

*An exploration of the applicability of
Linda Aronson's flashback theory as a
framework for the practice of
screenwriting*

Practice-based PhD

by

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ABSTRACT

An exploration of the applicability of Linda Aronson's flashback theory as a framework for the practice of screenwriting.

This practice-based PhD comprises an original screenplay for a biopic of the life and trial of 20th century Scottish medium Helen Duncan, entitled *Hellish Nell*, and a thesis which reflects the process of writing the script using Linda Aronson's flashback narrative structures.

The central focus of this thesis is to explore the applicability of Aronson's theoretical frameworks first circulated in *Screenwriting Updated* in 2000 through the various stages of script development.

The Introduction examines what a flashback is and its uses. It sets out Linda Aronson's theoretical framework on flashback narrative structure, in particular her theory on case history and thwarted dream. It also reviews the historical sources of my screenplay and examines the creative practice of exploring through biographic drama a complex and unresolved historical figure.

Chapter One investigates Aronson's flashback theory in more detail, how it is assessed and applied. It also explores the issues attendant upon writing biographical drama with specific reference to Aronson's framework. It also examines her three sub-sets and explains why they were excluded from my development work. Finally it covers what areas will be investigated in more detail in the rest of the thesis.

Chapter Two sets up the background and story of Helen Duncan, the Scottish medium and psychic. It then focuses on Aronson's thwarted dream and case history narrative structures, and the results that arose from testing their applicability against my own writing practice. The first section deals with the examination of Aronson's thwarted dream narrative structure through the development of *Surfacing for Air*, my initial attempt at a screenplay. The results were of paramount importance as it was through this initial investigation that the significance of theme and genre were first identified. It also pointed to the crucial role of point-of-view. This led to these areas of concern being explored further in the examination of Aronson's case history narrative structure, through the development of the final screenplay, *Hellish Nell*. The second section explores the development of this screenplay and also assesses the applicability of case history to my own script and writing practice. It illustrates the details of the amendments and the decisions involved in those changes and an analysis of the stages of my research development. It also investigates the impact of genre and theme in determining the content of the links between present and past stories.

Chapter Three analyses four contemporary films which involve flashbacks in the light of Aronson's theoretical framework and tests the impact of genre and theme when deciding where the dramatic connections should be between past and present stories and in determining their content.

The conclusion provides a modified version of Aronson's flashback theory in the light of the research and analysis undertaken. It also provides new additional questions based on the use of genre and theme when assessing the content of flashback sequences.

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CONTENTS

| | Page |
|--|--|
| 1. Practice | 1 |
| Screenplay <i>Hellish Nell</i> | |
| 2. Thesis | |
| Introduction | 1 |
| An author's perspective | 2 |
| Identifying key elements | 3 |
| Aronson's structures | 7 |
| Flashback definitions | 8 |
| Process and Conclusions | 13 |
| Chapter 1 – Flashback Structures and Functions | 14 |
| Flashback structures | 14 |
| Flashback functions | 21 |
| Assessing Aronson | 23 |
| How to assess whether or not to use flashback narrative structure | 23 |
| Aronson's subsets explored | 25 |
| How to apply flashback narrative structure | 26 |
| Flashbacks – far from Simple. | 27 |
| The key flashback questions | 29 |
| Chapter 2 – Testing Aronson's theories in practice. | 33 |
| Helen Duncan's story and background | 33 |
| Thwarted Dream narrative structure | |
| My Approach | 35 |
| The development of <i>Surfacing for Air</i> | 37 |
| Conclusion – thwarted development | 47 |
| Case History Narrative Structure | |
| My Approach | 47 |
| The development of <i>Hellish Nell</i> | 48 |
| Conclusion | 70 |
| Chapter 3 - Contemporary films explored | 73 |
| Case History narrative structure | |
| Analysis of the film <i>Hollywoodland</i> | 74 |
| Analysis of the film <i>Iris</i> | 87 |
| Thwarted Dream narrative structure | |
| Analysis of the film <i>Nixon</i> | 92 |
| Analysis of the film <i>The Constant Gardener</i> . | 98 |
| Conclusion | 108 |
| 3. References | |
| 4. Appendix 1 | Annotated Pages |
| 5. Appendix 2 | Glossary |
| 6. Appendix 3 | Interviews conducted |
| 7. Appendix 4 | Sample Outline of <i>Surfacing for Air</i> |

1. Practice

Hellish Nell

An original screenplay

by

Shirley Scott-Webb

1 EXT - TERRACED HOUSE - NOTTINGHAM - NIGHT 1

NOVEMBER 1956

A dimly lit narrow street. Several police officers gather silently, getting ready for a raid. They move into position, looking up at a first floor room, waiting for the signal.

A MAN in a dark raincoat and hat waits a little apart from them in the shadows.

2 INT - HOUSE - NIGHT 2

Barely distinguishable outlines of a dozen or so people. They are sitting in a semi circle facing a wooden cabinet which is just visible in the half-light.

Suddenly a figure from the audience dives towards the curtained cabinet. There is a woman's loud scream. A police whistle blows. Panic erupts.

3 EXT - HOUSE - NIGHT 3

The MAN gives the police officer a nod then slips away. The police spring into action and race through the front door ...

4 INT - HOUSE - NIGHT 4

...and stampede up the stairs, storming into a small darkened room. The main lights are switched abruptly on. Two MEN are standing by a wooden cabinet in the corner, grasping hold of a large, overweight, elderly woman. (HELEN DUNCAN).

Helen looks ill and is gasping for breath. She sinks down between the arms of the two men. Two WOMEN from the audience push their way forward through the crowd.

WOMAN 1
What have you done?

One of the women pushes the policemen aside and helps Helen to a nearby chair. She is pale and wheezing heavily.

The men begin to look disconcerted as Helen's breathing becomes more and more erratic.

The woman bends over Helen and takes her hand. Helen closes her eyes. She seems to be sinking into unconsciousness.

WOMAN 1 (CONT'D)
She needs a doctor. Quickly.

The policeman nods to his colleague who runs from the room. A police woman surveys Helen from afar. She turns to her colleague.

(CONTINUED)

POLICEWOMAN 1

Did we really need nine of us?

POLICEMAN 1

Aren't you forgetting who she is?

The woman bending over the collapsed body of Helen Duncan looks up accusingly at one of the policemen.

WOMAN 1

I think you've killed her.

5 INT - NEWSROOM - DAY

5

The room is a hive of activity. This is a newsroom at its busiest. Full of cigarette smoke and noise.

A young reporter TOM BRADLEY (late 20s) cuts a path through the throng as he makes his way across the newsroom.

A grey suited older reporter rushes past, putting on his jacket as he goes. Bradley steps aside to let him past. He is followed by a Photographer with a cumbersome camera who knocks into Bradley and pushes past without an apology. There's a hunger and determination in Tom's face as he watches them speed out. He wants to be one of those front line journalists and it shows.

Tom reaches the end of the newsroom and a small glass windowed room. The door - marked Ellery Stone - is slightly ajar. Tom hesitates, gathering his nerve, then knocks.

6 INT - ELLERY'S OFFICE - DAY

6

ELLERY STONE, late 50s, wizened editor, is sitting at a crowded desk, like a magpie on its nest, pages of newsprint spread across every inch. Calm and decisive there's not much Ellery hasn't seen in his thirty five years on Fleet Street.

Ellery hears the knock but ignores it. He's in mid conversation with another reporter.

ELLERY

If a doctor's been to see Eden get onto it. We need to know why.

The reporter nods and speeds out.

Tom taps again. Ellery looks up.

ELLERY (CONT'D)

The answer's no. Obituaries are how you earn your stripes.

Tom hesitates slightly.

(CONTINUED)

TOM

Actually, sir, I thought this one might merit a longer piece.

Ellery's taken by surprise. He studies Tom a little closer.

Tom steps forward and puts Helen Duncan's file on Ellery's desk, perching it onto of the other papers.

TOM (CONT'D)

Helen Duncan? Died following a police raid?

Ellery isn't quite there.

Tom opens up the file and start to sift through the cuttings.

TOM (CONT'D)

Her trial was the sensation of the war.

Ellery leans back in his chair and gives a long slow nod. He's got there.

ELLERY

Hellish Nell. I remember.

Ellery picks up the file and fingers through, stopping at one of Helen's photographs. Helen stares grimly out at us.

TOM

I think there might still be some interest.

ELLERY

We're up to our eyeballs in Suez and Hungary. Space is at a premium, Bradley.

TOM

I know sir. But I thought maybe our readers...

ELLERY

...We gave it good coverage at the time.

TOM

But there are still unanswered questions. Rumours she was set up.

ELLERY

Professional rivalry? Nothing was proven.

(CONTINUED)

TOM

People weren't willing to talk then.
Maybe they'd open up now.

Ellery looks at Tom. Maybe he's got something here.

TOM (CONT'D)

She was a super star in her day.
Thousands flocked to her.

Tom sees Ellery is wavering. He pushes home his advantage.

TOM (CONT'D)

Something went on. (beat) Skulduggery?
Betrayal? I don't know. But Helen
Duncan was tried as a **witch**.

He eyeballs Ellery. Lets the full weight of his words sink in.

TOM (CONT'D)

Don't you think our readers deserve to
know what really happened?

A beat. Then Ellery gives him a small nod. He's convinced.

7 INT - TOM'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

7

Tom's wife STELLA (mid 20s, feisty) is making tea. Whippet-thin and pretty, her restless energy is almost tangible. Sitting at the kitchen table are his two boys, JACK (5) and STEVIE (7). Stevie is practising a card trick while Jack watches on.

Tom sits opposite nursing a cup of tea. The evening paper lies beside him. The headline reads: SUEZ - CRISIS DEEPENS.

STELLA

So what did she do? Turn villagers
into frogs?

TOM

Held seances. Conjured up spirits.
Actually she was found guilty of not
conjuring them up.

STELLA

I was expecting dark spells and
bubbling cauldrons. You know shades
of Macbeth.

TOM

You'd have thought.

STELLA

Hardly a full blown witch.

(CONTINUED)

Stevie stops dealing and looks up at her wide-eyed at the word 'witch'. So does Jack. Tom sees this and smiles.

TOM

It's all right. She wasn't one really.

Both boys relax. Reassured Stevie goes on dealing.

Stella adds the last of the vegetables to the pot on the stove, then drops the chopping board into the basin in the sink and starts to wash up.

Tom goes over and starts to dry up the dishes. He notices the tense outline of her shoulders.

Stella concentrates on getting the plates out of the cupboard. Tom watches her, quietly concerned.

Stevie pulls at Tom's sleeve.

STEVIE

Daddy, are you looking?

Tom turns round to watch Stevie's card trick.

TOM

They've all arrived at the inn?

STEVIE

Yes. And all the Jacks go into one room...

He puts the four Jacks in one pile.

STEVIE (CONT'D)

And all the Queens into the next...

He puts the Queen in another pile.

Tom glances back towards Stella. She senses his gaze and turns to look at him.

STELLA

They sacked Joe Losey today.

Tom can't hide his shock.

STELLA (CONT'D)

Dean Jagger refused to work with him. Afraid he'll be blacklisted if he works with a communist.

TOM

But he's a great director.

7 CONTINUED: (2)

STELLA

They wanted Jagger more I guess.
Academy Award winner. That's the film
industry for you.

She shrugs her shoulders unhappily.

STELLA (CONT'D)

You know how it works. They bend laws
to suit themselves. I felt tempted...

Tom glances quickly at her.

STELLA (CONT'D)

It's all right. I didn't.

TOM

We need that job.

STELLA

Goes against the grain though.

The sound of the kettle whistling bursts across the room.
Stella walks over and switches off the hob. Tom can sense
she's still uneasy, on edge.

Stevie pulls at Tom's sleeve again.

STEVIE

Take a card Daddy and put it to the
bottom of the pile.

Tom stretches out and does so. He glances back at Stella.

TOM

I thought we'd got over all that.
McCarthy's been discredited.

STELLA

If you're different you're dangerous.
Isn't that their mantra?

She starts to mash the potatoes with vigour.

STELLA (CONT'D)

It's how the state works. Labels
people then uses obscure laws to do
what it likes with them.

Tom turns away, slightly uncomfortably. He knows where
this is heading.

STELLA (CONT'D)

Don't you care what's happening?

Her voice is rising slightly.

(CONTINUED)

7 CONTINUED: (3)

TOM
Of course I do.

STELLA
Do you? I'm not so sure.

TOM
Not everything is about beating drums.

STELLA
No, your middle class complacency
wouldn't allow it.

Tom glances across at the children who seem unaware of the beginning of a row. Stella follows his gaze.

She seems to calm. Her voice is softer now:

STELLA (CONT'D)
I just wish sometimes you had more
passion.

TOM
And sometimes I wish you had less.

Their eyes meet. This is an old battleground.

STELLA
You used to say that's why you fell
for me.

A beat. He smiles.

TOM
I lied.

But his voice is soft. And after a moment, Stella smiles too. She might not approve but she loves her Tom and it shows.

The slight air of tension lifts.

Beside them Stevie shuffles the cards and starts dealing them out again.

STEVIE
See Daddy. In the middle of the night
they all got muddled up. Now...

He deals out four sets of four cards and turns them up triumphantly. Ace, king, queen jack in each set.

STEVIE (CONT'D)
See?

He beams proudly at them all.

(CONTINUED)

STEVIE (CONT'D)

Magic.

8 EXT - STREET ROW OF TERRACE HOUSES - DAY 8

Rain is slicking down. Tom is standing outside one of the houses, collar turned up against the rain. It's clear by his manner he's been waiting a while.

He steps off the stone steps and tries to peer in one of the windows. Nothing. He rings the doorbell again. There is a rustle from inside the house. The door opens an inch. Someone peers out.

TOM

Mr. Duncan?

HENRY DUNCAN

Go away.

Tom hesitates a moment.

TOM

Mr. Duncan, I rang earlier. The Daily News. I just wanted..

HENRY

Havenae you people done enough?

The door opens a smidgeon more. An angry face fills the space. HENRY DUNCAN, grey-haired wiry, like a belligerent terrier, looks out at Tom.

HENRY (CONT'D)

I said No interviews. Why canna youse leave me alone...leave HER alone?

TOM

But don't you want the public to hear her side of the story? Be told the truth.

HENRY

Truth? You people wouldnae ken it if it bit you in the backside.

TOM

I'm not like the other reporters...

HENRY

...That's what they all say. Hae you scavengers nae shame?

The door slams to. Tom hesitates for a moment. Then he tries ringing the bell again. Listens.

(CONTINUED)

HENRY O.S.

Clear off!

Tom rings the door bell again. This time silence. Nothing. The rain is picking up. It's blustery and cold.

TOM

Mr. Duncan?

Silence. No sign of movement from inside.

Tom waits a moment more then takes out a business card from the inside pocket of his coat and scribbles something on the plain side.

He leans down and opens the letter box flap and speaks through the gap.

TOM (CONT'D)

Mr. Duncan, if you decide you want to tell the public what really happened, here is my card. I'll come up any time...

He listens against the door. Again nothing. He pushes the card through the letter box. The letter box snaps shut like the jaws of an angry animal.

Tom hesitates just a moment more, then pulling his coat tightly about him starts off up the rain-slicked street.

Behind him, the curtain in the downstairs room moves just a flicker then falls back into place.

9 INT - NEWSROOM - DAY

9

A pile of cuttings on Helen Duncan spill across a desk. The heading WITCHCRAFT TRIAL jumps out at us. Tom studies it for a moment, then carefully turns to the next cutting.

The next article shows a picture of a cadaverous looking man with the caption HARRY PRICE underneath. Tom picks up the article and starts to read, stopping from time to time to make notes.

The phone on his desk burst into life. Tom picks it up.

TOM

News desk.

WOMAN O.S.

You're doing a story on Helen Duncan?

TOM

Who is this?

(CONTINUED)

WOMAN O.S.

Just someone who went to one of her seances once. She was a wonderful woman. I just wanted to make sure you knew that. Everyone loved her. Everyone.

10 INT - SITTING ROOM - MOLLIE'S HOUSE - DAY

10

Wall to wall bookshelves.

MOLLIE

He hated her.

MOLLIE GOLDNEY, one time friend and assistant of the medium fraud-buster HARRY PRICE, is standing at the window looking out over the back garden. She is middle aged and smartly dressed and composed.

MOLLIE (CONT'D)

She ruined him, you know. The great fraud buster, Harry Price.

She turns to face Tom. It is an obsessively cluttered room, dark, slightly oppressive.

MOLLIE (CONT'D)

He always said he wished she'd never entered his life. He died in '48 - did you know? A great loss.

Tom gives a quick nod.

TOM

I read the notices.

MOLLIE

All the important scientific studies he carried out and she's the only thing he's remembered for.

TOM

So was that why he set her up?

She's barely able to disguise her disgust.

MOLLIE

He didn't need to. She was a fraud.

TOM

But Harry had formed a rival group. It was to his advantage to have her publicly humiliated?

Mollie can hold back no longer.

(CONTINUED)

10 CONTINUED:

MOLLIE

You want to know what she was like?
I'll tell you. Harry knew she was
trouble the moment he set eyes on her.

Tom looks up from his note taking.

MOLLIE (CONT'D)

August 1930. Harry had his lab on the
top floor of the LSA building...

TOM

London Spiritualist Association?

Mollie nods.

TOM (CONT'D)

And you were his assistant then?

Again Mollie nods.

MOLLIE

They were always bringing people in
for testing for paranormal and psychic
powers but this time...well you could
almost feel the buzz of excitement.

