I really wanted to be the way I wanted and I didn't want to be the way he wanted, and I don't know who won because, you know, I say you give different variations on things. And I think it's a problem in the editing sometimes, because a number of editors have said to me, "You know, you must try and do the same thing a bit more often, try and repeat things because..."

IHS: Philippe Claudel must have been happy with your performance because you worked with him on another film.

KST: Yes, and I did another film with him, yep. *Avant l'Hiver*, yeah. I don't know, has that been released here?

IHS: No it hasn't. Something that is incredibly fascinating about your work, and we could look at *I've Loved You So Long* or *Partir*, *Leaving* as an example, you bring humour to almost every character that you play, a very slight humour. And obviously no one is ever serious for the entirety of their life, but when we're watching a film there are certain films where we just watch serious people and nothing else. And it struck me when you go back to your early work, *Handful of Dust*, and I just get this sense that in the process of your preparing for a role and performing that there's this element of you that has to bring a levity no matter how dark a role may be.

KST: Yeah I think the darker, the more you've got... There needs to be somewhere in there that there's a sort of, like a pressure cooker there needs to be somewhere the pressure is taken off a bit. And I think that happens a lot through a twinkle or a wit or some kind of sense of humour. I mean that's what I look for, actually, in a role: You've got to be able to find where you're going to connect, to have fun, because there has to be fun in there. I mean Fiona was quite fun-loving. Poor Fiona, it's really, how sad.

IHS: I ask that because one of the scenes I've always wondered about in *The English Patient*, when you and Ralph are underneath the

bleachers and you're quite close to a beam and you turn around and smack your head on the beam and I just wonder was that agreed upon with Anthony or was that one of those star trooper moments in *Star Wars* where he can't quite find the exit?

KST: No, that was in the book. I think it was in the book. I sometimes have trouble remembering what was in the screenplay and what was in the book, and so does everyone who made that film. Sometimes Michael said to me, "Sometimes I think I wrote that but actually Anthony wrote it." So that was in the thing and then Anthony wanted to cut it and Saul Zaentz and I were absolutely insistent that, no, no, no, she must walk off with great dignity and then hit her head on the thing. And that's one moment that I absolutely love in that film. Those sort of moments where things go wrong and don't happen the way they're supposed to happen for the character, those are the things that attract me to different roles.

IHS: And this is one of the reasons I love the role of Mimi in Sam Taylor-Johnson's *Nowhere Boy*. At first we have this very austere character, but she has a cracking sense of humour.

KST: She does, doesn't she? She's pretty mean...

IHS: He did alright in the end, John Lennon.

KST: Yes he did, didn't he? But that's actually the only other character I've played who actually existed. I had to listen to her a lot and then I got complaints because I didn't have a Liverpudlian accent, but actually she doesn't have a Liverpudlian accent, she has something else. She came from north Wales, which is obviously near Liverpool, but it wasn't sort of Scouse—is that Scouse? Is Liverpool Scouse? So yeah, no I really enjoyed playing that part. It was a good part to get your teeth into because you can, you can be sort of punchy and at the same time there's a sort of—you can see the cracks, sometimes, I like being able to see the cracks in a—when I'm watching a film I like being able to think, "Oh but I saw something else that no one else has seen." Because if you're watching a film and you can identify with a character and you can see the weaknesses and you can see the wobbly bits and the bits that don't quite match up, then you feel that you own that character as an audience member, you're sort of attached—you know, "I saw that, I recognised

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that." I like that, I watching that, and so I like being able to act that, too.

IHS: One of the key scenes in *Nowhere Boy* that a lot of people talked about at the time is the huge argument that takes place between you and Anne-Marie Duff's character, John Lennon's mother. What's so interesting about that is it's not just about the words that are spoken, the body language of those characters in that scene is quite extraordinary and the physicality, not just the way that both of you look but the way you both hold yourselves in that scene... How much time did it take to work that entire sequence...?

KST: It was quite a complicated sequence to work out because it was very high emotion and then you keep tripping up when you've got such high emotion in a very small, confined space. Seamus McGarvey was DP and I remember him with his sliding thing and I remember we were all crammed into this really tiny set and so it was quite complicated to work out. And I think, doesn't she lift her arms or something? And that is simply because of the space, because the room is so small and the chairs and the fire and the knick-knacks and the—everything was so kind of invasive that you kind of protect your—I don't know. That's what happened, that's how that happened; it wasn't decided before, it just sort of happened. And then invariably when you're me you get, you're all at the end of the day when there's no time left, so it all has to be done very, very quickly. So that's how that happened.

