

Screenwriters On Screenwriting.

The BAFTA and BFI Screenwriters' Lecture Series in association with The JJ Charitable Trust

John Logan

20 September 2011 at BFI Southbank

John Logan: Hello, thank you for coming. I was telling Jeremy [Brock, curator] it's an especial sort of horror to ask a writer to speak in public, so forgive me for any nervousness. I always say if I liked public performing I'd be Roddy McDowall, I'd be acting.

I'm pleased and proud to be here and quite honestly my philosophy about my work has always been 'keep your head down and do your work'. I don't seek press, I don't do interviews, it's not something I'm terribly interested in, that level of personal aggrandisement.

But when Jeremy asked me to do this I thought about my life, and I turn 50 in a couple of weeks, and I thought back on all the events that shaped me. And I thought particularly about England. I've had five movies shoot here. My last play premiered here last year and my new play premieres here next year.

My parents are from Belfast. I'm wearing my Paul Smith suit, and I thought if ever I am going to crawl out of the crypt of my life and speak about my work it's going to be here. So thank you so much for having me.

APPLAUSE

I thought I would start just by telling you how I became a screenwriter. Occasionally when I talk to young screenwriters or writing students, which is my favourite thing in the world, they have this look on their face when they start thinking, 'Oh, okay, he's going to give us the secret. He's going to tell us the thing that I can do to be this certain thing,' and midway through my tale all the blood rushes from their face and they get this horrified, aghast expression, so I'm looking forward to seeing that on all of you.

The key to me and writing is Belfast. My parents are from Belfast, and I was raised reading poetry. My parents read poetry to me when I was very young and I always absolutely loved it. It was something that moved me and inspired me and

excited me. Corresponding with that was a love of movies.

I didn't know from the theatre, I didn't know from Ibsen or Chekhov, but I knew from *Notorious*. I knew from Howard Hawks, I knew from Truffaut. I knew from movies and I'd always loved them. And one day *the* event in my life occurred. My father came to me and said, 'I want you to watch this movie with me.'

I was about eight, and I didn't want to sit and watch a movie with my father so I asked, 'What is it?' He said, 'Don't ask, it's got ghosts and swordfights.' It was Olivier's *Hamlet*. And that was the movie that changed my life, because when you're that age you love the swashbuckler. I saw a swordfight in that movie that was unlike Tyrone Power and Errol Flynn, it was so exciting and so thrilling.

The ghosts were frightening; it was that black and white, deep focus Gregg Tolandish cinematography. There was something evocative about it. And there was this language, this thing called Shakespeare. And my father, bless him, realised that I had been inspired by this movie and so we sat down and we read Shakespeare.

He started with all those plays that had swordfights, so we read the history plays, we read *Coriolanus*, we read *Macbeth*. I didn't understand anything, but I knew they were inspiring to me and exciting to me and I was truly stage-struck by Shakespeare. I started going to the theatre, and that was it, I was lost.

There was no place and there is no place that I am more at home and more excited than in a theatre, whether it's a huge Broadway house or a teeny little pub theatre. It makes no difference to me, it is the magical event. The transformative event of my life is theatre.

So like everyone who wanted to be in theatre I wanted to be 'an actor'. I thought that's what you did. I knew there were playwrights, I knew

Screenwriters On Screenwriting.

The BAFTA and BFI Screenwriters' Lecture Series in association with The JJ Charitable Trust

John Logan

20 September 2011 at BFI Southbank

there were playwrights who did things but I wanted to be an actor. So I went to Northwestern outside Chicago to study acting. And I quickly realised that for me, all that emotional honesty was not the thing.

I saw great actors around me who lived for that personal expression and it just wasn't for me. But I still loved the theatre. So I stayed in the programme at Northwestern, and as a fluke I took a playwriting class. And the result of that class, at the end of the year, [was] to have an original play. So I wrote my first play.

I was 18, and from that day to this all I have ever wanted to do is be a dramatist; to write lines for actors, to give directors, designers, theatres and movie studios material, to collaborate in that particular way.

I'm not a novelist, I'm not a poet, I don't write in isolation, I work with others, and what I do is highly unique. What we do is highly unique. So I became a playwright, and it was great, and I loved it.

You're about to get to the part by the way where you're going to go pale and look ashen. I graduated from Northwestern. I had no money. No-one had any money. So I got a day job, shelving books at the Northwestern University Law Library. Every morning I would work from nine to five and shelf books, for ten years. Every single day for ten years.

I lived in a tiny studio apartment where you could practically touch the walls. Outside the window was a place that installed car alarms, so at all hours it was car alarms. I lived on tuna fish, which I still will not eat to this day. I learned how to de-bone a chicken because it was cheaper. And it was hard. And it was the greatest time in my life because I had no expectations of anything but learning how to do my job, which was to be a playwright. And all my fellows were doing the exact same thing. They all had hideous day jobs and all we did [was] theatre.

You'd stay up all night, and my plays were put on in teeny little church basements or in back allies, in theatres that were condemned while the play was going on. It was fantastic. It was a very vibrant time in Chicago theatre, and I loved it. I spent ten years learning how to do my job and it was fantastic.

I'd always had movies in the back of my mind but it was never anything I pursued. I wasn't interested. I was too happy doing what I was doing as a playwright making no money shelving books. But eventually someone read one of my plays, called *The View From Golgotha*. It was about a heresy trial in the Catholic Church. His name was Brian Siberell and he was, at that point, working for HBO Showcase in New York, a division that no longer exists.

He called me and said, 'We're interested in developing your play for an HBO movie.' I said, 'Great, I love movies but I know nothing about them.' He said, 'Great,' so Brian and I started talking about it.

Then one day he called me and said, 'HBO's not going to do your movie because I'm going to CAA. Would you like to be my first client?' CAA is a talent agency in LA. I didn't have an agent, I didn't have anything and I said, 'I would love to, I'd love to get in the movies, what a thrilling idea.' He said, 'Well, we can't sign you because you have no credits and no-one knows you, and you live in Chicago and you shelf books.' I wasn't a plum client at that point, but he said, 'But if you come to CAA, come to LA and bring ten movie ideas I'll have a meeting and we'll see if something connects.'

So I borrowed the money from my friend Molly to fly to LA where I stayed with friends, and I came up with ten movie ideas. I went into CAA. The building was designed to make you feel insignificant. You walk in and there's a 60 foot Roy Lichtenstein, and you're like, 'Fuck me, seriously?'

Screenwriters On Screenwriting.

The BAFTA and BFI Screenwriters' Lecture Series in association with The JJ Charitable Trust

John Logan

20 September 2011 at BFI Southbank

So little me, starving playwright John Logan goes in. Brian Siberell, who became my agent and is the only agent I've ever had, was there. There were a bunch of suits around a table and he said, 'Well what are you movie ideas?' So I went through them, and they were outlandish things because they reflected my Irish attraction for the melancholy.