FLASHBACK:

11 INT - LSA HOUSE - DAY

11

HARRY PRICE, dark haired, thin, almost satanic, is walking
up the narrow steps of a London house, followed by Mollie.

He glances to his right as he passes the first floor room
and sees Helen Duncan standing rather awkwardly in a black
plastic bag, surrounded by several attentive men and women
fussing around her. They stop and watch.

Helen glances up at Harry.

Harry doesn't smile at her. Their eyes meet. Helen is
obviously rather taken aback by his attitude but before she
can think any more of it she is eased back into a chair by
one of the LSA members who starts to tie her up with thick
tape.

Another LSA member sees Harry looking in. He gives him a
triumphant smile.

LSA MEMBER

Here's one who'll prove you wrong,
Harry.

(CONTINUED)

Helen is fussed over by her husband, HENRY, as an LSA member seals the tape with sealing wax.

The lights dim and the door is firmly closed, shutting Harry and Mollie out.

Harry walks on up the stairs, obviously deep in thought. Mollie follows silently.

MOLLIE V.O.

Harry was never one to walk away from a challenge. I could see then he'd go on until he'd exposed her as a sham.

12 INT - PRICE'S LABORATORY - LSA HOUSE - DAY

12

The bookshelves are stocked with books on witchcraft; Scot's Discoverie of Witchcraft etc. On the wall hangs a picture of Houdini.

Harry is deep in work, writing at his desk. There is a knock on the door. MOLLIE appears.

Mollie comes over to his desk. She's fairly bursting with excitement.

MOLLIE

She wasn't too sure at first but that husband of hers. All I had to do was wave a bit of money.

HARRY

Didn't I tell you?

MOLLIE

I thought they'd be more wary. The latest LSA tests were negative.

HARRY

But they still won't call her a fraud. Making too much money out of their golden goose.

Mollie shakes her head in disapproval.

MOLLIE

If they have suspicions and say nothing they're just as guilty in my book.

HARRY

More so. Helen's barely educated - I sometimes think she hasn't a clue what's really going on. The LSA, on the other hand, claim to be a bunch of academics.

MOLLIE

Poor woman. Do you think she knows what she's letting herself in for?

HARRY

Probably not.

He gives her a conspiratorial smile.

HARRY (CONT'D)

Luckily for us.

13 INT - PRICE'S LAB - LSA HOUSE - DAY

13

Harry sits Helen Duncan down in a chair and fusses over her. Mollie blindfolds her.

MONTAGE:

Harry taking flash photos of Helen:

Her trance:

The emergence of white muslin-like "ectoplasm" from her nose: Helen lying on a couch having her stomach xray-photographed.

14 INT - PRICE'S LAB - LSA HOUSE - DAY LATER

14

Harry Price holds up the Xray photos of Helen he's developed. There's nothing unusual there. He turns to Mollie, who's peering at the Xrays he's holding up.

HARRY

She uses cloth for the ectoplasm, I'm certain. But where the hell does she hide it?

Harry looks at the photos again frustrated.

MOLLIE

Up her nose?

HARRY

Twenty yards of it?

MOLLIE

The Xrays show nothing?

Harry shakes his head.

MOLLIE (CONT'D)

Nor the internal?

Again Harry shakes his head.

HARRY

We need another Xray photo. Something that'll show up a safety pin or somesuch.

(CONTINUED)

MOLLIE
She'll never agree.

HARRY
Henry will.

MOLLIE
I'm not sure...

HARRY
Tell him we'll pay double.

PRESENT DAY:

15 INT - MOLLIE'S HOUSE - DAY

15

Mollie clears a big stack of papers from a chair and comes to sit down opposite Tom.

Tom waits until she's settled himself.

TOM
So she came back?

MOLLIE
Helen did whatever her husband wanted.
He was her sort of...

TOM
Svengali?

Mollie nods.

TOM (CONT'D)
But those tests were pretty intrusive.
Intimate. Didn't she complain? I'd
heard...

MOLLIE
That she had a filthy temper? She
had. But she was strangely passive
about being prodded around in the name
of science.

TOM
Maybe she felt she had nothing to
hide?

MOLLIE
Don't say she has you fooled too?

TOM
I've got an open mind.

Mollie gives a small smile.

MOLLIE

That's what they all say.

TOM

So did Harry get the evidence he wanted?

Mollie laughs.

MOLLIE

We had all the experts lined up. It should have been so easy.

TOM

But?

FLASHBACK:

16 INT - PRICE'S LAB - LSA - NIGHT

16

The room is in darkness. A vague spectre like white form begins to appear from a wooden cabinet in the corner. Suddenly there is a piercing woman's scream.

MOLLIE V.O.

It was a complete fiasco.

Chaos. A loud clatter as Helen Duncan stumbles out of the wooden cabinet.

The lights go on to reveal the bizarre sight of four men in dinner jackets, the observers, sitting in a line in front of the cabinet. Harry and Mollie move across to try and calm Helen down.

HARRY

Helen, we just need one more photo.

HELEN

(broad Scottish)

I canna...

HARRY

Helen, you must...

Helen, wearing her bizarre black seance suit, pushes him violently aside and runs from the room. Her husband, Henry, follows her. The four observers look at each other stunned. From outside they can hear the sound of Helen wailing.

17 EXT - HOUSE - NIGHT

17

A policeman turns into the street. He stops, confused. Up ahead he can see the curious sight of a seventeen stone Helen Duncan, clad in black satin combinations, wailing hysterically. A group of men in dinner jackets have gathered round her, obviously unsure of what to do, and she

(CONTINUED)

17 CONTINUED:

is swearing at them wildly. He nears them cautiously.

POLICEMAN

Is everything all right here, sir?

Harry looks up startled.

HARRY

Yes, yes. We're just going back inside, aren't we Helen?

Helen looks at the policeman and then at the group of men. She then glances at Henry who gives her just a very slight nod of the head. She draws herself up straight, becoming almost dignified, and nods. She lets go of the railings.

She walks back inside almost regally, followed by the group of men.

The policeman watches them go in, still a little confused.

18 INT - HOUSE - NIGHT

18

The group have now reassembled. Henry is the last to come in. He looks faintly furtive and Harry gives him a suspicious look. Mollie leans towards him.

MOLLIE

Did you get it?

HARRY

She must have passed it to Henry outside.

Helen sits down again. She now looks completely relaxed, almost smug. Mollie and Harry exchange an exasperated look.

MOLLIE

So that's it?

HARRY

I will get her.

MOLLIE

It may take some while.

HARRY

I'm a very patient man.

He gives Mollie a small, slow smile.

PRESENT DAY:

19 INT - PRICE'S HOUSE - DAY

19

Tom looks across at Mollie.

(CONTINUED)

TOM

So he waited until the time was right?

MOLLIE

He didn't need to. I told you, Helen Duncan was responsible for her own downfall.

TOM

And Harry never saw her again?

MOLLIE

Not professionally.

TOM

But you both went to the Old Bailey when she was brought to trial there?

Mollie looks surprised Tom guessed. He smiles.

TOM (CONT'D)

To gloat?

MOLLIE

To observe. (beat) She hadn't changed. Despite everything.

FLASHBACK:

20 INT - COURT ROOM NO 4 OLD BAILEY - DAY

20

MOLLIE V.O.

...she arrived like some superstar.

The Court room - as without warning it quietens. There is suddenly a tremendous air of expectancy, you can feel it. Now we see why - as Helen Duncan is led in.

MOLLIE V.O. (CONT'D)

All her supporters were whispering blessings at her, blowing kisses...it made me sick.

Helen Duncan, resplendent in fur coat, walks almost regally towards her place in court. As she moves through the crowds, women whisper their blessings to her or blow her silent kisses and smile encouragingly at her. She looks very confident.

MOLLIE V.O. (CONT'D)

But then she saw Harry. That threw her. I could tell.

Helen's eyes rest on Harry Price in the gallery. She freezes, looking alarmed.

(CONTINUED)

MOLLIE V.O. (CONT'D)

Only for a moment. But it was enough.

After a moment, Helen moves on. She smiles at her well wishers, all confidence restored.

PRESENT DAY:

21 INT - MOLLIE'S HOUSE - DAY

21

TOM

Weren't you just a bit sorry for her?

MOLLIE

She was a fraud. Pure and simple.

TOM

But you never actually found the cloth?

Mollie is silent for a moment.

TOM (CONT'D)

Nor did the Xrays show up so much as a safety pin?

MOLLIE

We only had time for that one trial.

TOM

So despite all your searches and examinations, you never found anything in fact?

MOLLIE

No we didn't.

Mollie looks away.

22 INT - NEWSROOM - DAY

22

Tom walks across the news room to his desk. Newspaper clippings of the trial are spread out everywhere. On top of the pile sits a newly arrived small brown paper parcel.

Tom sits down at his desk and opens it. He draws out a manuscript. It is marked The Trial of Helen Duncan. Tom glances across to CASSIDY a young fresh faced reporter who sits at the next door desk..

TOM

Know who brought this in?

CASSIDY

Boy from reception. Said someone left it there for you.

(CONTINUED)

TOM
Do you know when?

Cassidy gives a non committal shrug.

CASSIDY
Half an hour or so. (beat) Anything wrong?

TOM
Just curious.

Tom examines the brown wrapping paper. It has his name on it. He frowns. He puts the transcript down thoughtfully.

On the desk in front of him is the Daily Sketch headlined: "SPIRIT RELEASED MEDIUM TIED UP BY MAGICIAN." Tom starts to look through the pages of the trial transcript, and finds the page that matches the article.

He starts to read.

23 INT - TOM'S HOUSE - DAY

23

STELLA, Tom's wife, comes into the hallway. She looks up the stairs and sees her two boys sitting at the top, looking anxiously down at her.

STEVIE
He made us do it.

STELLA
Do what?

But the boys scamper out of sight across the landing. Stella walks on through the hallway.

STELLA (CONT'D)
Tom?

Nothing. She frowns. A silence, then:

TOM O.S.
In here.

Stella walks through to the study to find...

24 INT - STUDY - DAY

24

...Tom tied to his chair. He looks sheepish.

STELLA
What **are** you doing?

TOM
Experiment.

24 CONTINUED:

He's trying to undo the ropes, but isn't getting very far.

STELLA

How long have you been here?

TOM

A while. I'm almost there...Just...
want...to...see...

All the while he's still struggling with the ropes. He stops.

TOM (CONT'D)

The LSA used to tie Helen Duncan up when they were testing her. I want to see how easy it is to escape.

Stella smiles.

STELLA

Not very, judging by your attempt.

TOM

Houdini managed it.

STELLA

He was a magician. He also made an elephant disappear.

She sees Tom is still struggling. She comes over and starts to untie the knots.

TOM

I want to know if it's a trick.

STELLA

What?

TOM

Helen. At first I thought she was an out and out fraud...

STELLA

Now?

TOM

I spent the day with someone who was convinced she was a plain and simple charlatan. But when it came to proof...

STELLA

Peel off one layer you find another.

Stella struggles with the last knot.

(CONTINUED)

TOM

That's just it. I'm not sure what lies beneath. I'm almost certain Harry Price wasn't to blame for her arrest.

STELLA

One of the others?

TOM

The claws were out certainly. She'd made fools of them all. But...

Tom stands up and rubs his wrists.

TOM (CONT'D)

I'm meeting someone tomorrow. Maybe...
(beat) It's like a jigsaw. All the pieces scattered...

STELLA

All you need is cloud.

Tom doesn't quite follow.

STELLA (CONT'D)

You know. You've got hundreds of pieces, all blue, all the same, and then you find the edge of white. A cloud. You know where you are then.

Tom smiles. Stella goes across and links arms with him.

STELLA (CONT'D)

Come on, let's tell the boys you are free and unharmed.

TOM

One favour?

They step out into the hall.

TOM (CONT'D)

Play down how much you had to help me?

FLASHBACK:

25 INT - SMALL DARK ROOM - NIGHT

25

Darkness. A weak red light glows in one corner of the room. Shadows move. Gradually it becomes clear that a group of thirty or so barely distinguishable people are gathered in rows facing a wooden cabinet set in the centre before them. Helen Duncan is visible, slumped forward, as in a trance.

Silence. There is a distinct air of anticipation. Someone in the audience coughs.

(CONTINUED)

Suddenly Helen Duncan straightens, eye wide. An old man's nasally voice cuts through the silence. ALBERT the spirit guide:

ALBERT O.S.
Someone is here. A young boy...A sailor... Recently passed...Very recently...Is anyone out there for him?

The audience stay silent. C/U of various faces in the crowd. Anxious. Attentive. Half afraid/half wanting the vision to be their loved one.

ALBERT O.S. (CONT'D)
He wants you to know he's alright.
He's safely on the other side.

The light flickers slightly. The audience look at one another, unsure. Helen is still rigid, in a trance, not moving. The voice continues:

ALBERT O.S. (CONT'D)
I see...His ship...I can't make out...Wait...It's name...

C/U of DOROTHY a bird-like woman with dark hair scraped back into a bun. She's alert now, her face tight. The plump woman beside her glances at her aware of her growing agitation.

ALBERT O.S. (CONT'D)
The Barton...no...no...It's the Barham...

Dorothy involuntarily gasps and begins to shake. Her plump friend puts a comforting arm around her. Dorothy's face crunches up in anguish. She falls against her friend's shoulder sobbing quietly.

PRESENT DAY:

26 INT - DOROTHY'S SITTING ROOM

26

A light, airy sitting room, filled with good, but inexpensive furniture.

DOROTHY
And that were how I found out my son had been killed.

Tom is with the middle-aged but still bird-like DOROTHY WOOLSCROFT.

Tom stops at the mantelpiece and picks up a photo of a young man in naval uniform. He studies it for a moment.

(CONTINUED)

TOM
Good looking boy.

Dorothy takes a deep breath.

DOROTHY
That he were.

She pours Tom a cup of tea. Tom comes over and sits down opposite her.

He takes out his notepad from his briefcase and rests it on his lap.

TOM
So had you been to many of Helen's seances?

He starts to take notes in a quiet, unobtrusive way.

DOROTHY
I'd only gone along to be with my friend. She'd wanted to make contact with her Mum. I hadn't really wanted to go...

She stops. Even now her emotion is obvious.

TOM
Did you feel...

DOROTHY
...She were the Real MacCoy?

Tom nods.

DOROTHY (CONT'D)
I know there are them what say she were a fraud, but that night...If you'd been there...Albert - her guide - were clear about the message. I remember afterwards, just sitting, I couldn't move.

FLASHBACK:

27 INT - SMALL ROOM - NIGHT

27

Dorothy is sitting looking shell shocked in one of the chairs. Her plump friend sits beside her, trying to comfort her.

Helen Duncan comes up and sits beside her. She looks concerned. She takes her hand. Dorothy looks up at her.

DOROTHY
You're sure it were the Barham?

(CONTINUED)

HELEN

I'm that sorry. If Albert sain...

Dorothy nods as if slowly accepting this.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Sometimes I hae so many voices all wanting to be heard it hurts. But tonight, your boy...he sort of pushed to the front, ye ken? Wanted to get through so bad. (beat) He needed you to know he was just fine. To tell you good bye.

Dorothy wipes away a tear and gives a small muted nod.

28 INT - DOROTHY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

28

Dorothy sits at home in darkness. She holds the photo of her son in naval uniform, rocking backwards and forwards.

DOROTHY V.O.

At the back of my mind, even then, I were hoping she might have it wrong. No-one had heard a dicky bird about the Barham going down. But then...They called.

29 EXT - DOROTHY'S HOUSE - DAY

29

Dorothy is out in the garden, pulling out a few weeds. She looks up with surprise as two men come up the garden path.

30 INT - DOROTHY'S HOUSE - DAY

30

The two men are sitting with Dorothy.

ADMIRALTY MAN 1

If we can just run through this again. Helen Duncan told you the Barham had gone down?

DOROTHY

She said my son had died. That the Barham had sunk. But when I rang the Admiralty they couldn't confirm...

ADMIRALTY MAN 1

There's no official news yet.

DOROTHY

So there's nothing suggesting it might have been torpedoed?

The men look uncomfortable. They avoid her gaze. Dorothy struggles with her emotion.

(CONTINUED)

30 CONTINUED:

ADMIRALTY MAN 1
Nothing is confirmed.

Dorothy looks from one to the other.

DOROTHY
But why hasn't there been an
announcement? Lawd above, haven't the
families got a right?

ADMIRALTY MAN 1
Mrs. Woolscroft, we need to know where
you and this Helen Duncan got your
intelligence from...

DOROTHY
I told you. She saw my son...

ADMIRALTY MAN 1
...She must have heard the rumour
somewhere. She must have spoken to
someone...

DOROTHY
...But even your department weren't
aware of it. How could Helen?

The men look uneasily at one another.

ADMIRALTY MAN 1
A lucky guess?

DOROTHY
I don't understand. What's this all
about?

ADMIRALTY MAN 1
Mrs. Woolscroft. We are at war. We
can't have people in trusted positions
passing on rumours. We need to
discover the source.

DOROTHY
Then you must ask Helen Duncan direct.
But I know what she'll say.

The men look uncomfortable.

DOROTHY (CONT'D)
It weren't no security leak.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PRESENT DAY:

31 INT - DOROTHY'S HOUSE - DAY

31

DOROTHY

It weren't what they wanted to hear of course. Made them uneasy. No-one knew about the Barham, you see. Its sinking were top secret.

TOM

But Helen spent a lot of time in Portsmouth, maybe she'd heard something?

DOROTHY

If it were that simple, why had no-one else heard the rumour?

TOM

Maybe Helen knew someone in de-coding who'd had access to the message?