IHS: We're going to see a sequence now from *Nowhere Boy*, but not that scene. We're going to go a little earlier because I'm just so fascinated by the way you inject humour into certain scenes. This is where Aaron Taylor-Johnson, John Lennon, has stayed overnight with his real mother and he's come back to his Aunt Mimi to see her and has an ambition that he wants to confess.

KST: I can't remember this.

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

IHS: At the other end of the scale to the lighter moments of *Nowhere Boy* is your extraordinary performance as Crystal in Nicolas Winding-Refn's *Only God Forgives*.

KST: Extraordinary hmm?

IHS: It's amazing. I saw it at a public screening cinema in London and this very old woman, must have been in her late eighties, obviously a fan of yours, came out white as a sheet and I just heard her saying, "Well she's off my dream dinner party list."

[Laughter]

Again, I'd heard that you were fascinated by the person who would want you to play that role...

KST: Exactly. Yes. Well I met Nicolas and I hadn't seen *Drive* because *Drive* hadn't been released. I saw the film about the man in prison—

IHS: Oh, *Bronson*

KST: *Bronson*, which I loved, I thought it was absolutely brilliant. And *Valhalla Rising* and *Pusher* and I was just fascinated by this strange, strange storyteller, anyway the stories are extraordinary. And then he'd written this screenplay about this family in Bangkok and wanted me to play this part which is so far away from Sylvia McCordle or Brenda Last, it was the absolute opposite end. And it was first going to be an English boy the actor playing my son, and then it became Ryan Gosling, and I said, "Well what are we going to do?" And he said, "Well you have to be American." So that's how that happened. And anyway, I had such fun. Oh god it was fun. It was great.

IHS: Again, another more recent fun role that you've played and you mentioned earlier about the recent role, Sally Potter on *The Party*. It looks like you're having a ball.

IHS: Yes, we are, we are. I'm actually going to go and finish it because it's too short, so they need to add on a bit for television or something. So on Friday we're going to go and do ten more minutes.

IHS: Really?

KST: Yes! But this is the sort of thing I love doing: We made this film, it took us twelve days, twelve days to make it—or thirteen, maybe, thirteen days to make the film. There were, I don't know, seven actors, I think we were. Bruno Ganz! I mean I've never made a film

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with Bruno Ganz and now I have and it's fantastic. And it was just, it was such a challenge, and saying these words that I think are—I really liked the screenplay, I thought it was brilliant, and when I read it first I immediately thought she wanted me to play April, you know, the sarcastic one. And I said, "Well I know you want me to play April," and she said, "No, no, no, I was hoping you'd play Janet." And so I thought, "Oh, hang on. Well let's have another look," and so that's how that happened. But I love making films like that, that's where I'm happiest; super urgent, a huge sense of urgency with other actors—lots of people who've worked on—it sounds a bit weird but people who work on stage have a great feeling of how to work together, and I find sometimes working on film that that is a bit of a lonely job, working on film sometimes. You know, when your acting partner is having his nails done or something while you've got to stand with a bit of blue gaffer for eyes, sometimes that's a little bit disheartening.

[Laughter]

IHS: We're going to see a pivotal moment from *The Party* now, where Janet, Kristin Scott Thomas' character, is about to find out that her appointment as Shadow Health Minister is overshadowed by some news that her husband has.

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

I will admit to feeling slightly cheated watching that film because for years I thought that the right cut was your favourite punch of choice and I've actually realised that your left hook is the strongest. That's hideous.

[Laughter]

KST: I do enjoy doing that. I've always been a bit nervous about all that fake hitting.

[Laughter]

it wasn't—anyway, moving on.

IHS: The last few years, as you said, you've taken on so many different kinds of roles, but at the same time you're looking to direct your first film. What made you decide to do that?

KST: Well, a number of things. I think after a while you start just wanting to act every other part as well and wanting to move the camera and wanting, just wanting to be in charge and wanting to make them move faster and... Is that a reason to make a film? I don't know. The desire to tell a story my way, I think, is why I want to make a film. And I have a story that I want to tell and it's proving extremely difficult to find the funds to make this film because it's, anyway... Yeah.

IHS: What was it about Elizabeth Jane Howard's novel?