They were rather serious things which Hollywood doesn't always embrace with the enthusiasm you might imagine. People like *Coriolanus* because the word 'anus' is in the title, that's the only reason the movie was eventually made. Trust me.

So I have this list of ideas, and I get to one, and it's one sentence. It's King Lear in the NFL – the NFL is the National Football League – and Brian said, 'Is that a football movie?' and I said, 'Yeah,' and he said, 'That's the one you should write.' I said, 'Okay.'

So I made a deal with Brian. He said, 'If you take a year off writing plays and you commit yourself to this and you write this screenplay, no matter what it's like I will represent it. So I said great, and we made that deal. But for that deal, but for Brian Siberell, I would not be standing here.

So I took a year off writing plays and wrote this screenplay. I lost my job shelving books, I had no money at all and I was learning about football. I went and hung out with the Chicago Bears, I studied football, I sort of lived total immersion to write this screenplay, and it practically killed me.

I wrote this script called *Any Given Sunday*, and I gave it to Brian Siberell after nine months and said, 'That's it, there it is.' I was going to Australia to work on a new play. This tells you of my standing in the theatre community. There was this teeny little theatre in Adelaide that loved my work, so I gave him the script and I flew to Adelaide Australia, halfway round the world from Chicago – burrow a hole and there you are – and I'm in the director's kitchen. And this is why my story is useless to other writers, because I can't imagine anyone's going to be in

this kitchen in Adelaide, the phone rings and it's Brian Siberell. He says, 'Well, sit down. Oliver Stone's going to be calling you in five minutes.' So I was like, 'Okay, great.'

So quite literally five minutes later the phone rings and it's Oliver Stone: 'Logan, what is that, Irish? I hate the Irish, but I love your movie, I've got to see you in Tokyo in three days.' So three days later he's doing a junket for *Nixon*, I'm in Tokyo in the best hotel in the world meeting with Oliver Stone and that's the beginning of my film career.

So that takes me up to the reel that you're going to see which, when I look back at it and think about the 50 years of my life, makes me very proud about the accomplishment. I have to give all credit to David Franzoni and to Bill Nicholson who co-wrote *Gladiator* with me, and Ed Zwick and Marshall Herskovitz who worked on *The Last Samurai*. I hope you enjoy it.

(Clips reel)

Mark Salisbury: What an incredible reel, and that was an exclusive from *Hugo* that you had to get Marty's permission to show.

John Logan: Yes, I had to wrestle that out of Marty Scorsese's hands, so I hope you enjoyed the clip from *Hugo* and I hope you'll enjoy it more in 3D.

MS: So, as they explained earlier, I'm going to talk for a bit and then throw it open to you. You said, John, that if you want to be a screenwriter, not to watch movies.

JL: [Laughs]

MS: That you must be a dramatist first, and if you want to read you want to read. Can you explain that, because obviously in Hollywood everybody watches movies.

JL: Yeah, but that's not my background. I didn't go to film school, I didn't come from a cinema study background, I came from a theatre

Screenwriters On Screenwriting.

The BAFTA and BFI Screenwriters' Lecture Series in association with The JJ Charitable Trust

John Logan

20 September 2011 at BFI Southbank

background, so shortly after I tell young screenwriters that story about struggling for ten years – this is when they actually leave the table, when I say, 'If you want to be a successful screenwriter, here's the secret...'

Here it is, I'm going to tell you. This is what you have to do, it's great – don't tell anyone. You have to read *Hamlet* and you have to read it again and you have to read it until you understand every word. And then you move onto *King Lear*. And then maybe you treat yourself to *Troilus and Cressida*.

And then you know what? Then you're going to go back and read Aristotle's poetics until you can quote it. And then you're going to read Sophocles and then you're going to read Ibsen and then you're going to read Tony Kushner and then you're going to read Chekhov. You're going to understand the continuum of what it is to be a dramatist, so you have respect for the form in which you are trying to function. So you understand what has come before you.

Then, if you choose, watch a couple of movies. But the great mastery of writing words for characters will be taught to you by those people who invented the form over centuries. So to me it's vital that people understand that, and particularly Shakespeare because of language.

There is a notion that what cinema is is pictures, it's beautiful moving pictures. It's the sweep and nuance of visual storytelling. It certainly is that. But it is also language, it is also characters expressing themselves through dialogue and dialogue has become so devalued in movies, which is why when someone asked me what I want in my reel I said I want speeches, I want language, I want tripping language.

I want nuance. I want Kate Hepburn's synopses firing so quickly you can't keep up, like I learned from Pinter. So what I say to young writers is, 'Read your Shakespeare, read your Shelley, read your Keats, read your Byron, love language.'

MS: And how do they react to that, because obviously they want to write *Die Hard*?

JL: Exactly. Not all of them thank god, but then they buy screenwriting books. More power to you, it's a complete waste of time as far as I'm concerned, because what those screenwriting books give you is, 'Here is the standard form, here is the standard three act structure,' to which I say, 'You show me the three acts in *Citizen Kane*. Take *400 Blows* and tell me what the inciting incident is on page 23.'

I think what those books teach you is they give you a skeleton, like every other skeleton. And if that's what you want to do then you should do that. You shouldn't be a writer because as a writer you have to be willing to follow the strange whims of poetry and language and character to the extremest possible, offensive and provocative areas. None of which fits into a pattern.

MS: You mentioned getting the phone call from Oliver Stone, but you didn't mention that it was 26 drafts from that phone call to the film coming out. So just talk briefly about that process and working with somebody who is an Oscar-winning writer, screenwriter and director in their own right.

JL: It was fantastic, I think another key to what you just saw and who I am is I didn't write my first screenplay when I was 20, I wrote it when I was 30. I was a grown up, and I knew what my job as a dramatist was.

So even though it was headspinning to be jetted off First Class to Tokyo, I walked into a room with a director. I know how you talk to directors, I know what directors want, we all want the same thing, so I was comfortable in the world of doing that. What I didn't know was how to write a screenplay, and Oliver Stone taught me how to do it.

We did 26 drafts of *Any Given Sunday*, one after another, so I learned everything about the form from him. He was patient. I'd go to his house,

Screenwriters On Screenwriting.

The BAFTA and BFI Screenwriters' Lecture Series in association with The JJ Charitable Trust

John Logan

20 September 2011 at BFI Southbank

he'd say, 'Pick up the Oscar, hold it, it'll feel good, you'll enjoy it.' And then we'd work. *Any Given Sunday*, like all these monstrous big movies, was hard to get made.

These are behemoths. The Queen Mary doesn't tack quickly. With *Coriolanus*, which we made for nothing, we could make quick adjustments. These things are huge beasts, and they're very hard to get made, and it takes a lot of work.