DOROTHY

We'd have heard. Afterwards I mean. They did a thorough investigation. Nothing. They'd have made a point of broadcasting the fact if they'd found something, know what I'm saying?

Tom acknowledges this with a nod.

DOROTHY (CONT'D)

It were after that the police kept tabs on her. It weren't the first time she'd revealed a ship had gone down.

TOM

You mean the Hood?

DOROTHY

That's what started it all.

TOM

But all she'd done that time was announce a British battleship had sunk. She didn't say which one. We were at war. Our fleets were at risk. It was a pretty safe guess to say a ship had gone down.

DOROTHY

You sound sceptical.

TOM

It's my job.

Dorothy smiles.

(CONTINUED)

DOROTHY

It's more than that. (beat) Not that I blame you. Mind, if you'd been there that night...

TOM

She was found guilty of fraud you know.

DOROTHY

I'm not saying she didn't have her tricks. But she also got things right. They were almost more annoyed when she did. Know what I'm saying? It meant they couldn't dismiss her. Like the Barham.

Dorothy pours Tom another cup of tea. He helps himself to a biscuit.

TOM

So you never saw Helen again?

Dorothy hesitates.

DOROTHY

Just once. (beat) I went to the Old Bailey. I thought I owed her. She were the one to tell me about my son. Not the Admiralty. Not those in power. I wanted to show my support...I expect that sounds daft.

Tom shakes his head.

DOROTHY (CONT'D)

I were that glad, too. That prosecution barrister Maude made her out to be a charlatan and their witness Worth... Almost too perfect. Know what I mean? And Loseby couldn't shake him, despite Worth claiming he'd only decided to expose Helen after that first séance and Loseby having quite different evidence . . .

FLASHBACK TO TRIAL:

32 INT - COURTROOM NO 4 OLD BAILEY - DAY

32

Helen Duncan is leaning forward in the docks. She is dressed in the same fur coat. She seems reasonably relaxed.

A spruce-looking, confident WORTH is in the witness box

(CONTINUED)

being cross-examined by the defence barrister, CHARLES LOSEBY.

Loseby is a cadaverous, earnest looking man. Not at all prepossessing. He glances at his notes carefully before speaking.

LOSEBY

So had you, in December 1943, already made up your mind to bring about the downfall of Helen Duncan?

WORTH

No, sir.

Loseby hesitates slightly.

LOSEBY

But I have evidence that long before you officially approached the police there was a plan to bring Helen Duncan down. That bets were being taken in an Oxford pub that she'd be arrested within fourteen days. Evidence that points to you being directly involved.

WORTH

I know nothing at all about it. Perhaps someone else suspected her.

LOSEBY

That is not the point. It is the connection of your name with the whole episode.

WORTH

As I said, I know nothing about it.

Worth is not going to be moved. Loseby sees this. He changes tack.

LOSEBY

Your first contact with the Portsmouth police...You impressed upon me you had not been a spy, or anything in the nature of a spy for them...

WORTH

Not for the police.

LOSEBY

I do not think you are being entirely frank, Mr. Worth.

WORTH

I was spying on my own account, if you prefer to call it spying.

(CONTINUED)

LOSEBY

Don't you think it's a pity you didn't explain that to me when we first met down at Portsmouth?

WORTH

No, sir.

Loseby is put off track, startled by this rebuff. He hesitates but doesn't challenge him.

Worth is unfazed, and stares at him unemotionally. It is clear he is supremely confident and not about to be rattled by Loseby's questioning.

In the docks Helen shakes her head in disbelief.

PRESENT DAY:

33 INT - DOROTHY'S HOUSE - DAY

33

DOROTHY

It were obvious Worth weren't telling the whole truth. But Loseby couldn't shake him.

TOM

Well rehearsed then?

DOROTHY

Some things didn't add up though. Worth and his friend Cross had different versions of that night. The torch...where the cloth they said Helen had used had gone...

TOM

Didn't Loseby pick up on that?

Dorothy shakes her head.

TOM (CONT'D)

Perhaps he felt his own witnesses would show up the inaccuracies?

DOROTHY

The more I sat there, the more I felt we wasn't hearing what really happened.

TOM

So you don't believe it was just a simple police case?

(CONTINUED)

DOROTHY

Seemed clear she'd been set up. That's why I thought that Harry Price were involved.

Dorothy offers Tom another biscuit. He refuses.

DOROTHY (CONT'D)

He were there, you know.

TOM

Who?

DOROTHY

Him. Harry Price. (beat) So were my two Admiralty men.

Tom looks at her surprised.

34 EXT - STREET OUTSIDE NEWSPAPER OFFICE - DAY

34

A bustling street. A newspaper vendor calls out:

VENDOR

Suez! Suez! Read the latest on our troops!

Tom crosses the street towards the Newspaper Office.

The sign on the newspaper boarding behind him says: Car Plant Closures: Workers Laid off as Petrol Crisis Worsens.

35 INT - NEWSROOM -DAY

35

Tom is sitting at his desk, going through his notes.

In the b.g. Ellery crosses the newsroom, stopping to chat to various reporters as he passes them. There is a buzz of activity in the room. Journalists, heads down, bashing away at typewriters out to beat deadlines.

Ellery stops at Tom's desk.

ELLERY

That Helen Duncan piece?

Tom stops typing and looks up.

TOM

I was right about her being set up, sir. (beat) But seems it was the police, not Price, who planned it all.

Ellery looks intrigued.

TOM (CONT'D)

Blatant entrapment. Apparently they considered her a danger to public morale. What's interesting though is they went to an unusual amount of trouble. Trying to find out why.

ELLERY

Interesting angle.

TOM

I've tracked down Worth, the main police witness. Haven't spoken to him yet but he's back tonight.

Ellery looks pleased.

ELLERY

Get it sorted soonest. Suez is blowing up in our faces. So is Hungary.

TOM

One other person to interview. A policewoman. There the night Helen was arrested.

ELLERY

She's willing to talk?

TOM

I get the impression she's lonely. Helen Duncan's arrest seems her only claim to fame. She was flattered...

ELLERY

Just be discreet.

Ellery gives Tom a meaningful look and moves on.

36 INT - NEWSROOM - LATER

36

Tom has spread the Helen Duncan files out across his desk. He has put in a lot of hours and it shows. He is busy typing out his notes. He makes a mistake, corrects it, types on.

The phone rings. Tom hastily finishes what he's typing, then stretches out to pick up the receiver.

OPERATOR O.S.

Your call to New Zealand, Mr. Bradley.

TOM

Hello? Hello, Mrs. Worth? We spoke. You said your husband would be back tonight? Is he there now?

37 INT - WORTH'S HOUSE - NIGHT

37

Light from a side lamp spills across a small plainly furnished room. MRS WORTH (mid 30s, small, bird like) sits on the edge of a two-seater sofa. Her voice is soft and apologetic with a slight New Zealand twang.

MRS. WORTH

No, I'm sorry. He rang last night to say he's extending his fishing trip. He won't be back for several days now. Can I take a message?... No, I appreciate that would be too late. It's most unfortunate. I'm sorry I can't help you more...

She puts down the phone thoughtfully.

The shot opens out to reveal Worth sitting in the background silently watching her. They exchange a look, then Mrs. Worth leaves the room.

Worth waits until the door has closed. Then he stands up and goes over and picks up the phone.

WORTH

Hello Operator? I'd like to put through a call to London...Yes, I'll wait.

38 INT- OFFICE - DAY

38

The office is dark, below street level. It is small and uninviting.

A middle aged man, WILSON is sitting at an orderly desk, going through a pile of files. He is greying, refined looking, with a school master-ish air. The door opens and another man enters.

CLYDE, thick necked and bullish, walks across to Wilson's desk and drops a file on top. It is marked Helen Duncan. Wilson looks up surprised.

CLYDE

We may have a problem.

39 INT - PORTSMOUTH SHORELINE - - DAY

39

Tom is walking along the shoreline with MARY PARSONS, a middle-aged ex-policewoman. She's a garrulous friendly soul, who obviously relishes this small moment of attention.

A black labrador is running beside them. Mary picks up a stick and throws it for the dog to pick up. Mary and Tom stop walking for a moment.

(CONTINUED)

TOM
So it was obvious something big was brewing?

MARY
Lord yes. Everyone was running round like headless chickens.

TOM
But you had no idea then what it was about?

MARY
We knew it was to be a raid.

TOM
Against Helen Duncan?

MARY
Not at that stage. Later of course...

TOM
Worth had been sent in specifically?

MARY
We were to wait for the signal.

The dog bounds back to them. Mary throws the stick again. This time into the water. The dog plunges in after it.

MARY (CONT'D)
They didn't want any mistakes.

Mary nods. She is busy watching the dog coping with the waves as he retrieves his stick.

TOM
Sounds a complicated operation.

MARY
But then, it was a matter of national security, after all.

Tom registers this, careful not to let his interest show. He gives an easy smile.

TOM
Is that what they told you?

MARY
That's what the Inspector Ford said.

TOM
I see. (beat) Take me through what took place that night. Worth set off the signal...What happened next?

39 CONTINUED: (2)

39

FLASHBACK:

40 INT - HOUSE - DARK STAIRWAY - NIGHT 40

Sound of a police whistle blowing. POV Mary running behind policemen coming up the stairs.

41 INT - SMALL MEETING ROOM IN FLAT - NIGHT 41

Chaos, with chairs kicked over. Several of the police are being quite aggressive with the sitters.

DET. INSP. FORD, every inch a dedicated police officer, turns to Worth, who is beside him.

FORD

You were supposed to hold it fast.

A defiant-looking JANE RUST, (early 50s) one of the sitters, comes up to Ford.

JANE

We're all willing to be searched.
Surely that tells you. No-one has it.

Ford looks at them all with frustration. He turns furiously to one of the policeman.

FORD

Get all their names and addresses.

The policeman goes off with his notepad. Ford gives a meaningful look at the two other policemen searching the room.

They shake their heads. Ford turns to Helen Duncan who is sitting slumped on a chair.

FORD (CONT'D)

You are to accompany us down to the station. You need to get changed.

Helen looks petrified, but she nods. She stands up. Ford nods to Mary.

Mary starts to follow Helen through to the back room bedroom. Ford catches at her arm and whispers:

FORD (CONT'D)

Watch her like a hawk. We need that cloth.

Mary nods. She follows Helen through to the side bedroom.

42 INT - HOUSE - MINUTES LATER 42

Mary and Helen come out of the bedroom. Ford looks at Mary, who gives a little shake of her head. Worth comes up

(CONTINUED)

42 CONTINUED:

42

to Ford. He's getting agitated.

Ford indicates to the policemen to search the room again.

43 INT - POLICE CAR - NIGHT

43

Helen is sitting in the back of the car with Mary and Jane Rust, her fellow spiritualist friend and nurse.

HELEN

It'll be just fine, you'll see. I'm innocent, ye ken.

Jane takes her hand and squeezes it.

44 INT - CELL - POLICE STATION - NIGHT

44

Helen, looking pale and disoriented, is in her cell, sitting on the bed. Mary comes in.

MARY

I gather you're diabetic. We'll make sure your insulin kit is picked up in the morning.

HELEN

I'll be awa' hame by then.

Mary hesitates. Helen picks up on this.

HELEN (CONT'D)

You sain I'll nae be released?

MARY

I can't answer that, I'm afraid. It's not up to me.

Helen becomes more agitated.

MARY (CONT'D)

Please stay calm, Mrs. Duncan.

HELEN

It's no right...

MARY

...You've been charged under the Vagrancy Act...

HELEN

I dinna understand.

Mary remains silent. She isn't sure what to tell Helen. She isn't sure herself what's going on.

Helen stands up. She is beginning to panic. She realises all is not what it seems.

(CONTINUED)

44 CONTINUED:

She starts to lose it. She sinks down on the cot sobbing.

HELEN (CONT'D)

They canna keep me here. Please. I need to gae hame.

45 INT - FORD'S OFFICE POLICE STATION - NIGHT

45

Mary Ford taps on Ford's door. He is on phone. It's obvious he is talking to someone high up. He waves to Mary to wait.

FORD (ON PHONE)

No, we didn't find it...But I think we can still make the charges stick...Yes, I understand the importance...Of Course...

Ford puts down the phone.

FORD (CONT'D)

What is it, Parsons?

MARY

I'm sorry sir. It's Mrs. Duncan. She's demanding to see you, sir.

FORD

Now's not the time. Have the sergeant go down to her.

MARY

She may not be happy with that, sir.

The phone rings again.

FORD

Well make sure she is, Parsons.

Ford waits pointedly for Mary to leave before picking up and phone and speaking.

46 INT - POLICE STATION - DAY

46

Mary arrives to find the station in a frenzy. A group of policemen and women are in a huddle. Mary approaches them.

SERGEANT

She's off to Holloway.

Mary looks surprised.

MARY

They're not letting her out on bail?

SERGEANT

Ford needs more time.

(CONTINUED)

The sergeant hesitates.

MARY
What're you not telling me?

The sergeant just smiles and taps his nose. Mary is about to pursue this, but there is a commotion on the stairs behind them.

Helen Duncan is being led up. She passes them, weeping loudly. She is trembling, tears pouring down her face. She looks on the edge of breaking down completely.

Mary looks sympathetic. She's shocked by how ill Helen looks.

MARY (CONT'D)
Poor woman.

SERGEANT
She shouldn't have stirred up a hornet's nest.

Mary observes Helen being helped into the waiting police car and driven away.

PRESENT DAY:

47 EXT - SHORELINE - DAY

47

The wind is getting up. Mary shivers. They start to walk again. The dog is barking insistently just ahead of them.

MARY
She was such a sorry sight. She obviously had no idea what was going on.

TOM
But something was?

The dog is still barking. Mary turns apologetically to Tom.

MARY
Sorry, he won't stop til I throw it again.

She throws it and the dog chases after it. Mary smiles a bit sheepishly.

MARY (CONT'D)
Gets a bit tiring. But he won't give up.

It's clear she doesn't really mind. Tom smiles indulgently.

(CONTINUED)

TOM

Like my children. (beat) So you were telling me after Helen had been arrested you felt something was going on?

MARY

The phone was red hot all that week. Big wigs from London all hours. Home Office, Admiralty, all sorts.

TOM

When your sergeant said Ford had been told to send Helen to Holloway did he say who exactly had instructed him?

MARY

He didn't. No.

TOM

But you got the impression it came from high up?

MARY

Certainly once Helen had been arrested there was pressure to make sure she was convicted by hell or high water. But the arrest itself...

She shrugs.

MARY (CONT'D)

I'm not sure. An awful fuss was made. But... Sorry, I'm not being much use.

TOM

Not at all. You're being very helpful. One last question. Helen was originally charged under the Vagrancy Act?

Mary nods.

TOM (CONT'D)

Can you remember who decided to change the charge?

MARY

I got the impression it came from London. But from where exactly...

TOM

Scotland Yard?

MARY

I don't think it was from the police at all.

(CONTINUED)

TOM

Then who?

She hesitates slightly, not sure if she should voice her thoughts.

MARY

I think the Ministry of Defence. And someone pretty high up.

Tom stops walking. This is a new turn of events.

TOM

But it was a simple case of a medium charged under the Vagrancy Act. Why had they become involved?

Mary shrugs.

MARY

I never understood that myself. But it begs the question doesn't it?

Tom looks hard at her.

TOM

You mean how much the Government was really involved in the whole sorry little affair?

Mary nods and then looks quickly away. She's not sure she hasn't said too much.

48 INT - TOM'S HOUSE - NIGHT

48

Stella is in the kitchen sitting at the table mending a hole in Stevie's jumper. A pile of socks to be mended sit on the table neatly paired.

The radio is on very quietly in the b.g. A News announcer is summing up.

NEWS ANNOUNCER

The British Army is viewing the smuggling of the bazookas by the Egyptians as a serious setback to the peace plan. A Spokesman....

O.S. The slam of the front door. Stella looks up.

STELLA

Tom?

Tom comes in. He looks windswept and tired. Stella gets up and kisses him on the cheek.

(CONTINUED)

STELLA (CONT'D)

Long day.

She moves over and turns down the radio.

TOM

Kids in bed?

STELLA

Asleep I'm afraid.

Tom goes over to the side and feels the tea pot. IT is still hot. He gets a cup out of the cupboard and pours himself a cup of tea. He sits down at the table, holding it in his hands to keep warm.

STELLA (CONT'D)

I'll make you some supper.

Tom grabs her hand.

TOM

It can wait.

He pulls her onto his lap. She laughs leaning back against him.

STELLA

Your hair smells of sea and salt.

TOM

Walked along the beach.

STELLA

Bracing?

TOM

Freezing. (beat) But it was worth it. Seemed to put my contact at ease.

STELLA

So she was helpful?

TOM

Every time I think I've got to the bottom of it all, someone reveals another layer.

STELLA

Like those Russian dolls.

Tom smiles in wry agreement.

TOM

I know I'm onto something. But I'm running out of time.

(CONTINUED)

STELLA

No luck with the MOD?

Tom shakes his head.

TOM

I've got one last bet. A chap Helen stayed with during the trial. I'm just hoping...

Tom shrugs.

TOM (CONT'D)

Trouble is, I'm not sure what lies at the heart of this anymore. It's riddled with secrets and contradictions.

STELLA

That tells you something.

Tom hesitates. He knows what she's saying but he doesn't like it.

TOM

If...just if...I accept the government might have been involved in some way...

STELLA

...not IF, Tom...

TOM

..I have to ask why set her up? Why go to all the trouble of bringing her up to the Old Bailey?