KST: It's a very complex story about two grown-ups who are at a dead end and who have their life turned around by somebody very young and seemingly innocent, who just shows them a sort of—gives them clarity. And they're very wrapped up in their own grief and this girl's grief will then show them that they can move on. So this story is the one that I've been chewing on for a long, long time and this is the story I want to tell right now.

IHS: It's interesting, around the time that the film was announced you quoted Sydney Pollack, who said that actors make naturally good filmmakers, which I think—

KST: He's not the only one that's said that to me, either. Roman's said that to me, as well, and I find that very encouraging. Both of them have worked with me as well, so...

IHS: I want to come up to the most recent film that you've worked on, *Darkest Hour*, which opened to great acclaim at the Toronto Film Festival. And again it's another relationship that we're looking at, and what discussions did you have with the director, Joe Wright, and what were your own feelings about playing Clementine Churchill? Because it strikes me the film is trying to reposition her, as so many women should be in stories, as an integral and important part of history, and not some one who should just be side-lined.

KST: Yeah. It's not the first I'm I've been asked to play Clementine Churchill and when I heard Joe Wright was—Joe Wright wanted to talk to me about something, and then I found out it was about Churchill my sort of heart sank because I thought, "Oh God, yet another, you know, in the background, 'have you done your—have you had your—have you got your coat, darling?'" this kind of thing, and it's just

not... No. Anyway, so I read it and to be honest in the beginning I said to Joe, "You don't need, I don't need, we don't need each other for this. Let's find something else to work on." And then he came and he persuaded me and I said, "OK, I'll have another look," and then I just felt that the role as it was written, it was exactly that problem. To understand this man, you have to be able to see his own emotional turmoil, his conscience, and the best place to show his conscience is in his marriage with this incredibly intelligent, strong woman who knew him backwards and was unafraid of him—well, was afraid of him and unafraid of him at the same time, complicated. And I felt very strongly that we should develop this a bit more and learn a little bit more about her and that she shouldn't just be sort of waving him off to the office in the morning or getting cross with him, that there was much more to her. And indeed there's much, much, much more to her and I would love it if somebody decided to do something on her. I would definitely beg for that part. But I really wanted to work with Joe and working with Gary was such a revelation—he's absolutely extraordinary in this film. But anyway, I'm sure more will be said about that.

IHS: We're going to see a scene from *Darkest Hour* now. Again, it's a moment of levity, but what I really love about this scene is it starts off with all bluster and emotion, commotion, sorry, and ends on an intensely personal level showing the couple's love for each other.

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

It's a beautiful relationship, the way it's communicated and then conveyed in that film. Could you talk a little more about working with Gary?

KST: Um yes I can. It was quite—the transformation was absolutely extraordinary. When I first met Gary Oldman, I didn't meet Gary Oldman, in fact, I met Winston Churchill, because he walked into the first rehearsal, first time he ever introduced himself to everybody he was in full Churchill gear—costume, make-up, everything, they'd done a test just before. And people stood up. It was quite impressive. And the way he moves and the way he—he was just extraordinary. And Gary just sort of dissolved into this skin and so I don't feel that I—part of me is bluffed by the whole thing and thinks, "Well perhaps I didn't work with Gary

Oldman, I just worked with Winston Churchill's ghost or something," I don't know. But it was—he is extraordinarily generous and patient and you know, I don't know how many hours of make-up he had to have every day but it was quite something. And I'd always arrive and grumble about having to spend ten extra minutes before the usual, and then I realised I really ought to shut up about things like that. And he was—he'd let me discover things; we'd rehearsed quite a lot before we got onto the set, which was—at the beginning we had four weeks rehearsal which was a huge luxury, and which was really well-invested. And it was just so easy acting with him, you just sort of do it and it just sort of worked. I mean he believed I was Cat and I believed he was Pig, and that was it. It was a sort of unspoken rule that we were—that that's who we were. And I never saw him out of Winston's suit, and I don't think—he never saw me out of Clemmie, either, so it was Clemmie and Churchill.

IHS: It's interesting you say that about the rehearsal period because watching the film you do get a sense the two of you in a way are riffing off each other. There's just this—

KST: There's no, I mean it was all written.

IHS: Yes

KST: It was all very, very written, it was very clever writing by Anthony McCarten but you do, you get a sense of sort of liveliness and there's a kind of joy in there that sometimes is difficult to dig out.

IHS: But the looks aren't written, and this is something about your work... I could pick a scene from *I've Loved You So Long*, before she arrives back for her birthday party where Juliette is just sat alone in a bar drinking, and we see a wealth of emotions passing across your face. It's beyond the script, it's just something that's quite remarkable that you do that happens in the moment.