So in that case, I was not only *doing* the necessary work of a screenwriter, I was learning what the necessary work of a screenwriter was. And I thank Oliver, and I thank all those people early on. Ridley was another one who had such patience with me.

MS: I'd like to talk about what it is you do in terms of do you write on a computer? Do you write in longhand when you do write? Do you do outlines, treatments? Take me through the process of what's an average day for you, writing.

JL: It varies on which stage of the process a particular project is in. And plays are very different. How I approach plays is very different from how I approach movies. But the typical day, I personally get up very early. I get up at four, because I've found the hush of silence and darkness very conducive to me writing. The phone's not ringing, there are no distractions, it's just me and the whimsical characters moving about.

So I start very early, I write until I'm tired and then I stop. And if I'm writing a first draft it's total immersion, I don't do anything else and I can work for 12 hours at a stretch, take a break and go back and work because my methodology is 'Always do the research first, as much as it takes.' The most research I ever did was probably for *The Aviator* because a subject like Howard Hughes, who I know we're going to talk about in a little bit, is such an intense subject and I had to read so many disparate areas. It was about a year of

solid research before I even thought about how to write it.

So once I've done the research on any project I feel I have an outline and an understanding of it, perhaps I've been talking with directors or actors or studios about where it is, where the process is.

I go away and write a first draft and my object is to write the entire thing as quickly as possible. It's always very ugly but I just like to get from beginning to end, and every day I convince myself I'm writing *King Lear*. I'm convinced it's the greatest screenplay ever, it's the greatest thing that's ever been written, and at the end of that time I go back and I work.

I do the actual work, the actual revising. Writing is easy, it's the rewriting – when you have to go and put a clinical analysis to your work – that's grinding.

MS: Sorry to interrupt, before the first draft do you outline, do you treatment....?

JL: I do, I outline. I do three or four page outlines, sometimes just bullet points. 'Sweeney Todd kills Judge Turpin,' or it could be longer, it could be a description of images. If I'm working with a director for example who's very good on images... developing *The Aviator* with Michael Mann there were certain images that would come up and he just loved the visual sweep of them.

I would make notes on those so I'd remember to include them or at least play around with those aspects. But yeah, I usually have an outline. I work on a computer, I work in my bathrobe, it's very quiet and really terribly uninteresting.

MS: Do you have to know the ending before you start writing?

JL: I do.

MS: Is it essential for you to know that?

Screenwriters On Screenwriting.

The BAFTA and BFI Screenwriters' Lecture Series in association with The JJ Charitable Trust

John Logan

20 September 2011 at BFI Southbank

JL: It is. I have friends who are brilliant writers who have an improvisatory feel to their work, they can be like a snake slithering. I need to know where the snake's going. Along the way you have to give your work the freedom to make strange things; [that] you never imagined a movie was going to go in that direction.

When I was working on *Gladiator* I knew that Commodus and his sister needed a private scene together, just because you felt the need to spend time with those characters. I thought Commodus is an odd man, and clearly Caligula was a model for that character and I'd read the Suetonius in preparation. I knew what was going on, so I just put the two of them in a room and all of a sudden he's kissing her and I'm like, 'Oh, he's kissing his sister, okay, glad I went into that room to see where it leads.'

You have to drive the car down the road, but if there's a neon sign flashing over there that says 'sexy scene', take an off-ramp, it's not going to kill you.

MS: So do you just do a quick first draft or do you revise...

JL: No, I blaze through it. No first draft has ever taken me more than three weeks, but then I go back and just work and work forever, and then when I think it's in a position that's not entirely embarrassing or will end my career, I'll give it to whoever my key collaborators are.

MS: So do you have a group of fellow writers that you show your early drafts to?

JL: No, no.

MS: Is it just the people you're working with?

JL: No-one ever sees my early drafts or notes or anything. That's the part of the process I love, it's very private, I don't talk about it, I just keep my head down and do it.

MS: And you say you're prone to overwriting...

JL: Yeah, I am. You heard those speeches, I am. Whether it's overwriting or I have a healthy Irishman's love of language, I don't know what it is. But one of the best pieces of advice I ever got in my career was Ridley Scott on *Gladiator* and it was very simple: 'write less words'.

I'm like, 'Okay, I can do that,' so some of my first drafts are monstrously long, and I should probably be more disciplined but why not, it's a first draft, go and explore. You might discover that that ugly little troll over there is going to be a beautiful angel. You just have to let them run around.

MS: Do you share those long first drafts with your director, or is that only for you? The first draft of *The Aviator* was more than 200 pages...

JL: Yeah, 225 pages. Don't do that, don't write 225 page scripts. In that case I did, because Michael Mann is like my brother, and we'd spent three years talking and talking like the talking cure, like I'm in Vienna, for three years with Michael Mann. So he was joyous to get 225 pages. Other directors, I don't think would be as pleased.

MS: In terms of you saying *The Aviator* was a year's worth of research before you embark on the writing, something like *Hugo* is based on a book. How different is the process of adapting a book?

JL: Wildly different. The assumption people make is that adaptations are easier, but not for me. They're much harder I think because when I'm writing something original I have no obligation to anyone, but the integrity of the form and the characters. When I'm writing an adaptation of *Coriolanus* I have Shakespeare on my shoulder. When I'm doing *Hugo Cabret*, Brian Selznick, who wrote the original novel, is a writer I respect. And my job is not to disappoint them.

Screenwriters On Screenwriting.

The BAFTA and BFI Screenwriters' Lecture Series in association with The JJ Charitable Trust

John Logan

20 September 2011 at BFI Southbank

There's something about their vision that has inspired [me] and I just want to take part in bringing their vision to a new medium.

So what's easier about it is there's an inherent plot, there's a skeleton which you can deviate from – or you can stay with the skeleton – but there's something there. And the hard part is just one writer's sense of profound debt and responsibility to another writer.

MS: And in terms of re-writing, they say that re-writing is writing, so when you hand in your first draft, how many drafts is that for you?

JL: Dozens. And it's the process for me... I'm not much for lecturing about the craft of screenwriting. If we were talking about playwriting I could speak about playwriting, but screenwriting – as you heard – I just sort of fell into and discovered along the way.

Here's one piece of advice I can give you, don't be afraid of the big line. Don't be afraid to reach for the big line, because I personally have very little interest in movies that sound like people just sitting round a table talking. That's not the cinema that draws me, and I think audiences are also drawn to the aspiration, to the big moment.

But, you know, you're sitting in your bathrobe in Chicago at seven in the morning and it's easy to type a line like 'At my signal, unleash Hell.' It takes fucking nerve to give that line to Ridley Scott, you know, and say 'Yes, Maximus is going to say this line and it's going to work.'