STELLA

Because the state will go to any length to silence people when it feels it's in crisis.

Tom looks at her.

STELLA (CONT'D)

That's how we do things in this country isn't it? Quietly behind closed doors.

TOM

But why use the Witchcraft Act?

STELLA

Because they could. They pursue people in the knowledge that no-one is going to pursue them.

(CONTINUED)

Tom acknowledges this with a slight nod. He's beginning to think she's right.

TOM

I thought they'd tried her because she was a menace and a fraud. A threat to public morale. But what if...

He stops. Looks away. Can't quite voice his thoughts.

STELLA

You think something else was going on?

Tom doesn't respond.

STELLA (CONT'D)

Tom?

TOM

This all revolves around the sinking of the Barham. From the moment she revealed it had gone down.

STELLA

You're not suggesting she was the real thing?

A beat. Then Tom gives a small shake of his head.

TOM

Strangely that isn't important.

Stella looks at him confused.

STELLA

But I thought...

TOM

It doesn't matter whether she was genuine or not, you see. What matters is that someone high up believed she might be.

Their eyes meet.

TOM (CONT'D)

And was prepared to do anything to silence her.

49 INT - NEWSROOM - DAY

49

Tom is at his desk busy dialling. It's obvious he's been plugging away all day.

TOM

Well someone must know what went on. If you just...

(CONTINUED)

He stops. The person the other end has rung off on him. He picks up the phone and dials another number.

TOM (CONT'D)

Logan? Tom Bradley here. I wonder if you had any luck with that name and contact number?...I understand. Well...if you come up with anything...

Montage: Tom plugging away at the phone. His voice is tiring, growing raspy. The contact number he's after clearly isn't coming through.

All last, he stops and stretches. Thinks a moment. Beside him the mail trolley stops at Cassidy's empty desk and the boy leaves two brown envelopes.

The boy wheels the trolley on and stops at Tom's desk.

BOY

Package for you, Mr. Bradley.

Tom takes the large envelope from the boy. He opens it. Pulls out a handful of hand-written letters. Stops.

Tom calls the boy back.

TOM

Who brought this in?

The Boy shrugs.

BOY

Reception gave it me.

Tom nods thoughtfully. The boy moves on. Tom picks up the phone.

TOM

Bradley here. A package's just been delivered to me. Any idea who brought it in? No...No it isn't a problem.

Tom put down the phone and then picks up the envelope again.

He studies it carefully for a moment and then opens the right hand bottom drawer of his desk. Lying on the top is the parcel delivered to him two days earlier.

He takes it out and examines the writing on the outside, comparing it to the envelope he's just received.

They match exactly.

Tom studies it for a moment more and then returns the parcel to the drawer.

(CONTINUED)

49 CONTINUED: (2)

He takes out the various letters from the large envelope and spreads them out across his desk. He picks up the first one and starts to examine it carefully.

He's just turned to the next one when the phone on his desk bursts into life. Tom picks up the receiver.

TOM (CONT'D)
Bradley here...Archie? You get it?...
Wiseman. Thanks. Of course I won't
let on it came from you. I know. I owe
you.

He clicks off the phone and allows himself a small smile. Then he dials a new number.

TOM (CONT'D)
Hello? Yes, I wonder if I can speak
to Mr. Wiseman? Yes, I'll wait.

While he waits he re-reads the hand-copied letter. It's regarding the Helen Duncan trial. He can hardly hide his interest.

It's to the Home Office.

And it's from Churchill himself.

50 EXT - MINISTRY OF DEFENCE BUILDING - DAY 50

Tom goes in through the main doors.

51 INT - WISEMAN'S OFFICE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE - DAY 51

The office is sparse, and scrupulously tidy.

Tom is sitting opposite a dapper, military-style man, FREDDIE WISEMAN, (late 50s.)

WISEMAN
I'm sorry. There's really very little
I can tell you.

TOM
But Loseby had been assured by the
Home Office that Mrs. Duncan could not
be charged under Article 4 of the
Vagrancy Act had he not?

WISEMAN
The Home Office categorically denied
it made such assurances.

Tom eyeballs him but he isn't about to press home the point. He doesn't wish to reveal his source. He tries another tack.

(CONTINUED)

TOM

But there was some doubt whether Mrs. Duncan could be legally charged under that Act?

WISEMAN

I don't know where you got such an idea.

Tom meets his gaze.

TOM

I believe Churchill himself questioned the use of it.

WISEMAN

The Spiritualist Association have fabricated all sorts of nonsense.

TOM

Are you saying Churchill did not personally write to the Home Office? Because I have it on the best authority...

WISEMAN

...sources you refuse to reveal...

TOM

...Newspaper procedure. I'm sure you understand.

WISEMAN

I'm sorry. I really can't help you any further on this.

TOM

But if you could just confirm or deny...

WISEMAN

Sorry. Standard procedure. (he allows himself a smile) I'm sure you understand.

Tom knows he's beaten.

Wiseman glances at his watch. He stands up and extends his hand to Tom.

WISEMAN (CONT'D)

I'm afraid that's all we have time for, Mr. Bradley. I'm late for my next meeting...

Tom has no choice but shake Wiseman's hand and leave.

(CONTINUED)

51 CONTINUED: (2)

51

The meeting is over.

52 INT - MINISTRY OF DEFENCE - DAY

52

Tom comes out into the passageway and makes his way down to the lifts.

Waiting there, too, is Wiseman's secretary JOYCE MASON (late 40s, plump and proper). She gives him a smile of recognition he takes his place next to her.

JOYCE

Did you find out all you needed?

TOM

What?

JOYCE

Mr. Wiseman, my boss? Was he helpful?

TOM

Yes, thank you. He filled in most of what I needed.

JOYCE

Good.

TOM

Must be an interesting job. You worked for him long?

JOYCE

A fair while.

TOM

Good boss?

JOYCE

Very.

TOM

I suppose you have to say that.

They both smile. The lift comes. They both get in. The doors close.

JOYCE

You said you were a reporter?

TOM

Doing an extended piece - sort of obituary. Someone called Helen Duncan? I think your department had a bit to do with her during the war.

JOYCE

Did they?

(CONTINUED)

She's careful not to meet his eye.

TOM

I don't suppose you were here then.

JOYCE

I was, but the name means nothing to me, I'm afraid.

Tom looks at her. He's not sure whether to pursue the matter but decides against it.

The lift clanks to a halt. The doors open.

TOM

Well, I may see you around. I'm based round here for the next couple of weeks.

JOYCE

So you are seeing people other than Wiseman?

TOM

Let's just say my research has only just begun.

They get out of the lift. Tom goes towards the exit, Joyce in the opposite direction.

53 EXT - MINISTRY OF DEFENCE - DAY

53

Tom is outside Joyce's office, discreetly standing some distance from the main entrance. A tide of women secretaries pour out of the building and cross the street towards the Lyons Corner House.

Tom sees Joyce coming out. She crosses the road to the Lyons Corner House. Tom follows her.

54 INT - LYONS CORNER HOUSE - DAY

54

Tom is a dozen or so behind Joyce in the queue. He is careful to keep his head down, his nose in a book as he shuffles along. He seems ignorant of her up ahead. He watches her take a table.

He starts to walk past her table and seemingly by accident drops his cutlery and book on the floor. Without appearing to notice her, he puts his tray on her table as he bends down to pick up his knife and fork and book.

When he straightens he appears to see her for the first time. A girl is sitting opposite Joyce, with a miscellany of bags on the seat beside taking up a lot of room. If she could be persuaded to remove the bags Tom could squeeze in.

(CONTINUED)

Tom picks up his tray, then hesitates, looking pointedly at the bags.

TOM
I'm sorry. Is that a space? Do you think I could just squeeze in?

The girl looks disgruntled but obliges, cramming the bags onto the floor. Tom settles in. He smiles at Joyce, who pointedly looks away.

Tom unpacks his tray.

TOM (CONT'D)
Wasn't expecting to see you here. Is this your usual haunt?

Joyce puts down her knife and fork. She hisses in a whisper at him:

JOYCE
I'm not a fool, you know.

TOM
What?

JOYCE
Your little bit of play acting. Not very convincing.

Tom looks sheepish.

TOM
Not my usual tack. Sorry.

JOYCE
So he didn't help you?

TOM
Who?

JOYCE
Wiseman.

TOM
Lips sealed tighter than the Tower of London.

JOYCE
And you thought I might be more forthcoming?

TOM
Don't know what I thought. (beat)
Anything is worth a stab.

Joyce looks decidedly unimpressed.

(CONTINUED)

JOYCE

So what exactly are you intending to write about Helen Duncan? A sort of expose?

TOM

I'd just like to know what really happened. And why.

JOYCE

And you really thought a government department would tell you?

TOM

I thought they would - if they had nothing to hide.

JOYCE

Government departments always have something to hide. Surely you know that.

Tom smiles.

TOM

So you were there when Helen Duncan was arrested?

Joyce eyeballs him.

JOYCE

Isn't that why you're here?

TOM

You're not making this very easy for me. It's only a few questions. Background information. Nothing more.

JOYCE

You're not very original, Mr. Bradley.

Joyce looks at her watch.

JOYCE (CONT'D)

I have to go. Wiseman's a stickler.

TOM

Perhaps we can...

JOYCE

...I don't think that's wise, do you?

She glances pointedly around the restaurant.

JOYCE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry Mr. Bradley. I really can't help you.

TOM

Whatever you thought of her, she didn't deserve to be branded a witch.

The merest flicker; then Joyce collects her coat from the back of the seat and leaves.

55 INT - PHONE BOX - DAY

55

Tom picks up the phone and dials a number.

TOM

It's Mr. Bradley. I know what you said...it's just I sensed...Look, there's a pub just down the road. The Coach and Horses. I'll be there tonight from six onwards. I'll wait for half an hour. If you don't come, I'll understand. But I think you and I both know it wasn't just a coincidence you came to the lift this morning...

The phone the other end is put down abruptly. But Tom smiles. He knows he's onto something.

56 EXT - MIDDLE CLASS STREET WIMBLEDON - DAY

56

Tom walks down the street checking the numbers of the houses. He stops at the gate of a house, then starts up the path.

57 INT - GEOFFREY WILSON'S HOUSE - DAY

57

An elegant room in a typical middle class suburban house.

Tom is with GEOFFREY WILSON (early 30s, earnest, clean cut.) Tom is making notes.

TOM

So Helen stayed here through the trial?

GEOFFREY

That's how I got involved. My father was president of the SNU...Spiritualists National Union.

TOM

And you acted as messenger for the defence?

Geoffrey takes a cigarette out of a silver case from the mahogany table in front of him. He offers Tom one. Tom declines. Geoffrey lights up.

GEOFFREY

I was back from University and they needed someone they could trust.

TOM

When I rang I asked if you could remember anything odd that had happened. Anything Helen might have mentioned?

GEOFFREY

I thought about that. No, nothing.

TOM

Or at the trial? There was never any suspicion other forces were at work?

GEOFFREY

Other forces? What do you mean?

TOM

Like the MOD or Admiralty?

GEOFFREY

I was there every day. I would have heard.

Geoffrey takes a long slow drag on his cigarette.

GEOFFREY (CONT'D)

The mood was upbeat. Everyone thought she'd win.

TOM

Despite Maude being such a strong adversary?

GEOFFREY

Oh, we were all wary of Maude. He had a reputation of being able to turn a case round. But this whole business of witchcraft...I mean honestly.

Tom nods in sympathetic agreement.

GEOFFREY (CONT'D)

When Loseby challenged its use you could see he had the sympathy of the court...

FLASHBACK:

58 INT - COURT NO 4 OLD BAILEY - DAY

58

Loseby is standing in front of the jury.

(CONTINUED)

LOSEBY

How can we in this modern age believe that a woman could be a witch? It is, quite frankly, ridiculous. I put it to you that the Witchcraft Act of 1735 should never have been used. It does not, and simply cannot, be made to apply to the facts of this particular case. This is not - and never could be - a case of witchcraft.

There are nods from the jury at this. Helen Duncan in the docks looks relaxed and at ease.

Maude glances at the jury's reaction and hastily scribbles something down on his notes. He whispers something to his clerk. The clerk nods and gives a conspiring smile.

Loseby sees this and for the briefest of moments has a flicker of doubt. But then he regains his composure and looks back at Helen and smiles confidently.

PRESENT DAY:

59 INT - WILSON'S HOUSE - DAY

59

Tom stops writing and looks up at Geoffrey.

TOM

So you felt the jury were behind you?

GEOFFREY

Loseby was confident. And even when Maude produced the muslin cloth out of nowhere...

TOM

...I thought the police never found such a thing?

GEOFFREY

They didn't.

Geoffrey regards Tom solemnly.

GEOFFREY (CONT'D)

But Maude knew he needed the jury to see something similar to make his case. To imprint its existence on their mind.

TOM

So they'd make the connection?

(CONTINUED)

GEOFFREY
 ...Precisely. God! He was a showman
 that man. There he was cross examining
 Gill, the defence
 witness...questioning him about
 ectoplasm...

FLASHBACK:

60 INT - COURTROOM - DAY

60

Maude is standing in the middle of the court cross
 examining a middle aged man, HAROLD GILL.

GEOFFREY V.O.
 When suddenly out of the blue in the
 middle of the courtroom he brings out
 a piece of cloth like a conjurer
 pulling a rabbit out of a hat.

Maude spins round, pulling a strip of screwed muslin cloth
 out of his pocket. He keeps it small in the palm of his
 hand, balled up.

MAUDE
 Was it about this size?

Gill looks a bit startled.

GILL
 Bigger than that.

Maude faces the jury and with a theatrical flourish flaps
 open the cloth to its full size.

MAUDE
 Like this?

GILL
 Not as big as that.

Maude proceeds to screw up the cloth again so that it
 disappears into the palm of his hand. The jury watch
 intrigued. Maude unfurls the cloth and repeats the
 performance casually as if it has no importance. But the
 fact a piece of cloth can be made to appear and disappear
 is not lost on them.

Maude's made his point. He gives a satisfied smile.

PRESENT DAY:

61 INT - GEOFFREY'S HOUSE - DAY

61

GEOFFREY
 I thought Loseby would pull him up for
 such a trick - but no.
 (MORE)

(CONTINUED)

61 CONTINUED:

GEOFFREY (CONT'D)

I don't think he realised Maude had pulled a fast one.

TOM

And the judge said nothing?

Geoffrey shakes his head.

GEOFFREY

Maude was clever. Knew just how to manipulate people. He played on their doubts. Just enough to cause uneasiness.

TOM

Not everyone holds with the concept of accessing life after death.

GEOFFREY

Of course not. But for every witness who claimed Helen was a fraud, Loseby had five times as many who'd swear she was genuine.

TOM

And it still wasn't enough?

Geoffrey laughs.

GEOFFREY

Too many! Do you know how many witnesses he was intending to call?

Tom shakes his head.

GEOFFREY (CONT'D)

Fifty. That was Loseby's mistake. He saw the trial as a chance to prove the existence of the after life.

TOM

A vindication of spiritualism?

GEOFFREY

It worked against Helen. Loseby should have concentrated on the holes in Worth's evidence. Disprove him as a witness. Mind you, Worth was tricky.

TOM

Did you know he was the nephew of Superintendent Worth of Scotland Yard?

Geoffrey's head jerks up at this.

(CONTINUED)

61 CONTINUED: (2)

GEOFFREY

Explains a lot. (beat) But you have to remember Loseby was still confident he had the upper hand. So was Helen...

FLASHBACK:

62 INT - WILSON'S HOUSE -WIMBLEDON - NIGHT

62

Geoffrey comes in to the sitting room. A fire is blazing in the hearth.

GEOFFREY V.O.

He believed he still had his ace to play, you see.

Helen is sitting talking with Loseby. As Geoffrey comes in, Helen smiles at him.

HELEN

Mr. Loseby hae agreed. I ken he wud.

Loseby looks anxiously at Helen.

LOSEBY

Are you sure now?

HELEN

Once the jury see it for themselves, they maun be convinced.

Geoffrey picks up on this.

GEOFFREY

You've decided to go ahead?

LOSEBY

Well, after we tested Helen here last night. The results were so perfect. I feel sure...

GEOFFREY

It'll certainly give the jury something to think about.

HELEN

I ken we are right.

GEOFFREY

A seance at the Old Bailey? Heavens, that'll keep the papers busy.

Loseby looks slightly irritated.

(CONTINUED)

LOSEBY

It's not for the papers. It's to show the jury what happens, so they might understand and know a little more.
(beat) That they might **believe**.

HELEN

They maun realise I wouldnae offer a sitting if I wasnae genuine.

Loseby's face fills with enthusiasm.

LOSEBY

To see it with their own eyes.

Helen looks very relieved.

GEOFFREY

Will the Judge agree?

Helen looks shocked.

HELEN

Why shouldnae he? It's the gey substance of ma defence.

63 INT - COURT NO 4 - OLD BAILEY - DAY

63

Helen Duncan is leaning forward in the dock. She seems relaxed, confident. But then:

RECORDER

No, Mr. Loseby, I shall not allow it.
That is the end of that.

Loseby is totally shocked and dumbfounded. For a moment he can't speak.

Helen also looks anxious and bewildered. This was their trump card.

Loseby recovers his composure and tries again.

LOSEBY

But my Lord, perhaps I ought to draw your attention...

The Recorder doesn't even let him finish.

RECORDER

You have made your offer. And that is all there is.

LOSEBY

My Lord...

RECORDER

Mr. Loseby. We had better get on with the evidence.

Loseby tries hard to hide his dismay at this decision.

LOSEBY

If your Lordship pleases.