KST: Um, thank you. I don't know what to say.

IHS: Let's turn to the audience and see if they have anything to say at this point in time. Do we have any questions? We have some roving mics. Someone just down here at the bottom, we've got a mic coming to you now.

Q: Congratulations on an amazing body of work.

KST: Thank you, thank you.

Q: My question is: You mentioned earlier that you've become aware of what you can do and what you can't do. Could you elaborate on that a bit? And what would be your dream roles, as well?

KST: I'd like to be a—I'd love to do a comedy, a proper comedy. I really want to do more of things like *Salmon Fishing* and things like that. I'm never—I'm not so sure I'm good at being evil. Am I?

IHS: I think you'd make a great Bond villain.

[Laughter]

Trust me.

KST: I always feel such a fraud when I'm being evil, but then perhaps... Anyway, I'd like to play more comedies, I'd like to be able to do more of the one-liners, I'd like to be able to nail them. I like sending through, nailing lines. I enjoy that a lot. But I'm a very—I really like, I like filmmaking; I like being with crews, I like stepping over tracks, I like standing on marks, I like impossible positions. That kind of thing, that's what I like doing. I love sort of the impossibility of it as I said earlier, I think. I love the difficulty, the—all the sort of technical stuff. I love that, that's what I enjoy about filmmaking rather than the acting part, I think. Of course I love the acting part but they go hand in hand and, you know?

Q: Thank you.

IHS: We've got someone at the top there. What about a Marvel superhero? That would be good.

KST: Oh no, no, no. That would mean—

IHS: Really? Lots of green screen.

KST: I've never done any green screen, I'd like to do some green screen—I think I have done green screen once. But I've never really done it properly. I think I'd quite enjoy that; I used to be awfully good at mime.

[Laughter]

But no, I couldn't bare having make-up and all that, that would drive me insane. So I don't

think I'd be very good at being green or red or having strange things... But do they? Anyway, don't really know, I don't—I haven't ever watched any of those *Marble* films—*Marvel*, not *Marble*!

[Laughter]

I've never watched any of those, so I wouldn't know.

Q: Wonderful performances in *Darkest Hour* and especially *The Party*.

KST: Thank you.

Q: You touched on a subject that I'm just a bit baffled by it: You mentioned that—I mean I saw *The Party*, it's perfect, the script is fine, I didn't feel anything lacking. Now you're mentioning that for the television version they're expecting another ten minutes adding. And is it Sally's idea or other ideas?

KST: You know, that's the mystery of the producers, I don't really know about that. But all I know is that we've got, on Friday, I'm giving a press conference and I'm very excited about it because it means I get to work with Sally again and I get to play that character again, who is giving all the reasons for the furore outside her front door. And it will be reminiscent of Theresa May's recent speech with cough drops and I'm going to have a ball. So I'm looking forward to it but I can't really give you the proper, real reason because I'm an actress and I tend to stay away from those kind of production problems.

IHS: Yes, just behind.

Q: Yes, so I recently saw *The Party* and I drew a lot of parallels between *The Party* and *Gosford Park*, you know? There's a party where everything goes wrong. Did you see that connection somewhere?

KST: Do you know, you are the first person to have suggested that and I think you're probably right, but I'd never thought of it. But yeah, it's true; it's a party that goes horribly wrong. But I think that's a theme of quite a lot of films, isn't it? Parties that go horribly wrong. Plays, films... I've just seen *Festen* on stage, an adaptation of the film *Festen* on stage in France and it works brilliantly as a play as well, so works both ways.

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IHS: Someone down here. And we have another question... Just two down here.

KST: Gosh it's awfully tense, isn't it?

IHS: We have two mics coming across now.

KST: Here we are!

Q: Gosh, I have butterflies now I've got the mic.

KST: Have you forgotten your question?

Q: No, not at all. I wanted to ask you about Ludovic Bernard's film *Au Bout des Doigts*, which is—a little bit au retour here in England as far as French cinema's concerned. I was wondering if you could tell us a little bit about it?

KST: Well I've just finished shooting it. It's about a young boy who has an extraordinary talent for playing the piano and is discovered and I play—and he's very sort of, doesn't want to go to lessons, doesn't want to exploit this talent, and I try and coax it out of him and I'm his wicked but at the end kind piano teacher. And I enjoyed every minute of it, I absolutely loved it. It was great; playing the pretend piano is one of my fortes now.