So reach for the big line and don't be afraid. But the process of working for me is sometimes getting the nerve up to say, 'You know what, I am going to go for the huge dramatic moment, because that's what this movie requires.'

Or, conversely, I'm going to go for the incredibly quiet, subtle moment, the last moment you'd have expected. Those are the things that take nerve and time and re-write and adjudication of the form of the piece for me.

MS: Are playwriting and screenwriting the work of different muscles? Describe the differences, for you, between the two disciplines.

JL: Well you know, I wake up every morning and I feel myself a playwright. That's the world I function in, that's the world I'm comfortable in. I'm not really a Hollywood guy. I don't go to movie parties; I don't exist in that universe because it's not a universe with which I'm very comfortable.

I didn't go into the movies to meet boys, you know? I stay in it to meet boys! So that sort of part of Hollywood, the sex, the money, the glamour, the cars, the drugs – all the *Entourage* glimmer and flash were never of any interest to me. I was always interested in being a dramatist and doing really good work, and the theatre is only about doing good work because there are no artificial lines of demarcation between anyone in the rehearsal room. You're all in the same trenches together.

It's always been an art form I find particularly ennobled, and I'm the most inspired when I see a great work of theatre. A great movie can excite, inspire and thrill me as well, but in terms of the job it's very similar in that it's writing lines for actors and collaborating with directors and fellow artisans.

What's different about it, obviously, is in movies you're looking for the visual metaphor. You're looking for that image or sequence of images that will suggest what, on stage, would be a theatrical effect, perhaps a line of dialogue or an exchange between characters.

So when I put my movie brain on, the eyebrow raises and you think, 'Alright, so the character is feeling this. What am I showing? What are we seeing that's reflecting or conversely in some way in contradiction to that?'

Sweeney Todd's a great example, because everything that Tim [Burton, director] and Dante

Screenwriters On Screenwriting.

The BAFTA and BFI Screenwriters' Lecture Series in association with The JJ Charitable Trust

John Logan

20 September 2011 at BFI Southbank

[Ferretti, production designer] did in building that world, is a very unified world so at every moment you think you're in Sweeney Todd's psyche. There's only the one moment of blue sky, which is clearly Mrs Lovett's fantasy, so of all my movies I think that's one of the ones of which I'm most proud of my part.

But it's also one of the most true to the idea that a movie can sometimes function very well within the individual nuances and psyches of its protagonists. *Lawrence of Arabia* is another movie that does that. I think *Psycho* does that as well.

MS: Do you have a preference?

JL: Of what?

MS: Between movies and theatre?

JL: I like the theatre now. Mind you, I just had a great theatre year. So I'm feeling good on the theatre.

MS: In terms of the selection of clips, it's incredibly diverse: animated movies, children's movies, *Star Trek*, *Sweeney Todd* – how do you choose the projects that you want to work on? Is it the characters? The world? The story? Clearly you must be offered lots of things all the time.

JL: It's a number of things. Usually it's either something about the story or a character [that] appeals to me. I think that's in my sewing circle. Patti Smith wrote a book called *Just Kids*, about her relationship with Robert Mapplethorpe, and that's the next thing I'm doing. Patti and I were collaborating on it together.

There was something about that relationship, when I read that book, that deeply moved me and I said that's a story I want to tell. Or it can be a character that appeals to me. I mean *The Aviator*, I looked at Howard Hughes and said that was an amazingly complex character, I could turn that character for years – because these big movies take years.

If you lose interest in your protagonists you're fucked, so it's like I'm drawn to those characters who I don't understand, who I find interesting, and as much so the people I'm working with. My collaborators: Who's the director? Who are the stars? What's the studio? Who are the executives? Are they people who are going to make this a challenging and rewarding experience for me?

MS: We'll talk about the collaborators in a minute, but you talk about spending five years on a project and three years on a project. How do you juggle multiple projects because you're clearly not just writing one script then another script and another? How many can you work on at a time?

JL: I've always had a facility and an agility to do that, as long as the projects were very different. Going from something like *Any Given Sunday* to *Gladiator* there's clearly crossover because it's sort of testosterone driven movies about men and sub-cultures of men involving physical contest.

As long as they're something else, or the next thing is going to be very different, I feel variety is everything. I can never write two first drafts at the same time, it all depends on where different projects are. And in moviemaking, you never know when things are going to happen.

You never know whether this movie's going to get greenlit, when it's going to go into production, when it's going to wrap, when it's going to be released, so you never know what you're going to be working on. You just have to keep all those arrows in your quiver, you know, and you're like, 'Oh, so they're green-lighting *that*.'

And *Hugo*'s a great example of Marty and I developing it with Warner Bros.. They had no interest at the end of the day because it's a very intimate movie, it's not *Harry Potter*, it's not a big

Screenwriters On Screenwriting.

The BAFTA and BFI Screenwriters' Lecture Series in association with The JJ Charitable Trust

John Logan

20 September 2011 at BFI Southbank

special effects movie, so the studio sort of lost interest in it.

And Marty and I weren't really willing to torque the material into making it something it was not, I think sensibly. So we considered that dead and moved onto other projects. But Graham King, the producer, got it from Warner Bros., made the call and said we were doing *Hugo*. So we were back into that. You never know.

But the key for me, personally, and it's not uniformly about screenwriting or cinema, is I like to do different things. I'm just not the kind of guy who can write the same tone or the same movie over and over again. Despite all the swords and bloodshed, I have to do something different.

MS: But occasionally the characters coincide, like Maximus and Sweeney have revenge...

JL: I think I'm drawn towards certain characters. I couldn't write a rom-com to save my life. I couldn't see a rom-com to save my life. That's not my dig.

MS: I think in *Sweeney* you appropriated a line from *Gladiator*, didn't you?

JL: Totally unconsciously.

MS: I'd like to talk about *The Aviator*, which I think is an extraordinary film. When I first saw it I really liked it, and then I watched it again for this [and] I was just blown away by the detail in the movie, in the images but also in the script. You worked first with Michael Mann, and then Scorsese...

JL: And Leonardo [DiCaprio] all the way along.

MS: Given Hughes' colourful life, shall we say, why did you choose that period and how did you focus on that period? Was that something that came before the research?

JL: No, no, no. This is a very good example of how my process works. Leonardo DiCaprio called Michael Mann and said, 'I've read this Howard

Hughes book, it's really interesting, why don't we do a Howard Hughes movie?' So Michael Mann, who's a director I admire very much and we've been trying to find something to do together, came in and said, 'How about Howard Hughes for Leonardo DiCaprio?'

And I said yes, instantly, in the room. I knew exactly I had to do that movie. I knew enough about Hughes to know there was a story there, and my next year became figuring out what that story was for me. If you were to hand Howard Hughes' life to Bill Nicholson, or Charlie Kaufman or Bill Condon, Eric Roth, you'd get a completely different movie because every artist is going to approach it from a different perspective.