Helen Duncan looks as if she's about to burst out shouting a comment, but Henry, in the gallery, gives her a vigorous shakes of his head. She pauses.

Henry tries to give her an encouraging smile but it's clear the Judge's decision has knocked their plans into disarray.

Helen looks angry and dejected, and slumps backwards in her seat. She's a worried woman. All confidence gone.

PRESENT DAY:

64 INT - GEOFFREY'S HOUSE - DAY

64

Tom stops writing. He looks across at Geoffrey, confused.

TOM

Odd he wouldn't allow it?

GEOFFREY

He said it wouldn't be fair on Helen.

TOM

I don't follow.

GEOFFREY

Because if she failed, it would condemn her out of hand.

TOM

But if she'd succeeded...

GEOFFREY

Precisely.

He frowns. It's clear the memory worries him.

TOM

You see? Things about this trial just don't add up. (beat) Do you think pressure was brought to bear?

GEOFFREY

I don't think the police...

(CONTINUED)

TOM

I'm talking higher. Much higher. I'm certain there's a connection between the government and Helen and the trial. But I can't find the proof...

Geoffrey takes this in slowly. Considers the full weight of what Tom is suggesting.

GEOFFREY

At the time I thought he was just being churlish. But now...Maybe...

He gives a small shrug.

GEOFFREY (CONT'D)

Certainly it was the moment everything changed for Helen.

TOM

And Loseby realised he'd been fighting the wrong battle?

Geoffrey looks at Tom, not quite understanding.

TOM (CONT'D)

It must have been clear this was not about conjuring spirits and Witchcraft but about getting a conviction?

Geoffrey lights himself another cigarette. He gives a slow nod.

GEOFFREY

I think Loseby began to see that. He was a changed man overnight. (beat) You've spoken to him?

TOM

He's in Hong Kong.

GEOFFREY

He blames the police for her death.

TOM

It does seem strange they didn't know the dangers.

GEOFFREY

Some people are saying they did.

Tom looks at Geoffrey surprised.

TOM

You're not seriously suggesting...

Geoffrey shrugs.

(CONTINUED)

GEOFFREY

We're at war again. Individuals don't count in times of crisis.

TOM

Especially troublesome ones.

A beat. Then Geoffrey smiles.

GEOFFREY

She was a strange mix, Helen. Shy at times then rough and ready, swearing like a trouper when it suited her. But she knew how to connect with ordinary people. She had many loyal supporters.

Tom acknowledges this with a smile.

TOM

They've been ringing me, or sending me odd little bits they think might help me.

GEOFFREY

She had many friends.

Tom closes his notepad.

TOM

It's not her friends who concern me.
(Beat) It's her enemies.

Their eyes meet.

65 INT - NEWSROOM - DAY

65

Tom is at his desk, on the phone. He looks dishevelled. He's been putting in the hours and it shows.

TOM

I don't want to leave a message. When will Mr. Loseby be back?...Well can you tell him I'll ring him then. Thank you. No, I won't be late. Dot of nine.

Tom puts down the phone with a sigh. CASSIDY, on the next desk, looks across at him.

CASSIDY

Like squeezing blood from a stone? I have days like that.

TOM

Seems to be a conspiracy of silence. Nobody trusts anybody. I feel my hands are tied behind my back.

(CONTINUED)

CASSIDY

Stage One. Stage Two is when you feel the noose tightening around your neck.

TOM

Sounds ominous.

CASSIDY

Oh, it's Stage Three you've got to watch out for. (beat) The sound of the trap door opening.

Tom smiles. Cassidy's phone goes. He picks it up. Tom returns to his notes.

66 EXT - COACH AND HORSES PUB - NIGHT 66

The Coach and Horses sign swings in the dim light.

67 INT - PUB - NIGHT 67

Tom is sitting at a corner table, nursing a beer.

The door opens and someone comes in. He looks up expectantly but it isn't Joyce. He glances at his watch.

It shows 6.10. No Joyce in sight.

68 INT - MARY'S HOUSE - NIGHT 68

Mary is making herself a coffee. She gives her labrador one of the biscuits out of the tin. There is a knock at the door.

She goes to answer it. There are two policemen outside.

POLICEMAN

Miss Parsons?

Mary looks at them confused.

MARY

Yes. (beat) What's this about?

POLICEMAN

I believe you met a reporter, a Mr. Bradley, yesterday afternoon?

Mary nods. She looks from one policeman to the other a little warily. She's trying to work out how much they know.

POLICEMAN (CONT'D)

There are just one or two questions we'd like to ask you? Can we come in?

Mary hesitates just a moment. Then steps aside.

69 INT - PUB - NIGHT - LATER

69

Tom has finished his beer. He glances at his watch. 6.30. Joyce isn't coming.

He starts to gather up his coat. Just then the pub door opens and Joyce comes in. She looks a bit hesitant. She glances round the pub then sees him.

Tom stands up as she comes over.

70 INT - PUB - NIGHT - LATER

70

Joyce is half way through a gin and tonic. Tom has a half pint, hardly touched.

TOM

So it began with the Barham?

JOYCE

They knew she must have got her information from somewhere...They were in an awful tizz.

TOM

So they never believed she had psychic powers?

Joyce doesn't answer at once.

TOM (CONT'D)

I'd heard there were those in the ministry who were open to spiritualist views? Wilson for instance?

JOYCE

But they all believed security was of the utmost importance. Anything which could be considered a matter of special security was investigated.

TOM

Was it difficult for you?

Joyce looks confused.

TOM (CONT'D)

With your spiritualist views I mean?

Joyce looks shocked, then angry.

JOYCE

That's no business of yours.

TOM

I'm sorry. You're right.

(CONTINUED)

JOYCE

Did you target me because of that?

TOM

No, I wanted Wiseman. But then I found out...well, it made sense to see if you might help.

JOYCE

You're very sure of yourself.

TOM

I'm not. I assure you.

JOYCE

I won't answer anything I think I shouldn't.

TOM

I wouldn't expect less.

They sit in silence for a while. For a moment it seems Joyce might leave, then she seems to relax a bit more. Tom notices this.

TOM (CONT'D)

It must have been a shock when you found out Helen Duncan had been arrested?

JOYCE

I told you, she'd already come to the department's notice.

TOM

And was it just co-incidence that she was arrested just before D-Day and kept in jail until after the landings?

Joyce hesitates just a second.

JOYCE

You promised me no difficult questions.

Tom smiles. She's told him what he needed to know.

TOM

So they set out to trap her. And they used Worth.

JOYCE

She was deemed a menace. Careless talk costs lives, remember?

TOM

So your department instigated Helen's arrest?

JOYCE

Did we?

An enigmatic smile. Tom understands.

TOM

Shall we just say then that you were aware of what was going on in Portsmouth?

Joyce nods.

JOYCE

All hell broke loose. I remember Mr. Wiseman asking me to bring in Helen Duncan's file. He seemed in a bullish mood...

FLASHBACK:

71 INT - WISEMAN'S OFFICE - DAY

71

Joyce's boss FREDDIE WISEMAN is on the phone in the adjoining office.

WISEMAN V.O.

Been arrested? Splendid. No, tell Portsmouth to keep her there. I'll let you know what happens next.

Joyce comes through and hands him the file. He's looking pretty pleased with himself.

WISEMAN

This all we have on her?

JOYCE

There was one on a Victoria Duncan...

WISEMAN

Same woman. Bring that through too.

Joyce goes out and starts looking through the filing cabinet. She finds the file headed Victoria Duncan. She comes back into Wiseman's office.

Wiseman's phone rings again.

WISEMAN (CONT'D)

Yes...They're taking her to Holloway. I've heard. No, try and keep the BBC off our backs.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

71 CONTINUED:

WISEMAN (CONT'D)

Yes...well, at least she's been charged....

He puts down the phone and takes the second file from Joyce.

WISEMAN (CONT'D)

Maybe now we can have a bit of peace.

72 INT - WISEMAN'S OFFICE - DAY

72

Newspaper Headline: UPROAR AS MEDIUM ARRESTED

Pull back to reveal a frustrated Wiseman sitting at his desk surrounded by a whole pile of newspaper reports on Helen. He's in a foul mood.

He looks up as Joyce comes in with his morning coffee. He indicates the papers with an irritated wave of his hand.

WISEMAN

Can you believe all the fuss?

JOYCE

She has quite a following though, Mr. Wiseman.

WISEMAN

And now the wretched SNU is talking about tapping into its Freedom Fund. Persecuted minority, I ask you!

Joyce puts down his cup of coffee, with a biscuit balanced on the side.

JOYCE

I'm afraid we were out of Garibaldi's.

WISEMAN

What?

JOYCE

Only the Rich Tea left.

She nods at the biscuit on Wiseman's saucer.

WISEMAN

They just can't see it, can they? If they up the stakes and bring in learned counsel, we shall be obliged to do the same.

He picks up his coffee and takes a sip.

JOYCE

Then poor Mrs. Duncan.

(CONTINUED)

WISEMAN

Poor? With SNU interfering, she's going to waste us a lot of time.

JOYCE

So the forces are gathering against her.

WISEMAN

They should have thought about that before they tried to make a damn martyr out of her.

The phone rings again. Wiseman gives her a purposeful look and picks up. Joyce leaves.

73 INT WISEMAN'S OFFICE - LATER

73

Wiseman looks up from his desk as Joyce returns from lunch. He calls her in.

WISEMAN

Take a memo Miss Mason.

Joyce takes a seat opposite him. She waits, pencil posed.

WISEMAN (CONT'D)

Heading: Helen Duncan.

Joyce looks up, but Wiseman avoids her gaze. He stands up and begins to pace the room as he continues with his dictation.

WISEMAN (CONT'D)

The D.P.P. has concluded that owing to the limited evidence against Helen Duncan, that they should pursue the victim not under the Vagrancy Charge, but under a charge of Conspiracy...

Joyce stops writing and looks up at him, shocked.

JOYCE

Conspiracy, sir?

WISEMAN

Conspiracy.

He takes a breath as if to continue with the dictation, but Joyce butts in.

JOYCE

But they must know she isn't a spy?

(CONTINUED)

WISEMAN

You're missing the point, Miss Mason. They want a jury trial and in the event of conviction a custodial sentence.

JOYCE

But why not the usual rap across the knuckles?

WISEMAN

This case is different. It always has been.

JOYCE

But what if the jury don't find her guilty? What if you can't get this conspiracy charge to stick?

Wiseman smiles at her.

WISEMAN

Then we will find one that does.

PRESENT DAY:

74 INT - PUB - NIGHT

74

Tom puts down his beer.

TOM

And that was when they came up with the idea of the Witchcraft Act?

JOYCE

They say she fainted when she heard the charge against her. In the end I don't even think it was the D.P.P. who thought up the charge.

TOM

Who did?

JOYCE

I'm not sure precisely.

She looks away for a moment. Tom nods at Joyce's empty glass.

TOM

A top up?

JOYCE

I'm fine, thanks.

A beat. Tom feels he might be losing her. He re-engages.

(CONTINUED)

TOM
You said earlier they had limited
evidence against her?

Joyce nods.

TOM (CONT'D)
But isn't a case usually dropped if
the prosecution doesn't have enough?

JOYCE
Not here.

TOM
Why were they so determined to lock
her up? What were they afraid of?

Joyce considers this.

JOYCE
I don't think she fully realised the
force against her.

TOM
I don't think anyone did. Not even
Loseby.

JOYCE
Poor Loseby...

TOM
They tell me he was a broken man.
Blamed himself for not getting Helen
off.

Joyce looks surprised.

JOYCE
But he was never going to, was he?

TOM
It was trial by jury. I don't
understand.

Joyce clams up. She looks at her watch.

JOYCE
It's late.

TOM
No-one could have predicted the
outcome.

JOYCE
True. But Loseby made one crucial
mistake.

(CONTINUED)

TOM

He underestimated the enemy?

JOYCE

He didn't even know who they really were.

75 EXT - PUB - NIGHT

75

A man is standing in the shadow of the doorway. He is smoking a cigarette.

Joyce comes out of the pub and sets off down the street.

The man stamps out his cigarette and glances across at the pub. A few minutes later Tom appears. He turns up the collar of his coat and starts up the street in the opposite direction to Joyce.

The man waits a moment, then follows him.

76 INT - TOM'S HOUSE - NIGHT

76

Tom is with his family in the homely and comfortable sitting room. He is performing tricks. He is trying to make an egg disappear from a black bag. The trick isn't quite working.

His two sons look on, a little disappointed. Tom keeps on trying.

TOM

I used to be able to do it. Out of practice.

Stevie is losing interest. He keeps glancing out of the window.

TOM (CONT'D)

Ah. Got it now...Stevie look.

Stevie's attention goes back to Tom. Tom holds up the egg and the bag. He turns the bag inside out and to show that it is empty.

TOM (CONT'D)

Now I take the egg and put it inside the bag.

Tom picks up the egg and places it gently inside the bag. He withdraws his hand and shows the boys that it's empty.

TOM (CONT'D)

Now I say the magic word.
Abbracadabra! And the egg has disappeared!

(CONTINUED)

Tom turns the bag inside out to show the boys it is empty. He then turns it right side out again. The boys watch him wide-eyed.

JACK
Where'd it go, Daddy?

TOM
Disappeared. Magic.

Stevie glances out of the window again. Something out there interests him, but neither Stella nor Tom notice this. Stella stands up and goes over to the window and draws the curtains.

TOM (CONT'D)
Stevie? Jack?

He has their attention again.

TOM (CONT'D)
Do you want the egg to come back?

The boys nod.

TOM (CONT'D)
Then say with me EGGracadabra!

| | |
|---------------|---------------|
| STEVIE | JACK |
| Eggracadabra! | Eggracadabra! |

Tom shows the boys his hand is empty and then reaches inside the bag and pulls out the egg for everyone to see.

Jack giggles and claps his hands with delight.

After a moment Stevie stands up and goes over to the window. He pulls back the curtain a smidgen.

STELLA
Stevie what are you doing?

Stevie lets the curtain fall back.

STEVIE
I just wanted to see if the man was still there?

STELLA
What man?

STEVIE
The one outside the house. He's been there for ages and ages.

(CONTINUED)

Stella and Tom shoot a look at each other. Both are on their feet and at the window in a second.

Tom jerks back the curtain. He glances up and down the street. Empty. The man is no longer there.

Stevie peers out too.

STEVIE (CONT'D)

It worked.

TOM

What did?

STEVIE

I said abracadabra and he's disappeared.

Tom and Stella glance intently at each other. Tom pulls back the curtain looks up and down the street again. No-one.

He lets the curtain fall back deep in thought.

77 INT - KITCHEN - NIGHT

77

Stella comes in. Tom looks up.

TOM

Are they asleep?

STELLA

Stevie took a while.

TOM

Was he worried?

STELLA

Not really. He just asked if he had something to do with the war.

TOM

A spy you mean?

STELLA

You know boys. Anyway I told him that we were not about to be invaded. In fact we were the country doing the invading...

She sees his look.

STELLA (CONT'D)

It's all right. I didn't give him a lecture on imperialism...but he should know the truth...

(CONTINUED)

TOM
Not tonight.

Stella gives a small smile.

STELLA
No. Not tonight.

She nods in the direction of his empty mug on the table.

STELLA (CONT'D)
Another cup before you go?

He glances at her anxiously.

TOM
Will you be all right?

STELLA
Of course.

TOM
I could stay.

STELLA
No, we agreed. You need to speak to
Loseby. IF you don't ring now you
might miss him...

Stella takes the cup off the table and puts in the sink.

STELLA (CONT'D)
That man. You think it meant anything?

TOM
Maybe just a coincidence. We don't
even know he was watching our house.

STELLA
Probably find Mr. Jones down the road
has put a private eye on his wife, you
mean?

TOM
Something like that.

Stella forces a smile. She isn't convinced.

STELLA
I hate this. Looking over our
shoulders. Feeling we're being
watched.

TOM
I thought things were improving at the
studio?

Stella gives a small shrug.

STELLA

Here's a thing though. Rolley asked me yesterday what I thought about Hungary.

Tom looks at her surprised.

TOM

Rolley? I thought he was only interested in long legged starlets.

STELLA

He's never asked me anything like that before. You could see everyone watching. Waiting.

TOM

Maybe it means nothing. Rolley just trying to prove he has something more than sawdust between his ears.

STELLA

But it unnerved me. I get the feeling one small thing will rock the boat.

TOM

I thought you said they were only interested in those with access to power. You're hardly that.

But she doesn't look convinced.

STELLA

It's always the little people who pay.

Tom connects with this.

TOM

Easier to destroy those of little consequence? The nobodys of this world?

His voice is harsh. Stella looks at him. She gives a small teasing smile.

STELLA

That couldn't be the small voice of outrage I hear, could it? Passion?

TOM

Nothing like having your back to the wall.

STELLA

We pay a price for everything we do.

(CONTINUED)

TOM
Or allow others to do.

A beat. Stella glances at the kitchen clock.

STELLA
You don't want to miss that call.

Tom stands up. He goes over and kisses her.

TOM
Don't let anyone in.

Stella smiles.

STELLA
Only my lover...

TOM
Very funny.

STELLA
Reds under the bed. Got to give them
something to talk about.

78 INT - NEWSROOM - NIGHT

78

Deserted, except for a few older Front Page hacks, playing cards in a corner of the room.

Tom is at his desk. He starts to insert some papers into his typewriter, hesitates, lights a cigarette. Behind him, Ellery is briefly seen chatting to the hacks as he passes by to his office on his last round before putting the paper to bed.

The phone rings.

Tom stops typing and stretches out to pick up the receiver.