[Laughter]

IHS: Directly in front. Yep.

Q: Hi. I was wondering if you could say a little bit more about what the process was like working with Prince? And if there was anything kind of unusual or memorable that happened on set?

KST: Well lots of unusual things. For a start he fired the director after two weeks and said, rang me up in the middle of the night one day and said, "Hello. Mary has been fired, I'm now going to be the director," which was—well, you know, what can you, "Oh, goody, OK."

[Laughter]

So I turned up to work and it—it was extraordinary having a film with somebody who was so important in the world, I guess, and in show business and for Warner Brothers and everyone was fawning. And we were twenty-three! It was a bit mad, really.

IHS: Was there a lot of hoopla around the actual shoot?

KST: Oh god yes. It was unbelievable, yeah. You know, like police cordons and you couldn't get, you couldn't get—they had to make sure no one was coming on and we had to shoot at funny times and funny places. It was a huge thing, all in the south of France, which is why I was hired. The only reason I was hired was because I could speak English and was local.

[Laughter]

Some things don't work like that!

IHS: And please tell me you—

KST: Oh and who else? Terence Stamp left. And who—

IHS: Was it Steven Berkoff?

KST: And Steven Berkoff took over. And Terence Stamp after three days of rehearsal said, "Right, I'm out of here."

[Laughter]

He left and Steven Berkoff turned up and he was my dad. So yeah, I mean it was fun.

IHS: But please tell me you just got free tickets to Prince concerts—

KST: Forever.

IHS: Good.

KST: Yep, I've seen him play many times, it was always extraordinary.

IHS: I think we've got time for—

KST: I have to say he gave me my first job, I will never forget that, and he remained a great supporter: Came to see me in *The Seagull*, loved *I've Loved You So Long*, wrote a song about it. You know it was all pretty fantastic. And he was my—he was the first person to give me a job.

IHS: What song?

KST: It's called *Better With Time* and you can find it on the Internet.

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[Laughter]

IHS: I think we've got time for one more question. Someone right at the very back. While the microphone's being passed across, it's a horrible thing to pin an actor down—

KST: Oh God.

IHS: Especially someone with so many roles. But if you had to take away one role that you would keep with you—

KST: Oh that's awful; it's like being asked to choose a child. Erm...

IHS: Wow, that was a look I got just then.

KST: Yeah, I'm sorry but that's really, really hard. The one—I do have an extraordinary attachment to this Romanian film that no one's seen, which is useful. Because I was so proud of actually just doing it, you know, getting up and going to Romania where I knew no one, where I knew no one on set. I was all on my own, I was the only non-Romanian person there, and just sort of got on with it and did my own hair and make-up because there wasn't anyone else to do it, and just sort of got on with it and played this role in a foreign language with a director who kept telling me I was too ugly—"You're a television actress." That was that, I'd go home, he didn't like me very much but in the end he did like me, and the film is a really beautiful film that I'm really proud of. So I think perhaps I'd take that one because it's not too big, as well, so I can put it in a little bag.

[Laughter]

IHS: Yes.

Q: Hi, hello, hi. I was wondering about the *As You Desire Me* play that you were in on the West End, the Pirandello play. I saw you on stage then and I remember thinking that was a very challenging role to play. I just wondered if you could tell me a bit more about how you prepared for that role? Thank you.

KST: Well I had a lot of lines to learn, so preparing was mostly just learning lines and leaning how to sing but sing in a certain way. That's what is great about working in the theatre is you've got this rehearsal period. It was—that's sort of what I prefer, really, is the rehearsal. But anyway the thing that, the challenging thing in that role was this is a

woman who kept forgetting everything, and she would talk in circles and she'd get almost—she'd get to the middle of her thought and forget what the end was supposed to be so she'd have to go back to the beginning. And people kept sort of complaining that I'd forgotten my lines.

[Laughter]

There were a lot of complaints to the theatre about that: "She doesn't know her lines."

[Laughter]

IHS: *The Darkest Hour*, or *Darkest Hour*, even, opens on the twelfth of January next year, and I cannot begin to recommend how superb a film it is, as well as Kristin Scott Thomas' and Gary Oldman's performance. Thank you very much to BAFTA for organising this event but most of all can you please join me in thanking Dame Kristin Scott Thomas.

[Applause]

KST: Thank you.

IHS: Thank you.

KST: Thank you, that was really nice.