So I started reading all the biographies about Hughes. They are legion, and I just read them all. And then things began to appeal to me, early movies began to appeal to me, and particularly aviation began to appeal to me as a framework because there was something about Hughes' response to aviation that was psychologically motivated. About being in an antiseptic, safe environment at 30,000 feet... *That* I found very compelling as a way for me to understand his germ phobia.

So all these things sort of came together and I realised it was a movie about planes, it was a movie about aviation – for me – and Hughes as an engineer. Not Hughes as a moviemaker, not Hughes as an obsessive compulsive, not Hughes as a lover, not Hughes as a famous paranoid or recluse. It was Hughes as an engineer and man who wanted to fly. But his germ phobia kept him on the ground, and I thought there's a character being torn in half, and that's really interesting to me as a dramatist.

So Michael Mann and I talked about it. He said, 'Great approach,' and so I began to research aviation and that took months of just understanding what Hughes' innovations were.

I had to understand why he was drawn to touching a fuselage. Why, when he ran his

Screenwriters On Screenwriting.

The BAFTA and BFI Screenwriters' Lecture Series in association with The JJ Charitable Trust

John Logan

20 September 2011 at BFI Southbank

fingertips across a fuselage and came to rivets it bothered him. So I had to study aviation, which led to a study of commercial aviation and why the airline he founded – TWA – went to war with PanAm. And what possible dramatic opportunities could arise.

And all this, by the way, was all to find good scenes. It was never just 'I'm interested,' it's always, 'There's a purpose, I'm a professional, this is my job to do this thing.' So at every moment I'm looking at the telling detail that becomes a scene, a line, a suggestion, anything.

Even sort of a background noise to the movie, and then I just did countless outlines. And the movie was framed by airplane flights, by the idea of him buying a plane, buying an airline, making a movie about planes, crashing a plane and then finally building the largest plane that had ever flown.

MS: Talk about the collaborative process first with Mann and then with Scorsese and DiCaprio? How did that work, because Leo was there all the way through?

JL: Leonardo was there, he was the only person other than me, I think, to read every draft because he knew it was a great part and we got along well and he was very involved in a healthy way. Every film director is different, every stage director is different as well. They have a different sensibility and way of approaching material.

And Michael has a very intellectual way, as I said I always called it the talking cure. I would go to his office and we would talk and talk, and I would do research and we would talk about it and do research notes. It was a lot of very intellectual examination of the material.

Whereas a director like Tim Burton comes from a completely different aesthetic. So when Tim and I talk about *Sweeney Todd* it's like poetry. It's like talking haikus, and because Tim and I are about the same age and have the exact same sort of references we could talk about 'You know the

moment in *The Bride of Frankenstein* when...' and it was like we didn't need to meet for five years, we needed to meet for 15 minutes to make exactly the adjustments we needed to make.

So after all those years of developing the movie with Michael Mann and Leonardo we had a script I was very proud of. It's pretty much the script of the movie. But Michael decided he didn't want to direct it because he had just done *Ali* and he didn't want to do another biopic after that. That was just the timing of the situation, he would have made a magnificent version of the movie.

So we went to Marty, who immediately said yes, and it became the process of working with Marty and having that sensibility approaching the material. So for me it was unique, I've never had that experience before, with two directors.

It was uniquely fascinating, to see how Marty looked at the exact same scenes in a completely different way, and what he wanted to be shaded and how we formed a different version of the movie through his eyes. My job at that point is to look through the director's eyes and to try to get inside his head and look through the viewfinder so I can reflect that in my work.

MS: Give me an example of how Mann and Scorsese differed in their take on a scene.

JL: There's a scene in the movie where Hughes is in the Coconut Grove – great set – and he goes into a bathroom and he washes his hands. He's just had a huge fight with Alec Baldwin, he's very tense, and he washes his hands and he goes to touch the doorknob and in his mind the doorknob is infected with germs.

He feels he will be corrupted, so he's trapped in this bathroom. My original draft of this has interior monologue, where he talks about it, where he talks about this situation and it's a sort of intellectual, aesthetic approach to the moment.

Screenwriters On Screenwriting.

The BAFTA and BFI Screenwriters' Lecture Series in association with The JJ Charitable Trust

John Logan

20 September 2011 at BFI Southbank

Marty, engaging with that moment said, 'No, no, I think it's a fully emotional moment, it's a visceral response he's having. I think the language works against it.' So the scene became – through our discussing it – an interior monologue while he was doing the stuff, without the dialogue. So it became the Scorsese version of that moment and it was the exact same moment. But it was the appropriate moment for his telling of the story.

MS: Didn't you write the script in a more novelistic manner?

JL: Yeah, the script of *The Aviator* is very long. It's actually fun to read if you like reading screenplays and because so much of it took place in Hughes' head I felt I couldn't just write 'Interior: Hughes' Mansion. He walks across the room'. That's a very neutral response to a moment, whereas I felt one of my jobs as a writer was to bring readers into the world, so I tried to write more evocative stage directions – I always try to write more evocative stage directions that have some panache to them.

But in the case of *The Aviator* I very much went into Hughes' head and I just wrote it down, saying: 'He stops', 'He believes this', 'He doesn't believe that', 'He's afraid to do this because,' and just sort of laid it all in there so the reader could get a texture of the emotional complexity of that character who I was in love with. And what attracted me was his emotional complexity.

MS: Can you talk a little bit about exposition and character? You seed lots of things in that movie, the opening scene is the mother giving him a clean and the germ phobia is seeded then. It's all the way through, and then you get that wonderful pay off in the airplane with Katharine Hepburn, where he has the bottle of milk and gives it to her, and it comes back, and you see in that moment he's made the decision that he's either in love with her or wants to be with her.

JL: There's tropes in your work and one is the love scene, and the love story. Once again I return to

Shakespeare, think of all the love stories in all those plays, and yet you get to a play like *The Tempest* and Ferdinand and Miranda, it's a beautiful love story. How the Goddam hell? He's written 8,000 love stories, how does he do this one differently? They're talking about chess, and it's a beautiful love story, it's a fresh way to do it.

So in *The Aviator* I was faced with 'Howard Hughes falls in love with Katharine Hepburn' – so what is that? Clearly it was their personalities falling in love which was different, but how do you show that in some way that's not 'we're walking on the beach' and the music comes up and they kiss and the waves swell.

I thought the most important thing to Hughes is his sanctity: the sanctity of the pressurised cockpit, of his cleanness, so I thought you know what, if he risked getting germs from her, not by having sex or kissing but in a more intimate way for him, that would be a sign to the audience – subconsciously, not with a big sort of textual sign – that he was falling in love.