OPERATOR O.S.
Your call to Hong Kong, Mr. Bradley.

TOM
Thank you Mavis.

He waits a moment.

TOM (CONT'D)
Mr. Loseby? Can you hear me? Tom
Bradley. Thank you for agreeing to
talk.

There is a pause. Tom waits. There is obviously a time delay.

(CONTINUED)

TOM (CONT'D)

I realise you don't wish to go over old ground but there are a few things I need to clarify. Yes, I had heard you consider her death murder. I appreciate how strongly...

Another Pause. Tom is concentrating hard. It's obvious there is interference on the line.

TOM (CONT'D)

I want to ask about the trial. About outside interference? Could the MOD have been involved? Admiralty maybe?

A phone starts to ring on the next door empty desk. Tom turns away from the offending shrill sound and clamps one hand over his ear and receiver.

TOM (CONT'D)

So if it wasn't the D.P.P. who decided to use the Witchcraft Act who...I'm sorry...It's a very bad line...

There is a long pause, while Loseby obviously repeats his words.

TOM (CONT'D)

Good God! Are you sure?...But why...?

Tom face changes. He looks stunned.

TOM (CONT'D)

I see...No, very helpful. Yes, I can see it would make you enemies. I won't quote you.

Tom puts down the phone.

He looks at it for a moment, then slowly allows himself a small triumphant smile.

79 INT - ELLERY'S OFFICE - NIGHT

79

Tom taps on the door. Ellery looks up and beckons him to come in.

TOM

I've just spoken to Loseby, Helen Duncan's defence at the trial.

ELLERY

And?

(CONTINUED)

TOM

It was Maude the prosecution lawyer who insisted on using the Witchcraft Act not the D.P.P.

ELLERY

But that doesn't make sense.

TOM

Maude was MI5, sir. In charge of working undercover to investigate security leaks. It's the link I've been searching for.

ELLERY

You're saying they were the force behind it all?

TOM

It ties everything together. That's why the Government got involved in this murky little business. After the Barham affair MI5 were out to silence Helen in any way they could. It was a scam from start to finish.

Tom has Ellery's full attention now.

ELLERY

Source reliable?

TOM

I'll speak to my contact first thing. Verify it.

Ellery looks pleased.

ELLERY

I want to run it tomorrow, Thursday latest. Suez is about to pop.

TOM

Almost there, sir.

ELLERY

Twenty four hours. That's all I can give you.

Tom keeps his face still and expressionless until he's outside Ellery's office. Then he breaks into a broad smile. It's a moment of genuine exhilaration.

He knows, perhaps for the first time, that he's really on to something.

81 INT - NEWSROOM - DAY

81

It's morning. The newsroom is quieter now. Tom comes into the newsroom. He has a cup of coffee in his hand. He takes off his coat and sits down at his desk and glances at his watch. Then he picks up the phone and dials a number.

TOM

Joyce Mason, please.

He re-arranges some files on his desk while he waits to be put through.

TOM (CONT'D)

What? Of course she does. Freddie Wiseman. She couldn't have left. I spoke to her yesterday. I tell you she's...

He stops. A slow dreadful realisation starts to cross Tom's face.

TOM (CONT'D)

No, it's all right. IF I could just have Mr. Wiseman's office then. Yes, I'll hold...

82 INT - JOYCE'S OFFICE - DAY

82

A new secretary CAROLE is sitting at Joyce's desk. Smart, efficient, brisk.

CAROLE

No, I'm afraid Miss Mason no longer works here. Personal problems, I believe. No, I'm sorry, Mr. Wiseman is in a meeting. But if I can help at all. NO, I'm sorry. I have no idea where Miss Mason might have gone...

83 INT - NEWSROOM - DAY

83

Tom puts down his phone.

TOM

Shit!

He glances up and sees Cassidy looking at him.

TOM (CONT'D)

I think I just heard the sound of the trap door opening.

84 INT - JOYCE'S OFFICE - DAY

84

Carole puts down the phone. The shot opens to reveal Wiseman at his desk through in his office. Carole stands up and taps on Wiseman's door. He looks up.

CAROLE

I thought you'd like to know, sir. Mr. Bradley has just rung.

Wiseman glances up but shows no reaction.

WISEMAN

Thank you, Miss Phillips.

She leaves, closing the door behind her. Wiseman picks up his phone.

85 INT- NEWSROOM - DAY

85

A finger runs down a list of names: MASON, J. A. MASON, J. A., MASON J. A. B.

Tom is searching through the electoral role books. He has several spread out on his desk, pages open, markers in place.

Cassidy on the next door desk looks over at him, a little doubtful at his task.

CASSIDY

You so sure you'll find her there?

TOM

Law abiding citizen. She'd vote.

CASSIDY

London's a massive place.

TOM

Bayswater. I know she lives there, because after our meeting I said I'd call her a cab and she told me not to bother, she only had to get to Bayswater.

CASSIDY

Could have been visiting a friend.

TOM

Not the sort.

CASSIDY

Her mother?

(CONTINUED)

TOM

You trying to throw a spanner in the works?

CASSIDY

Just trying to be helpful.

TOM

If you really wanted to be of assistance you'd help me search...

Cassidy smiles.

CASSIDY

Much more fun watching you struggle.

But after a beat he gets up from his desk and comes over to Tom's. He looks down at the books.

TOM

How'd you get these any way? Thought they were guarded closer than the crown jewels.

Tom smiles and taps his nose.

CASSIDY

O.K. I can give you half an hour...What was her name again?

86 EXT - BACKSTREET - BAYSWATER - DAY

86

Tom walks along the street slowly, checking the number of the houses. He stops at one and walks up the steps to the door. There is an array of bells on the wall beside the door. It is obviously a house converted into flats.

Tom runs his finger down the list of names and then stops: Mason. J. He presses the bell. Nothing. He's about to press it again when the door swings open and another tenant of the house steps out.

Tom puts his hand out to stop the door from closing. He steps into the hallway.

87 INT - STAIRWELL - FLATS - DAY

87

Tom is slowly walking up the staircase, checking off the number on the door as he goes past.

Another flight. Same thing.

Another flight. Tom is slightly out of breath. He stops. Glances along the passage. He sees No. 7 and pushes the automatic light switch as he makes his way to the flat entrance.

(CONTINUED)

He presses the doorbell. There is the muffled sound of movement from inside. He presses it again.

The door opens the merest smidgen. Joyce peers out.

JOYCE

Hello?

Her voice is shakey, weak, as if she's been crying.

TOM

Joyce? It's Tom Bradley.

A shocked silence. She tries to close the door but Tom has wedged his foot into the gap. He grabs the outside edge of the door to prevent it closing.

TOM (CONT'D)

Joyce, I need to speak to you.

She rams the door hard against Tom's foot. HE winces, but doesn't withdraw. She glares at him angrily.

JOYCE

Haven't you done enough?

TOM

I'm sorry. I never imagined for a moment you would lose your job.

JOYCE

I knew I shouldn't have spoken to you. They said I could have been prosecuted.

Her voice catches.

TOM

Joyce, I'm sorry.

JOYCE

Are you?

TOM

I know Maude was MI5.

JOYCE

Then you know more than I do. (beat)
Mr. Bradley, please leave.

Tom pleads silently with her for a moment.

TOM

Joyce, you and I know somewhere in those files is the information we need.

(CONTINUED)

Joyce stiffens slightly.

 JOYCE
What files?

 TOM
The ones on Helen Duncan.

 JOYCE
You must have misunderstood me. There never were any files on Mrs. Duncan.

 TOM
Joyce!

 JOYCE
I'm sorry. I can't help you. I really can't.

She starts to close the door. Tom grabs her arm through the space to stop her. He looks hard at her.

 TOM
You and I both know...

 JOYCE
...what do you know, Mr. Bradley?
Really?

Tom hesitates.

 TOM
The key was the D.P.P. and Maude. You gave me that lead. You wanted to get at the truth as much as I did.

Everything is falling into place. He realises something else too.

 TOM (CONT'D)
And those letters...you sent those too didn't you?

 JOYCE
I don't know what you're talking about.

But Tom isn't fooled. He knows the truth. Joyce looks flustered.

 JOYCE (CONT'D)
Please just leave me in peace. I don't want to have to alert security...

She pulls her arm away from him with such force that it unbalances Tom slightly. He takes his foot out of the door to steady himself. Joyce gives him a hard unwavering look.

(CONTINUED)

JOYCE (CONT'D)
Don't contact me again.

TOM
Joyce, I can help you if you'll...

JOYCE
Just stay away from me!

She pushes him back away from the door and slams it shut hard in his face.

88 INT - HALLWAY - DAY

88

TOM
Joyce...

Tom hesitates a moment. He knows this is one battle he won't win. Tom waits a moment, and then starts off down the stairs.

89 INT - JOYCE'S FLAT - DAY

89

Joyce in darkness. She is sitting on the edge of her bed, with the curtain drawn shut. She starts to sob quietly.

90 EXT - BAYSWATER STREET - DAY

90

Tom comes down the steps of Joyce's flat. He starts up the street. Two men appear from the shadows and take up their position, one on either side of him.

Behind a car pulls out of its parking place and draws alongside them. Before Tom can take in what's happening he is bundled into the car by the two men.

91 INT - ELLERY'S OFFICE - DAY

91

Ellery's in his office sorting through the news page with one of his senior reporters. The phone rings. Ellery picks up.

ELLERY
Sir Oliver?...Now?

A pause.

ELLERY (CONT'D)
Of course...I'll be up in five minutes.

92 INT - LIFT - NEWSPAPER OFFICE - DAY

92

The lift is going up. Ellery is deep in thought.

93 INT - OFFICE - NIGHT

93

The lift doors open. This is the elegant floor of the building - the proprietor's and directors' suite of offices. Carpets and polished wood and brass.

Ellery steps out.

94 INT - INVESTIGATION ROOM - DAY

94

A cold room. Desk. Three chairs. Tom sits opposite the two men who picked him up earlier.

CLYDE is thick necked and bullish. WILSON is refined looking, with a school master-ish air.

WILSON has a pencil and pad in front on him on the desk and is busy making notes.

Tom's face says he's calm and holding it together, but his hands say otherwise. We come in mid - interview. Tom's voice is weary:

TOM

I told you, I'm not a communist.

CLYDE

Your wife is.

TOM

Was.

CLYDE

Once a communist always a communist.

TOM

She left the party years ago.

CLYDE

Is that what she told you? Try months.

Tom snaps to alert at this. He shakes his head determinedly.

Clyde turns to Wilson and gives him an insinuating pitiable smile.

CLYDE (CONT'D)

My, my, don't you just love it when a wife keep secrets from her husband?

Tom bristles. He leans forward across the table as if he's about to thump Clyde hard. Wilson stretches out his arm to block him.

(CONTINUED)

WILSON

Don't make it worse. You're in trouble enough as it is.

Tom hesitates the merest second. He gives Clyde an angry glare as he slumps back into his chair.

WILSON (CONT'D)

Now, Mr. Bradley, we need to know what you and Joyce Mason spoke about. Exactly.

TOM

I needed some facts verified.

CLYDE

Your wife involved in this?

Tom's head jerks up. He knows Clyde is trying to provoke him but he isn't sure where this is leading. He struggles to keep calm.

CLYDE (CONT'D)

An obvious move to embarrass the Government? Perhaps if we were to bring her in...

Tom tries to hide his emotion. He knows what would happen if Stella came face to face with this guy. She wouldn't hold back. It would throw them both into deep water.

He tries not to show his apprehension. To keep steady. To give nothing away.

TOM

There is no move to undermine the government. No communist plot. This is just a simple case of...

CLYDE

...Nothing is ever simple. As a reporter you know that, surely?

Tom leans back in his chair and shakes his head disbelievingly. Stella's conspiracy theory is staring him in the face.

TOM

She warned me. I wouldn't believe...

WILSON

Joyce Mason?

But Tom tightens his lips. No way he's bringing Stella back into this. But it's too late.

(CONTINUED)

CLYDE

Ah, your wife. Of course. A regular firebrand so our files show. (beat) The studio hadn't quite appreciated what they'd got in their midst.

Tom stills. He realises they've been to the studio. What they've done. Anger bursts through him.

TOM

You bastard!

CLYDE

What? Liked her job did she?

Tom pushes his chair back and dives across the table between them, catching Clyde by his throat. Clyde struggles, startled, trying to get hold of Tom's hands and to break their grip.

Wilson lunges across punches Tom in the kidneys. Tom collapses forward in pain. Wilson grabs hold of him and shoves him roughly back into his chair. He leans across to him, pushing his face close to Tom's.

WILSON

This really isn't helping matters, Mr. Bradley.

TOM

Why are you doing this?

WILSON

I suggest you calm down.

A slow realisation crosses his face.

TOM

There are others, aren't there? More damaging. This isn't the only cover-up.

Wilson looks away. Tom realises with a jolt he's discovered the truth here.

TOM (CONT'D)

My God! Who else have you ruined?

Wilson regains his composure.

WILSON

The government has the right to use whatever methods it deems necessary to protect its people.

CLYDE

We are at war. You forgotten that?

(CONTINUED)

Clyde and Tom eyeball each other. Wilson sees Clyde bristle, still roaring for a fight.

WILSON

Leave it Clyde.

Clyde looks as if he's about to protest, then retreats, leaning back in his chair. He glares at Tom.

Wilson turns his attention back to Tom.

WILSON (CONT'D)

Now, Mr. Bradley, the sooner we get this over with, the sooner you'll be free to go. Perhaps you can take us from the beginning again...

Tom looks from one to the other. He's frustrated as hell, but he knows all he can do is oblige. He's cornered and he knows it.

He sags back in his chair. No more fight left in him.

95 INT - SIR OLIVER'S OFFICE - DAY

95

The office is smart and plush with panoramic views.

Ellery is standing looking out of the window across the rooftops of London.

Sir Oliver looks at him across the expanse of polished mahogany.

SIR OLIVER

Your expose? Has your man got proof?

ELLERY

His sources seem reliable.

SIR OLIVER

But proof as in documents?

Ellery shakes his head.

SIR OLIVER (CONT'D)

Then this isn't a battle worth fighting. Opinion is not with us. Look at the Observer. Astor came out against the government and readership plummeted.

ELLERY

I don't like waving white flags.

SIR OLIVER

We are a small newspaper and these are sensitive times.

(CONTINUED)

Ellery gives Sir Oliver a withering look.

ELLERY

When are they not sensitive times, Sir Oliver?

Sir Oliver looks at Ellery and then quickly away. He knows what Ellery is saying, but he isn't going to budge.

96 EXT - STREET - DAY

96

Tom is unceremoniously delivered back in the street. He gets out of the car and brushes himself down distastefully, as if trying to brush off the contamination of his interview.

The car drives off. Tom stands for a moment staring angrily after it then starts to walk along the street.

He passes a news stand with the headlines blazing: Suez crisis: British Soldier Abducted. And another: Doctor visits Eden. PM has setback.

97 INT - HOUSE - DAY

97

Stella is sitting at the kitchen table. She is hunched forward, head in hands.

There is the SLAM of the front door.

Stella straightens quickly, brushing away the tears from her face. Tom comes to the doorway.

TOM

The studio told me you were here.

Stella blows her nose and nods. She looks as if she's about to break down any minute.

Tom goes over and puts his arms around her. Stella buries her head in his shoulder.

STELLA

I thought I could make a difference.
But all I've done is ruin everything.

TOM

You tried. That's more than most.

STELLA

I was stupid...stupid.

He holds her close.

TOM

I fell for you because you were not afraid to fight your corner, to stand up for what you believed in. Don't lose that. Ever. Promise me.

STELLA

How can you say that now, of all times?

Stella studies him closely.

STELLA (CONT'D)

Tom, what is it?

Tom shakes his head. He lets his hands drop to his side.

TOM

This isn't your fault, Stella...

STELLA

...You warned me...

He takes her hand gently in his.

TOM

You were right.

Stella looks at Tom. She can feel the weight of his confession already.

98 INT - NEWSROOM - DAY

98

Tom sits down at his desk and puts a sheet of paper into his typewriter. He starts to type very fast.

99 INT - NEWSROOM - DAY

99

Tom is still working. Ellery crosses the floor and comes up to his desk.

ELLERY

Bradley?

Tom stops typing. He can see by Ellery's face something is not quite right.

100 INT - ELLERY'S OFFICE - DAY

100

Ellery is sitting at his cluttered desk. Tom is sitting in the chair opposite him. His face clearly shows his frustration at what's just been said.

They stare at each other a beat. Ellery lifts his shoulders.

(CONTINUED)

ELLERY

You're a good reporter Bradley. Thought at first you were just junior reporter material. You've proved me wrong. Anyone can make a big story stand. The trick is to pick up the small story and breath life into it. You've proved you can do that.

Any other time Tom would have been flattered. But at this moment he knows this is a double-edged sword.

ELLERY (CONT'D)

I wouldn't want to lose you.

Tom regards Ellery slowly taking in what this means. He knows he's got to tread carefully.

TOM

You saying my job is at risk?

ELLERY

All I'm suggesting is that you show judgment. Helen Duncan isn't newsworthy at this stage.

TOM

But this piece isn't just about her any more. It's about how powerless the individual is against the state. About the government's failure to be open and transparent. It's relevant to here and now. You know that.

ELLERY

I understand your frustration, believe me. But this isn't a fight you can win.

Ellery looks pointedly at Tom. The air is stiff with tension.

At that moment Ellery's phone starts to ring.

Ellery glances quickly at the phone, then back to Tom. The moment has passed.