So that led to writing a scene in the beginning where you see Hughes the child, sort of a preface scene which normally I don't like, but you see the development of this germ phobia being, as you say, seeded in. So the moment when she drinks and he takes the bottle and looks at it and touches his lips to that bottle is like a Puccini aria to me in what it was trying to communicate. I did that on purpose, but many times you just stumble oh so happily into those things that people then ask you about.

MS: You mentioned his rubbing his hands on the side of the engine, and there's a wonderful scene where he's rubbing his hands on her back and then it cuts to the... was that in the script?

JL: Oh yeah.

MS: When you're dealing with real people and history, and the balance between what really happened and good drama, how do you decide which side to fall on?

Screenwriters On Screenwriting.

The BAFTA and BFI Screenwriters' Lecture Series in association with The JJ Charitable Trust

John Logan

20 September 2011 at BFI Southbank

JL: I don't decide, I'm a dramatist. If you're dealing with Marcus Aurelius from *Gladiator* or Howard Hughes from *The Aviator*, or Orson Welles from *RKO 281*, what I always say is this isn't life, this isn't biography, this isn't fact, this is fiction. This is drama, this is make-believe, this is fantasy. I'm not a historian, this is not reportage, it's a drama, you know.

The same way the approach to T. E. Lawrence in *Lawrence of Arabia* is a work of drama. And no, Lawrence certainly didn't look like Peter O'Toole and these weren't the exact events in the right order. I do feel it's important to be true in some way to the spirit of the character you're trying to portray, but not to the letter.

I feel personally [that] it would be an act of bad faith to in any way take a character and break it for dramatic ends. I think you can bend it to a certain degree within the limits of probity, but if you break it you would feel... I've done that a few times and I feel awful about it.

MS: I think you insist on talking to the actors when you're writing... don't you?

JL: No.

MS: I thought you did?

JL: I don't insist, I'm open to it.

MS: You've got Tom Cruise, Johnny Depp, Russell Crowe, Leonardo DiCaprio, actors who bring lots to their performance in the role. Can you talk a little bit about each of those and working with them?

JL: My experience is as a playwright; I'm used to talking to actors. Playwrights talk to actors all the time. The director, as we know it in theatre, is only an invention of the 19th century and is a very new conceit. There is no sense of divinity around the director in the theatre.

And nor do I consider there to be divinity around the idea of a director on a movie set. Not a lot of writers necessarily feel that but it's my experience and what I feel, so I'm very comfortable talking to directors.

And I'm very comfortable talking to actors, because part of my job as a playwright, dramatist and screenwriter is to help, is to hear the language and engage, because finally the words on the page are the words on the page and by heavens I'm proud of them but they only live when they're spoken, either on stage or into a camera.

So it behooves me to be engaged in that process and I aurally need to hear it, I need to hear the words out loud, I need to hear them coming from the actors, to understand the rhythms, the cadences of the language.

And what I will say to actors, any actor, is if this doesn't sound right coming out of your mouth let's talk about it. Are there too many syllables? Are there not enough? Is the ellipsis in the wrong place? Is the punctuation confusing you? Do you not like the semi colon? Let's find a way to make to make it work together, because I'm a great believer in Jerome Robbins' single rule of the theatre which is, 'Does it work?'

I'm not interested in sitting in my garret and composing the perfect sonnet, I have no interest in that. I want to get muscular with my collaborators and we all want to create the same thing. And different actors, like any other artists you work with, require different approaches.

An actor like Leonardo on *The Aviator*... we'd sit for hours and just talk through history and read Senate transcripts of the Hughes trials. Where an actor like Tom doesn't have that approach to it, Tom Cruise would have a different approach.

But I've always found the engagement very healthy. That's why I wish more films would budget rehearsals, which are not usually

Screenwriters On Screenwriting.

The BAFTA and BFI Screenwriters' Lecture Series in association with The JJ Charitable Trust

John Logan

20 September 2011 at BFI Southbank

budgeted, so you're lucky if you get a table read, so the poor screenwriter is desperately trying to listen and take notes the *one time* he gets to hear it out loud, to make suggestions in the aural life of his work.

Theatre directors like Sam Mendes understand that, so for Bond for example we're doing two solid weeks of rehearsal which, believe me, is unheard of. To get into the room with me, with Sam, with the actors, and work the scenes. So when we get on the set we know what we're trying to communicate with them.

MS: I'd like to talk about Bond in a little bit.

JL: I bet you would. You and my mom, she doesn't care what I do. I say I won the Tony and she said, 'And Bond? Where are you filming? Who's the Bond girl?'

MS: You talked about *Coriolanus* and your love of Shakespeare, how did that project come about and how did you go about tackling it? I haven't seen the film so did you rewrite Shakespeare? And how did you approach cutting the play like that?

JL: I liken it to my experience on *Sweeney Todd*, because I have such incredible respect for Stephen Sondheim's score and for Hugh Wheeler's book that I approached it gingerly. And *Coriolanus* came because of my absolute besotted love of Shakespeare. I've always loved Shakespeare and I've always wanted to get into a film adaptation because I've been dissatisfied with some, I've been elated with others and I wanted – like every artist – to have a chance at it.

And I've always thought *Coriolanus* was the one. It's an unloved play that I love with a central character as dark and thorny and ugly as all the central characters I've ever written about. Those titanic, dark people. And I never thought anyone in the world would be interested in this until Brian Siberell, my great agent that I told you about,

said, 'Well you know, someone else likes *Coriolanus* as a movie. It's Ralph Fiennes.'

I said, 'Shut up!' So Ralph was coming to LA where I lived at the time, and I went to his hotel and met him for the first time and we started talking about *Coriolanus* and I realised ten seconds in that we saw the same movie, which is modern, upsetting, provocative, the purpose of which would make the audience feel exactly like they did after the production of the play, a play we both loved.

And I realised Ralph was a filmmaker, he wasn't an actor wanting to do a vanity project. So we committed to doing it. There was no studio, there was no money, we just committed to doing it. So we spent weeks just talking about the script, we had the play, he sort of acted it out – all of it, which was fun.

And we started shaping it in a modern context. We knew we wanted urban warfare, we knew we wanted the modern political machinery to be reflected. We had no idea where we were going to film it or what it was going to look like. And so I wrote a screenplay, which was an adaptation of the play.

And every word of it is Shakespeare. It's been moved around, characters have been eliminated, characters have been conjoined, characters die who don't die in the play. We were muscular in our adaptation, but truly I believe it is a fantastic representation of Shakespeare's play. It is our version of it.

And then we went out to see who wanted to make our movie, and the answer was no-one. Like I said, you walk into DreamWorks and they're thinking, 'It's Ralph Fiennes and John Logan, they're going to bring us *Harry Potter*,' and it's *Coriolanus*. And this is where I give Ralph all credit, he would not give up. We cobbled the money together from a million sources, it was the hardest setting up of a movie I've ever been involved with, and therefore the most rewarding. We made it for no money in Serbia, and it is a

Screenwriters On Screenwriting.

The BAFTA and BFI Screenwriters' Lecture Series in association with The JJ Charitable Trust

John Logan

20 September 2011 at BFI Southbank

completely pure vision of what we wanted to create. I'm very proud of it.

Q (from the floor): You talked earlier on about a distrust of the screenwriting theories around 'You put the inciting incident here' and so on. You've just had an experience with *Coriolanus* which was very pure in terms of doing what you really wanted to do, but I'm guessing that a lot of the time you're actually in some kind of negotiation between the purity of your art and what you want to do and what a Hollywood producer and studio say, that they want an inciting incident on page 20.

JL: Of course.

Questioner: I just wondered if you could say a little bit about how, for you as an artist, that kind of works for you?

JL: It's a complex situation, because on one hand it's not my 200 million dollars, you know? And someone owns this. A play I own, I own the copyright, it's my play, no-one can do anything with it ever. A screenplay; I'm a worker for hire, unless I'm writing it on spec. Unless it's *Coriolanus* which I just wrote, or *The Aviator* which I just wrote, no-one paid me to write those. I own them. And still do.

At some point they were sub-contracted but at that point the horse was well out of the barn, you either want to buy into this or not. And then they're a case of: you were hired to do a job. And then you're collaborating with, not only directors and actors, [but] with the power mechanics of moviemaking: Hollywood, London, wherever it is, you're dealing with the business of the business.

Thankfully I've always loved the business of the business, that's maybe why I'm not a poet. I don't mind the active engagement. I've had ferocious battles with the studios, with heads of studios. I've walked off movies, I've been fired from movies. I'm charming now, you're not messing with my script. There's a lot of give and

take, and a lot of thrust. I think if I didn't have the directors I have, and have been lucky enough to work with and have sought out to work with, I'd be giving you a different answer.

The first thing I did, this is interesting, when I started writing movies with *Any Given Sunday*, my agent said, 'Write down all the directors you want to work with,' and I made a list. And I've worked with all of them but one now. I'm drawn to the big personalities. No-one is going to mess with Tim Burton, no-one is going to mess with Ridley Scott. These people have big shoulders and big elbows, and if they believe in something they'll fight for it.

Ridley's a great example on *Gladiator*. When we made *Gladiator* no-one believed in that movie. It was like, 'Russell who? Who's playing the lead, for how much money?' And the studios, DreamWorks and Universal, were nervous about this movie, very nervous about this movie. And Ridley just said, 'Trust me, I know what I'm doing, I'll get there.'

I've been in situations where the director hasn't had that amount of surety or self-confidence, and those are horrible because you just see something you care about – whether it's something you've worked on for years, or something you're deeply invested in – becoming something that isn't, and that's very difficult.

MS: Who's the director that you want to work with?

JL: Aaaaah, I'll tell you when I sign the deal.

Q (from the floor): You mentioned the importance of your Irish ancestry, do you have any plans to set a film in Ireland, whether it's an original film or an adaptation of a book or a piece of history or something?

JL: It's funny you should say that because I've always sort of wanted to do that. I've spent a lot of time in Ulster. My entire family's in Belfast and Coleraine, and I embrace my British heritage

Screenwriters On Screenwriting.

The BAFTA and BFI Screenwriters' Lecture Series in association with The JJ Charitable Trust

John Logan

20 September 2011 at BFI Southbank

entirely, as much as I possibly can. I would love to write something uniquely Irish. I thought I might write something about Yeats once, but couldn't quite find my way in. Maybe, maybe it will inspire me to do that.

Q (from the floor): You've talked about how being a playwright has informed your screenwriting, I want to discuss how being an actor has informed that. I've studied acting myself and found it really opened my mind into being a better writer, because before I was stuck on structure and that kind of stuff, whereas when you're an actor you're looking at what your character's doing, and that kind of stuff. Can you talk about that?

JL: Just from my own experience, when I went to Northwestern and took that playwriting class I also took the entire acting sequence, which is three years. And I was an awful actor, but I'd learned so much about what theatre is and what actors have to do. I am enough of an old fashioned guy of the theatre that I think everyone should do every job. At some point you should fucking pull the rope that makes the curtain come up so *Les Mis* can come on.

You should do every part of it. And clearly in drama, acting is a major component so to at least – even in a bad way – try to understand the nuance of facing an audience or a camera and telling a story and speaking words that are not yours, but taking full ownership of them because you have to... even if Molière wrote them, at this moment I am Tartuffe and I am saying this and these are mine, was really valuable to me.

And it's given me great patience with actors, because I know how difficult it is to look at a creative artist and be an interpretive artist. And realise that there's sometimes a completely artificial line between those things.

Q (from the floor): You were talking about the importance of collaboration, with the director specifically, and I was just wondering what's the process when you collaborate with other writers?

Particularly on *Gladiator*, on which you collaborated with two other writers? How does that process work, how much do you need to respect what's written before, and those other writers that have gone on?

JL: Total respect, total respect. The interesting thing about re-writing, and being re-written and hiring to re-write something, is it gets into a very treacherous, emotional area. I genuinely believe in a brotherhood of writers, and we have to have such mutual respect for each other because what we do is so difficult and so many people don't have a conception of what it is to be a dramatist.

My mother, god love her, she has no idea what I do. She's constantly saying, 'Oh, did he make that up?' No he didn't make that up! Or, 'I'm glad that the camera did that.' It did that because I said it could do that! So sometimes the screenwriter particularly – not the playwright who's god on high – can feel a sense of insecurity or a lack of respect. So that's why I think it's vitally important we respect each other.

So on something like *Gladiator*, for example, when I came on – I came on to *Gladiator* when Ridley Scott came on, he wanted me to come on. The first thing I did was sat down with David Franzoni who wrote the original draft and said, 'Let's talk about it, let's talk about what you want, let's talk about what I want, let's talk about sharing back and forth.'

And then when I left, when production started and Bill Nicholson came in it was the exact same thing. It was a complete sharing, so at the end of the day when that movie came out we three were incredibly, uniformly proud of the work we had all done. And sort of proud of each other. I remember the Oscars was unbelievable, because there was such a sense of reflected glow between all three of us.

And the other co-writing experience I've had, which was *The Last Samurai*, was the same thing with Ed Zwick and Marshall Herskovitz. It was

Screenwriters On Screenwriting.