ELLERY (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, Bradley. But I have to decide what's in the best interest of this paper. Now, if you would excuse me...

It's the brush-off. He knows it, so does Tom.

- 101 INT - NEWSROOM - DAY 101
Tom strides angrily out through the newsroom. Cassidy looks up startled as he storms out.
- 102 INT - NEWSPAPER RECEPTION - DAY 102
Tom comes down the stairs into reception. He's about to head out of the door when a man emerges from the shadows.
Tom turns and sees Henry Duncan standing there. This is not what he needs right now. He's about to move on. He takes a few steps. Then stops.
He knows he owes this man something, if only a few minutes of his time.
- 103 INT - CAFE - DAY 103
Henry is sitting opposite Tom nursing a mug of tea.
- 104 HENRY 104
You ken the strange thing?
- FLASHBACK:**
- 104 INT - BONNINGTON HOTEL RESTAURANT- NIGHT 104
A comfortable but not plush hotel restaurant.
HENRY V.O.
She kent what the verdict wad be. That last night, we all went oot to dinner. It shoud hae been a celebration, heeld in Helen's honour.
A group of people sit round a dining table. They are chatting easily together, though there's a hint of tension in the air.
Helen in a half trance has a pad on her lap. The pen is posed above it, still. Then it starts to move quickly across the page. The others stop talking to watch. The pen stops.
Helen looks down at the pad. Her face creases with emotion.
Loseby takes the pad from her. He reads what's written on the pad. YOU WILL NOT GO FREE.
LOSEBY
Maybe there's been a mistake?
Helen shakes her head. She looks down at her hands for a moment. Then she looks across at Henry stoically.

(CONTINUED)

HELEN
I was never gaun to be allowed...

HENRY
...Nothing is decided yet lass.

HELEN
I kent it the moment the Judge
wouldnae allow the seance.

LOSEBY
The trouble is, they fear you. You
tell people things the Government
doesn't want them to know.

HELEN
The mair the Government closes up, the
mair they hae to turn to me. They need
to ken their boys are safe. There's
no-one for them to ask.

LOSEBY
I can see that.

HELEN
All I do is gee them hope. Hope their
boys are alive. And if they're no,
that they can contact them, see them
one last time. Ken they're at peace.

She looks at Loseby.

HELEN (CONT'D)
I canna see that's such a bad thing.

LOSEBY
Nor can I.

HELEN
But it maun be.

Helen smiles half-mockingly.

HELEN (CONT'D)
After all, that's why I'm here.
Because they think I'm dangerous.

PRESENT DAY:

105 INT - CAFE - DAY

105

Henry puts down his cup of tea.

HENRY
She made a joke of it, but of course
they did think she was dangerous.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

HENRY (CONT'D)

Price who hae a mynd to shaw he was richt; The Kirk which hae seen Spiritualism take their numbers; The Government who saw her as a risk. She hadnae a chance.

Tom adds more sugar to his tea.

TOM

A question.

Henry smiles.

HENRY

You're after to ken if she was genuine?

Tom nods.

HENRY (CONT'D)

She was a very special person.

He sees Tom's look.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Of course I wad say that, wadnae I? But she did hae the gift. Cases which canna be explained. Whiles she spoke in a foreign language - French, Spanish. Now how coud a simple lass do that?

Tom shakes his head.

HENRY (CONT'D)

All she felt she was doing was giving form and substance to something that she already kent existed. That she could see and feel, but maybe others couldnae.

Tom considers this. It makes sense.

HENRY (CONT'D)

You've spoken to Loseby?

Tom nods.

HENRY (CONT'D)

He risked everything for her. When he lost the case, he could so easily hae blamed her. Decried her as a fraud. But his belief in her didnae waver. Because he kent.

TOM

Loseby thinks Helen's death was no accident.

(CONTINUED)

HENRY

That's a stoot accusation.

TOM

So you don't believe...

HENRY

They meant to silence her atweel. But to kill her?

He shakes his head.

HENRY (CONT'D)

They destroyed her. But no in the way you think.

He looks out of the window at the driving rain. Neither speak for a moment.

HENRY (CONT'D)

The Government will stoop to any lengths to smosh those they feel threatened by. They hae nae scruples. Sounds a wee bit melodramatic to you, I ken...

Tom thinks of Stella.

TOM

Believe me, it doesn't.

A beat.

HENRY

I wish you'd known her. She was shy for all that people thought she was bursting with confidence. I was never more proud of her than that day at the Old Bailey.

FLASHBACK:

106 INT - COURT ROOM NO 4 OLD BAILEY - DAY

106

Helen Duncan is led in.

HENRY V.O.

She was sick with fear but she wouldnae show it.

As she moves through the crowds, women whisper blessings to her or blow her silent kisses and smile encouragingly at her. She looks very confident but from this angle we can see her hands. They are clenched tight together.

(CONTINUED)

HENRY V.O. (CONT'D)

And then she glanced up and saw the devil himself. Harry Price.

From the gallery we see Molly and Harry Price glaring down at Helen. She freezes then she walks on, almost cockily.

HENRY V.O. (CONT'D)

She knew then the daggers were oot. But she dinna waver. She walked on head held high.

Helen sits down. She smiles at her well wishers, all confidence seemingly restored. But we see her hands working together anxiously in her lap. And from the gallery we see Henry looking down at her, his face tight with worry.

HENRY V.O. (CONT'D)

She sat there as if she dinnae hae a care in the world. Only I knew what that cost her.

Helen stares ahead, determinedly confident.

PRESENT DAY:

107 INT - CAFE - DAY

107

Henry glances across at Tom.

HENRY

My Helen dinna deserve to be branded a witch. It was a grievous wrong.

A pause. Tom tries to hide the measure of defeat he feels.

HENRY (CONT'D)

But your story. You say your paper isnae going to publish? Mebbe another...

Tom shakes his head.

HENRY (CONT'D)

So that's it?

TOM

One day the time will be right. The Government won't be allowed to manipulate laws to their own agenda forever. The people will demand they be accountable.

HENRY

And that's supposed to be enough?

(CONTINUED)

107 CONTINUED:

107

TOM
It's all I can offer you.

Tom meets his gaze.

TOM (CONT'D)
But her story will be told. Not now.
But one day. I promise you.

108 INT - NEWSROOM - ELLERY'S OFFICE - DAY 108

The phone bursts into life. Ellery reaches out and picks it up.

Ellery pauses a moment, listening to who's speaking at the other end...

109 INT - FREDDIE WISEMAN'S OFFICE - DAY 109

Freddie puts down the phone. Through his open door he can see Carole putting files into the box on her desk.

110 INT - JOYCE'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS 110

Carole continues to put the files into the box. They are all on Helen Duncan.

A man in overalls, obviously a porter, comes to the office door. Carole puts the last file in the box.

The porter glances through to Freddie, who gives a slight nod of his head. He takes the boxes from Carole and leaves.

111 INT - JOYCE'S OFFICE - A FEW MOMENTS LATER 111

Carole looks down at the open filing cabinet. There is an obvious gap between the names Duncally and Duncaster.

She readjusts the files so that they fill that gap. It's as if Helen Duncan's files never existed.

She closes the cabinet drawer with a slam.

FLASHBACK:

112 INT - COURTROOM - DAY 112

A startled and bewildered Helen is being led down below, accompanied by two tough looking warders.

113 INT - PRISON - DAY 113

Helen is sitting on a hard bunk, head bowed. She's shaking, sobbing. She's frightened and confused.

114 EXT - PRISON - DAY

114

A fragile looking Helen steps out of the gates of Wormwood Scrubs to be greeted by Henry. She's aged considerably and looks battered and lost.

PRESENT DAY:

115 EXT - CHURCHYARD - DAY

115

It's raining. A Funeral is taking place. Tom stands discreetly in the background, away from the mourners.

A coffin is lowered into the ground.

Henry Duncan steps forward and throws some petals onto Helen's coffin.

FADE OUT.

ON SCREEN:

Helen Duncan was the last person in England to be tried and imprisoned under the Witchcraft Act of 1735.

The Act was repealed in 1951.

ENDS

2. Thesis

2. Thesis

INTRODUCTION

This practice-based treatise involves two key elements: the screenplay, *Hellish Nell*, and an analysis of Linda Aronson's structural framework for the writing of flashback narrative.

The thesis concentrates on the development of a screenplay¹ and uses Aronson's flashback framework as a practice tool and point of reference in this development. Part One of the treatise is a 99-page screenplay, *Hellish Nell*, written between 2005 and 2008. Part Two is a critical commentary which explores the applicability of Linda Aronson's flashback theory to the practice of writing *Hellish Nell*, and the limitations discovered in this process. In this context it should be noted that this is not a textural analysis but rather an articulation of practice. That is, while writing the script, Aronson's ideas about flashback in film narrative were used as a guide to practice and not as the basis of an analysis. The critique of Aronson's work that follows in this critical commentary draws on and documents that experience. The critical commentary is not intended as a contribution to debates about the theory or history of flashback narratives in film, although it may have implications for both these areas.

What follows from this basis in practice is a critical commentary that documents and analyses a process of composition. Its main, though not only, source is the author's own work. Given that this is the case, I have chosen to use the first person, rather than the third, throughout the work. This procedure carries risks of tone and assumption. The argument may appear to be confined to one perspective or excessively self-involved. My hope is that the reader of this thesis will respond to the first person as the subject of an experiment in writing whose processes and results are explored in what follows.

¹ The analysis is based upon the development of two narratives – one entitled *Surfacing for Air* (developed to outline stage) and the second entitled *Hellish Nell* (developed to finished screenplay) – the latter forming the practice part of the thesis.

An Author's Perspective

As an author of four published novels, all of which explored different time frames and moments of temporal reference, I found I was naturally attracted to narratives that moved across timelines. This engagement increased further following my MA degree in screenwriting and this prompted me to consider investigating the representation of time in modern cinema and its effect on memory and identity, and in particular the flashback narrative. This decision led me to identify screenwriting theorist Linda Aronson's book *Screenwriting Updated* (now revised) as an important resource in making the transition from prose to screenplay. Aronson's book is the first to provide practical guidelines, not only for conventional narrative, but for non-linear forms as well. My relationship with Aronson's work grew further when I attended a lecture given by her on flashback narrative structure and my subsequent meeting with her persuaded me it would be of significant value as a screenwriter to investigate the strengths and weaknesses of her theory through the development of my own screenplay.

Aronson's approach is to look at flashbacks in structural terms, including them as an aspect of the traditional three-act structure², and I found this helpful in establishing the basic principles of flashback construction with a view to my own writing practice. Aronson makes valuable points about non-linear forms and her guidelines and models clearly explain how and why they work and provide constructive detailed strategies which I felt could set out the basis for the development of my screenplay *Hellish Nell*.

In the development of my screenplay³ I set myself certain parameters. Firstly, the creation of a mainstream movie, following a classic Hollywood format; secondly, to remain true to

² The three-act structure is the basic paradigm of classic Hollywood screenwriting which I examine in more detail in Chapter One.

³ The development of a script follows several stages. The first is to write a series of outlines, short prose versions of the main story, which are used to find the best way of approaching the material as film. The next is the more detailed step outline, which breaks the story down into scenes. The third stage is the rough draft, which is the first full-length version of the script. A series of drafts are then written, first draft, second draft etc. until it reaches the final polished draft stage.

my own personal vision of Helen Duncan; and thirdly, to work within a moral and ethical framework, as set out by Joanna Leigh, in her thesis.⁴

However, that being said, I believe a screenwriter's task is also to produce the most dramatically and emotionally compelling script possible and at times there can be a tension between accuracy, interpretation and truth. As Maureen Turim remarks: "The moral charge of the biographical flashback narrative is always one of judgment, evaluation of life."⁵ My own decision was that as a screenwriter the most ethical approach would be to adhere as closely as possible to the known historical facts, as far as I could discern them, and when choosing fictional episodes only to include those which I believed could have happened, at least in a similar way.

Throughout the series of script development stages, I adapted my methodology so that, rather than writing a screenplay and then testing the applicability of Aronson's theory against the final draft, I adhered as closely as possible to Aronson's framework at each stage of development to enable me to pinpoint potential problem areas. I believe this approach gave me a unique insight into specific difficulties which would not otherwise have been possible.

Identifying the key elements – Helen Duncan and flashback structures

Although flashback narrative structure is becoming increasingly popular and is now, and has been for some time, widely used in contemporary feature films, Aronson is one of the few screenwriting theorists to analyse flashback narrative structure in any great depth.

My particular interest is to see how the use of flashback narrative structure impacts upon the development of a screenplay, specifically the plot; to analyse how pacing and interweaving the revelations produced by the plot into different temporal time frames affects the building, and audience's perception, of my characters; and to explore how its

⁴ For a more extensive investigation into the issues of creating a moral and ethical mainstream biopic film see: Leigh Joanna, 'My impossible task? Writing an ethical biopic of Samuel Johnson', (PhD thesis, University of the Arts London, 2009).

⁵ Turim, M. *Flashbacks in Film: Memory and History* (London and New York: Routledge 1989) p.121.

use might impinge upon theme⁶, genre⁷ and point-of-view (POV). This chapter briefly summarises the historical sources of my screenplay and then goes on to examine what are the definitions of a flashback and its uses and sets out Linda Aronson's theoretical framework on flashback narrative structure, in particular her theory on case history and thwarted dream narrative structures. It also examines the creative practice of exploring through biographic drama a complex and unresolved historical figure.

The screenplay *Hellish Nell* is based on the events leading up to and surrounding the trial of the Scottish medium Helen Duncan in 1944. I had long been interested in these events and in Helen Duncan herself after reading a series of newspaper articles about her imprisonment. Many of the articles covered the campaign mounted by her supporters to persuade the government to grant Helen a posthumous pardon, and I chose her story to write about and to develop in my screenplay *Hellish Nell*, as a progression of my existing concerns about the injustice surrounding her case highlighted by the pardon campaign.

Helen Duncan's story is one of mystery and intrigue. Her trial under the Witchcraft Act of 1735 and her subsequent conviction in 1944 provoked an outcry among her supporters who believed the use of such an archaic act to be a major injustice. She was the last woman ever to be imprisoned for being a 'witch' and the issues surrounding her trial and conviction have never been properly resolved.

My initial research revealed a positive and sympathetic portrayal of Helen Duncan from a wide range of different biographers. UEA historian Malcolm Gaskill asserts that Helen's achievements "appeared to know no bounds," and mentions that "one of the oldest and most useful skills for which Helen displayed an aptitude was healing."⁸ Declared spiritualist Mary Armour describes her as "one of the finest physical mediums that ever lived,"⁹ while the psychologist Dr. Nina Shandler reports that Helen's metamorphosis into

⁶ For the purposes of this thesis I use the word theme in general terms to depict the unifying main idea or concept of the screenplay. Michael Hauge describes theme as a universal statement about the human condition that goes beyond the plot. Hauge, M. *Writing Screenplays That Sell* (London: Elm Tree Books 1988) p. 81.

⁷ Although there are many different interpretations as to how to define genre categories I shall adhere to the four main categories of genre as set out by theorist Phil Parker. These are: the thriller, the romance, the horror and the personal drama.

⁸ Gaskill, M. *Hellish Nell*, (London: Fourth Estate 2001) pp. 76-77.

⁹ Armour, M. *Helen Duncan, My Living has Not Been in Vain* (London: Pembridge Pub. 2000) p. 5.

her Spirit Guide, Albert, was “viewed as one of the most extraordinary transformations in Spiritualism.”¹⁰

However, as I started to investigate her life more fully and to view official documents relating to her trial at the Public Records Office at Kew (see Archival and Newspaper References) and to conduct my own personal interviews (see Appendix 3), a contrary view to these positive assertions emerged. At her trial, for example, Arthur West, Chief Constable, Portsmouth, described her “as an unmitigated humbug who can only be regarded as a pest...” and said she had “tricked, defrauded and preyed upon the minds of a certain credulous section of the public.”¹¹

It thus became clear as my research continued that Helen was a controversial figure (I shall be reviewing her story more fully in a later chapter) who in equal measures was considered to be a superstar worthy of adoration, and an unscrupulous money-grabbing fraud.¹² This alone made her a fascinating character but then there is also no official explanation as to why she was tried as a witch, while all the participants are now dead.

The division of opinion over the interpretation of the events of her life led me to make choices at key development stages, which are outlined in more detail in Chapter Two. As a screenwriter, I felt that employing different POVs would highlight the different judgments on Helen Duncan. So many questions were posed about her character and her work, and so many contradictory versions surrounded the events of the *HMS Barham* affair¹³ and her trial,¹⁴ that I did not want to develop a screenplay which concluded in any way whether she was a fraud or not. Instead I chose to concentrate on the injustice of a woman in 1944 being tried, and convicted, as a witch, resulting in the theme of the State pursuing an individual becoming central to my dramatic treatment.

In the first stages of writing, I explored different narrative structures through a series of outlines. I also explored the possibility of keeping the screenplay to one time frame instead of two. Screenwriting theorist Phil Parker suggests that if you have a narrative,

¹⁰ Shandler, N. *The Strange Case of Hellish Nell*, (Cambridge, Mass: Da Capo Press 2006) p. 20.

¹¹ Bechhofer Roberts, C.E. *The Trial of Mrs. Duncan* (London: Jarrolds Publishers 1945) p. 337.

¹² Complaints against Helen Duncan: File PRO DPP 2/1204, Public Records Office, Kew.

¹³ File on the sinking of the *Barham*: PRO HO ADM 1/11948, Public Records Office, Kew.