The BAFTA and BFI Screenwriters' Lecture Series in association with The JJ Charitable Trust

John Logan

20 September 2011 at BFI Southbank

complete freedom and transparency back and forth. Now I know that's not always the case. I've been lucky, or I've been tenacious, or I've been stubborn, or I've been stupid, but I've never had the bad experience of just summarily being fired, thrown off a movie and having someone come in and then not being involved or engaged whatsoever. I think that would be killing.

Q (from the floor): Can you talk a bit about the experience of producing theatre in London as opposed to on Broadway? Is it something we should feel justly proud of? Because I'm sure you know there's a lot of insecurity and volatility at the moment with the arts cuts and all the rest of it.

JL: The ten square miles around us is the centre of the world for theatre. It has been since 1500. And whether it's Shakespeare or John Osborne or War Horse or Cameron Mackintosh or Michael Grandage or Sam Mendes or the Donmar or The Old Vic or Olivier, the tradition of English speaking theatre – this is the heart of all of it.

Every American writer like me longs for nothing more than to some way be a part of this tradition. The most moving moment of my entire life was going to the rehearsals for *Red* here in London, because I spent my life dreaming about working in the British theatre and going to the theatre and being inspired by the theatre – as everyone should be.

Whether it's a huge Shakespeare play right across the street at the National, where you go and see Rory Kinnear doing *Hamlet* in this magnificent production, [where] you can't speak it's so powerful, or some tiny sort of fringe theatre in Chalk Farm, upstairs, doing a little two handed gay play about murder... It's magnificent, and nowhere in the world has that.

Broadway is about making money. Broadway is the equivalent of Paramount and Sony and Disney. It's fantastic, and it does a unique, powerful thing and that's the legacy of Steve Sondheim and *Guys & Dolls* and Lerner and

Loewe and Rodgers and Hart. But what you have *here* for a writer is the sort of beginning and ending of everything which is why, when I wrote, I my play, I knew it had to be here and why my next play's here. It's because British audiences, it's hackneyed and you've heard it, but they listen and they care.

Questioner: Can you please tell our government?

JL: Believe you, me.

Q (from the floor): It's great to hear someone talking who's a great writer and talks so respectfully about screenwriting. You'd written quite a lot of action movies, for someone who comes from a background in playwriting. That's not an obvious thing, so I wonder if you could talk about writing action and the particular challenges of that.

JL: It's the hardest thing in my job, without a doubt, writing action sequences. I love them; a good action sequence is great. It was a lot easier before CGI, in which clearly anything can happen, but in the old days of sort of actual special effects and stunts, thinking of inventive things that could actually be done was difficult.

But it's always against the visual metaphor for me. The first time Maximus walks into the Coliseum, what's the narrative that's going on with him and how can we reflect that? Is it chaos? Is it antiseptic order? What exactly is it? So what I look for whether it's a football scene from *Any Given Sunday* or a fight from *Gladiator* or *The Last Samurai* or an action sequence in Bond, it's what's the emotional narrative of the characters and is there some cool visual way to present that?

And it takes forever, and it's hard to do anything fresh and original, and thank god there are brilliant stunt co-ordinators and directors of photography and directors who have an eye for that and a sensitivity to it.

Screenwriters On Screenwriting.

The BAFTA and BFI Screenwriters' Lecture Series in association with The JJ Charitable Trust

John Logan

20 September 2011 at BFI Southbank

And you know, there are worse jobs than sitting with Ridley Scott when he's got the cigar, saying, 'Okay, we've got the Coliseum and Russell Crowe, what are we going to do?' You know, it's fantastic, it's also exciting. But it's hard.

MS: Before we come to the next question I want to ask you one thing about Bond, I found this interview around *Star Trek* time, and you said that James Bond should always fight Blofeld. So I wondered, is he?

JL: I think James Bond should always fight Blofeld.

Q (from the floor): I used to work in LA for River Road Entertainment, which is in production on *Genius*, which is one of your scripts, a beautifully written one. I just wanted to know how you feel about working with a small production company, versus a big conglomerate like Sony?

JL: In a way it's liberating, dealing with a small independent movie. There's more sense of freedom and generally a lot more creativity involved because there's not the corporate structure.

The vast corporate structure of a movie studio is simply to be the cog in the machine of a vaster corporate structure. So your boss at the end of the day isn't the head of the studio or the division, it's the head of General Electric. Or the head of General Dynamics, or Viacom, one of those massive corporations of which moviemaking is a tiny part, and art is a really tiny part. Whereas working with a smaller company like a Weinstein company, Miramax in the old days, New Line, any of the smaller companies around now, is working with fellow artists.

It's more, frankly, like doing a play. You'll never get rich doing it, but it's incredibly fulfilling because of the quality of the people you're dealing with. You simply don't have the financial pressure of 'Jeez, this is a big movie so it's got to do certain big movie things'.

Q (from the floor): Your screenplays are very self-contained; they don't really lend themselves to sequels...

JL: Oh God, I hope Bond does! I've killed the franchise. Hello, Sam? About *Bond 24*...

Questioner: Apart from Bond, are you ever tempted to write something long form, not a franchise but a sequel, or television?

JL: Yes, yes I am. Not because the writer is king, but I have – as you might guess from my lineage – an incredible passion for 19th century novels, and for Dickens, Stendhal and Thackeray. For huge works that go out episodically. I've always wanted to do it, not to be king but the idea for a screenwriter to be able to write for 12 hours, and to take characters *that* complex and keep twisting them round. And as a matter of fact, not that I can tell you, but I'm currently in negotiation to do a BBC miniseries that will be here in England. So I'm going to maybe get my chance.

Q (from the floor): Sorry about this, but it's going to be about *Bond 23*, I just wanted to know whether you're working with other writers on that, and also whether you're going to be tying up some of the loose ends from the first two movies with Daniel Craig?

JL: I can't say anything about *Bond 23*. If I did Judi Dench would come racing down here and kill me. That's the one thing. I'm sworn to secrecy about anything.

Q (from the floor): It's about *Hugo*. I was just wondering how you approached writing for children because obviously it's a very different voice, and it looks like they're the leads in this.

JL: They are. It's about two 12 year olds. Honestly, I didn't look at it as writing a family movie or writing for children, I just looked at it as writing about great characters. Actually my touchstones for *Hugo* were *To Kill A Mockingbird* and *400 Blows*, which to me are very adult movies, they just happen to deal with children.

Screenwriters On Screenwriting.

The BAFTA and BFI Screenwriters' Lecture Series in association with The JJ Charitable Trust

John Logan

20 September 2011 at BFI Southbank

I think *Hugo* reflects that sensibility, and when Marty and I talk about it it's always as serious as [when] we talked about Howard Hughes and Katharine Hepburn, it's that level of engagement with the material. So I didn't cut my jib for *Hugo*. There's not a lot of throat slashing. Other than that it's pure me.

MS: On that, please put your hands together for John Logan.

JL: Thank you, such a pleasure, such a pleasure.