¹⁴ Files on Helen Duncan’s trial: PRO CRIM 1/1581; PRO CRIM 4/1709; PRO CRIM 2/256, Public Records Office, Kew.

which naturally involves several points-of-view, the episodic narrative form may work best, although an episodic narrative does not have to take place in one time frame.¹⁵ Although this form is most often used for TV soaps or drama series, it is also present in feature films, such as *Pulp Fiction*, which have a complex or multi-stranded narrative and which use the episodic narrative form to follow several different characters' POVs.

By testing this option, I believed I could certainly employ this form, using each narrator to fill in Helen Duncan's story in chronological order from the moment she arrived in London in 1930 until her trial and imprisonment in 1944. Ultimately, though, I rejected this narrative form as I felt that in order to achieve the most dramatic and emotional impact, the screenplay should start either at the moment she is found guilty at her trial, or with her death. So again, I was drawn back to the possibility of using flashbacks, and in particular Aronson's overview and practical framework for non-linear screenplays, which became central to the development of the project.

I came to see Helen Duncan's story as two separate narratives: the event of the trial itself and the investigation into that event – by an outsider (or outsiders) pulling together the fragments of the past and reconstructing them into some sort of revelation, as in my outlines for *Surfacing for Air*¹⁶ and for my screenplay *Hellish Nell*.

In addition, I decided to construct a narrative through different characters' recollections of her story. I thought this would set up a tension between sympathy and judgement that would enact the ambivalence of an audience towards my central character. I wanted to connect the events of her story in the most coherent and concise way possible and was attracted to the possibility of temporal movement, i.e. flashbacks. The added advantage of this approach would be that the past incidents would thus be dramatised – with each flashback segment having its own clear conflict – rather than just being recounted verbally. This then became the context in which to investigate what impact Aronson's theories might have on the development of my ultimate screenplay *Hellish Nell*, completed after numerous experimental outlines.

¹⁵ Parker, P. *The Art & Science of Screenwriting* (Exeter: Intellect Books 1998) p. 99.

¹⁶ For the sake of clarification a brief outline of *Surfacing for Air* is set out in Appendix 4.

Aronson's Structures

In order to assess the value of Aronson's theories it is useful at this point to list her categories of flashback narrative structure. She clearly distinguishes them as:¹⁷

- Flashback as thwarted dream
- Flashback as case history

She then adds three subsets to her list.¹⁸ These are:

- Flashback as life-changing incident
- Flashback as illustration
- Flashback as autobiographical narrative

I initially undertook the development of Helen's story in the thwarted dream model as the attraction of starting at the climactic scene of the court room scene, and then flashing back appealed to me and I felt this option took the audience closer to Helen's experience and her dream of being regarded as a genuine medium.¹⁹

However, although initially attracted to using Aronson's thwarted dream framework as a means of telling Helen's story, as discussed earlier, my stance as a writer changed as my research revealed certain aspects of her life which threw into doubt my original concept of her. I judged that issues relating to her authenticity and integrity might be dealt with more effectively by creating a certain distance between the audience and Helen herself. This meant modifying my approach, and the creation of a fictional character, Connie, proved a solution. However, the creation of this distance did not mean, at this stage, abandoning a flashback structure based upon the idea of thwarted dream as this allowed me to investigate Aronson's thwarted dream model more thoroughly.

As a result of this, I developed several outlines for a proposed screenplay, *Surfacing for Air*, (the development of which is shown in more detail in Chapter Two), in which the

¹⁷ Aronson, L. *Screenwriting Updated* (Los Angeles: Silman-James Press 2000) p. 106.

¹⁸ These three subsets are discussed more fully in Chapter One.

¹⁹ The potential 'dreams' for Helen are discussed further in Chapter Two.

audience comes to understand and engage with Helen Duncan through the fictional protagonist Connie. However, by the end of the outline process I came to recognise that the thwarted dream framework did not provide me with the necessary dramatic and narrative options, which reflected my own position as a writer with respect to Helen Duncan. I judged that, in order for the audience to be willing the success of the protagonist, Connie – and thus indirectly Helen as their lives are so intertwined – in the final act, as Aronson states should happen in flashback as thwarted dream,²⁰ they should unquestionably believe in Helen's gifts and intentions and I felt this to be in conflict with my own way of thinking. Therefore, I ultimately chose to abandon Connie and the thwarted dream approach to develop *Hellish Nell*, which is a case history structure. I also took the decision to move the focus of the screenplay from being about whether or not she was genuine to being about a State conspiracy. Both these issues are dealt with in detail in Chapter Two.

Interestingly, *Surfacing for Air*, the thwarted dream approach, highlighted one or two limitations of Aronson's flashback structure which were reinforced in the development of *Hellish Nell*, in particular the choices made over content in key structural scenes, which it became clear were driven by issues of point-of-view, genre and theme. This led then to an analysis of four contemporary films (*Hollywoodland*, *Iris*, *Nixon* and *The Constant Gardener*) to see whether the conclusions drawn from my own process were relevant to understanding the success or failure of other flashback feature films.

Flashback Definitions

At this stage, before I set out the methodology and approach in more detail, it is important to establish precisely the different understandings of the term 'flashback' that emerge in the work of a number of screenwriting and film theorists.

In its straightforward condition, a flashback shows antecedent action and is a device used to alter the script's subjective timeline since flashbacks usually occur by way of a

²⁰ Aronson, p. 120.

character's point-of-view. Maureen Turim describes a flashback as: "a privileged moment in unfolding that juxtaposes different moments of temporal reference."²¹

Robert McKee classifies the flashback as simply another form of exposition.²² However, although flashbacks do serve to elucidate characters, events and situations, I question this definition as this is certainly not their sole purpose. A further description comes from the screenwriting theorist Syd Field, who claims a flashback's purpose is simple: it bridges time, place and action to reveal information about a character, or to move the story forward.²³

That is to say, as Maureen Turim posits in *Flashbacks In Film: Memory and History*, a flashback is a sequence which moves the story from an image in the present to an image in the past, which the viewer recognises as either a story being told or a memory.²⁴ It is an image or sequence which shows a "temporal occurrence anterior to those in the images that preceded it,"²⁵ and is used to expand the audience's understanding of the story, characters or situation, as well as affecting their experience of time. This definition suggests that flashbacks in cinema can be a narrative device and a principle of structure.

To explore this further, it is worth turning to Linda Aronson's description in *Screenwriting Updated*:

"In its simplest form flashback narrative structure uses a series of flashbacks to construct an entire story in the past that runs in tandem with a story in the present. In some cases flashbacks are used to tell a number of stories in the past, and more recently flashforward has appeared which deals with stories in the future of central characters."²⁶

However Aronson is unequivocal in separating films which use parallel narratives, such as *Pulp Fiction* which, when analysed, can be seen to employ a variety of time frames,

²¹ Turim, p. 1.

²² McKee, R. *Story* (London: Methuen 1999) p. 341.

²³ Field, S. *The Definitive Guide to Screenwriting* (London: Ebury Press London 2003) p. 182.

²⁴ Turim, p. 1.

²⁵ Turim, p. 1.

²⁶ Aronson, p. 107.

though not in fact flashbacks, and those films which use the narrative flashback structure. She states:

“While flashback narrative could be defined as a form which tells a number of stories in parallel and moves between time frames, this is inadequate because there are other films that use parallel storytelling with a range of time frames but do not employ flashbacks at all ... What sets flashback narrative apart is that it is a form crucially concerned with memories and the impact of the past upon the present.”²⁷

While I agree with Aronson’s assessment of flashback narrative, however, it is important at this stage to point out that flashbacks, although often derived from memory, are not necessarily so – a conclusion drawn from my practice, and through the analysis of the four contemporary films. Thus I identified four types of functions of flashback narrative. These are: ²⁸

1. ‘Personal’ flashbacks, which are derived from a specific character’s memory.
2. ‘Subjective’ flashbacks, which are not derived from a character’s memory but do depict a character’s POV.
3. ‘Objective’ flashbacks, which are free-floating and which do not depict a character’s POV.
4. ‘Historical’ flashbacks, which are based on archival material.

However, what is clear is that the reality of the process of memory and its depiction in the cinema are not the same. It is not my intention to cover this aspect in detail but, nevertheless, it does merit some further investigation. As Turim states, “verbal storytelling can ease temporal shifts through the sustaining power of the narrative voice ... an arsenal of verb tenses and qualifying clauses render these shifts as an invisible act of

²⁷ Aronson, p. 107.

²⁸ To clarify this, for the sake of reference I have indicated examples of all four of these different flashbacks in the film *Nixon*, which I analyse in Chapter Three.

language.”²⁹ That is to say, while temporal shifts are entirely normal in literature, a film has no tense system – in other words there is nothing inherent in cinematic images to indicate whether they are past, present or future.

But despite this, flashback is a deeply sophisticated recreation of the process of remembering. Indeed, it could be argued that in many ways cinema has developed more closely in line with the actual process of remembering than literature.³⁰ Although we do remember the past, as Wendy Everett points out in *European Identity in Cinema*: “We don’t remember in the past tense – but in a flash of past as present” and cinema reflects this.³¹

Maureen Turim poses a question as to whether or not cinema partakes of a different implied temporality. She explores an interesting scenario, one which allows us to investigate the canonised ways that film suggests tense, subjectivity, and personal memory.³² If a spectator enters the cinema *during* a flashback sequence, how can that spectator identify that the events on screen are taking place in the narrative’s past, if indeed he is able to make such identification at all?

Turim states such an argument ignores the way a filmic text codes its temporality. She argues:³³

“Firstly segments are defined temporally in relation to what preceded or what will follow them. Secondly, the temporal reference of a filmic segment is defined by a complex combination of visual and auditory indications, which can include: voice-over narration, filmic punctuations such as dissolves, changes in image qualities such as colour to black and white, changes in elements of *mise en scène* such as costumes indicating

²⁹ Turim, p. 7.

³⁰ However, it may also be argued that since memory has a history that is informed by changing cultural assumptions and technologies, it is quite possible that both film and literature now inform the ways we remember and forget and that they are both techniques or arts of memory.

³¹ Everett, W. *Time Travel and European Film in European Identity in Cinema* ed. by Wendy Everett (Oxford: Intellect Book 1996) p. 107.

³² Turim, p. 15.

³³ Turim, p. 15.

an earlier time period or make-up differences that indicate a younger period in a character's life, and change in non-diegetic music."³⁴

What becomes clear is the flashback really portrays a conjunction between disparate filmic segments, each of which appear to depict actually occurring events in the present tense. As Everett claims: "Changing tense in a film is not a matter of movement from one discrete temporal category to another, but of the creation of a process or continuum in which spatial and temporal transition are inseparable."³⁵

The logic of time and space is ultimately what helps the viewer to distinguish a flashback from an imaginary sequence, for example, or an arbitrary narrative disruption in the flow of the script, or indeed a moment in time which is flashforward or, as Turim refers to it, a prolepsis.³⁶

However, although Maureen Turim explores flashback narrative in her book *Flashbacks in Film: Memory and History*, she chooses to tackle the subject through a chronological tracing of their development rather than through an analysis of their construction.

Aronson, on the other hand, is the only screenwriting theorist to analyse flashback narrative structure in any great depth. This is a central reason as to why I wished to test Aronson's structural approach in order to establish the relevance of her models against my own screenplay, and to identify any limitations which this process might expose.

³⁴ Turim, p. 16.

³⁵ Everett, p. 106.

³⁶ Although I shall mostly be referring to Aronson's vocabulary during this thesis, it is worth setting out the critical vocabulary suggested and used by Turim: it is the terminology developed by Gerard Genette in his essay 'Discours du recit.' The terms themselves are as follows: '*Anachrony*' is a general term that suggests 'temporal rearrangement'; '*Analepse*' is a transition from the narrative present to the narrative past; '*Prolepse*' is, inversely, a transition from the present to a 'disjunct' future (Turim gives the example of a flashforward). These terms are subdivided by the modifying phrases '*interior*' and '*exterior*' indicating whether the temporal moment that we move to remains within the narrative we have already witnessed (i.e. a repetition of events we have already seen) or whether they lie beyond the narrative's present time phase. Turim helpfully provides the term '*Elliptical*' to suggest a transition to or from (an analepse or a prolepse) a moment we have already seen. Genette's remaining terms are as follows: '*Porte*' (to denote how long ago the past event occurred); '*Amplitude*' is 'the duration of the event within the analepse, or to put it more simply, how much of the past is told in the flashback'; and '*Duration*' which means 'the actual length of the flashback as it is told' (p. 8) (i.e. the screen time in minutes). Finally, Genette provides the term '*Ellipses*' (not to be confused with Turim's 'elliptically') to represent 'periods of time that are left out of narration' (p. 9) - temporal gaps that are not delineated, the gap between the flashback and the present for instance. Whilst I do not intend to use these terms exhaustively, I shall refer to them in instances where their use provides greater clarity than an extended description. It will be simpler in a complex sentence, for instance, to use the term analepse rather than the phrase 'transition from narrative present to narrative past'.

Process and conclusions

The four main narrative elements I investigated further during this process of analysis were the triggering crisis or hook, the first flashback, subsequent flashbacks, and lastly, POV. Through testing the applicability of Aronson's theory to my own writing practice, it was possible to look beyond Aronson to establish an expanded set of strategies to help the screenwriter further in dealing with the complexities of flashback narrative structure.

This process of script development and rigorous testing included sixteen outlines for my proposed screenplay, *Surfacing for Air*, and a further series of sixteen outlines, four step outlines and fourteen drafts for my screenplay *Hellish Nell*. As stated earlier, I also tested Aronson's theory against four contemporary films as I did not wish to rely on the evidence of my own practice alone and wanted to establish how her conceptualisation of flashbacks in film stood up to recent examples of contemporary film-making.

The results of this testing and analysis have led me to suggest modifications to Aronson's model which may be useful to screenwriters in their creation of flashback narratives. In particular I see it as crucial to address the issues of genre, theme, and point-of-view, and to a lesser extent an issue of chronology. Therefore in my conclusions I put forward a modified version of Aronson's framework as a practice methodology. I see Aronson's model as extremely useful in the practice of developing flashback narrative; however, I also suggest the modifications with reference to the points above will provide a screenwriter an even clearer methodology when approaching the creation of flashback narrative feature films.

CHAPTER ONE

Flashback Structures and Functions

This chapter examines Aronson's flashback theory in the light of the development of two screenplays; one entitled *Surfacing for Air*, the second entitled *Hellish Nell*. It also investigates the issues attendant upon writing biographical drama with specific reference to Aronson's framework. It looks at the functions of flashbacks and how to assess and apply Aronson's framework, and why I rejected three of her sub-sets from inclusion in my development work. Finally, it sets out what areas will be investigated in more detail in the rest of the thesis.

Flashback Structures

Aronson's approach is to look at flashbacks in structural terms, with particular reference to the three-act structure. What Aronson understands by structure is derived from Aristotle's *Poetics*, and its various applications to the writing of screenplays.³⁷ The basis of structure is the three-act drama. She is not working in the intellectual mode of structuralism, associated with the work of Vladimir Propp,³⁸ Claude Levi-Strauss³⁹ and the early writings of Roland Barthes.⁴⁰ Her interest is in well-made plots, not binary oppositions.

This thesis focuses on Aronson's flashback structure and the evolution of my screenplay. I have made a commitment in writing my screenplay *Hellish Nell* to adhere to the classical Hollywood screenwriting three-act structure which Aronson outlines and which underpins her theory. Aronson's framework has its origins in the conventions for dramatic structure as set out in Aristotle's *Poetics* in which the concepts of a unified action, with a beginning, middle and end, are first articulated.

Aristotle writes:

³⁷ See Tierno, M. *Aristotle's Poetics for Screenwriters*, (New York: Hyperion 2002) and Hiltunen, A. *Aristotle in Hollywood*, (Exeter: Intellect Books, 2010).

³⁸ Propp used Russian Fairy Tales as the basis for his theory, which was based on the work of Russian Formalists. His book *Morphology of the Folklore* was published in Russian in 1928.

³⁹ Levi-Strauss was a French anthropologist and cultural theorist, best known for his work *Tristes Tropiques*.

⁴⁰ Barthes was a French literary theorist, philosopher, critic and semiotician. His work includes *Mythologies* which examines the tendency of contemporary social value systems to create modern myths.

“As for the art of imitation in narrative verse, it is clear that the plots ... ought to be constructed dramatically; that is, they should be concerned with a unified action, whole and complete, possessing a beginning, middle parts and an end, so that (like the living organism) the unified whole can affect its characteristic pleasure.”⁴¹

Whilst it is true that it is possible to create a successful flashback narrative film which does not follow these conventions, such as the Russian film *The Mirror* (1975)⁴², directed by Andrei Tarkovsky,⁴³ Aronson's theorist work is based on a group of contemporary cinema works, all of which follow the conventions of the classic Hollywood three-act structure screenwriting model. My analysis in the thesis deliberately confines itself to this model of script. I am not therefore considering in the analysis any issues to do with film artists or gallery installations or the tradition of *avant-garde* film that appears to avoid the use of any narrative structural devices.

In order to contextualise the significance of Aronson's framework in terms of film and screenwriting theories of flashbacks – in particular the issue of structure and emotional engagement – it is worth examining in brief the elements of the conventional Hollywood flashback.⁴⁴

An interesting point to raise here is that over time, instead of evolving in terms of complexity, mimetic accuracy and experimentation, the technique of the flashback has been refined and reduced. It has become simpler, more compressed, and more condensed as time has passed. Although there have been some pertinent and influential experiments in depicting memory across cinema's history, the

⁴¹ Aristotle *Poetics*, trans. Heath. M., (London: Penguin Books 1996) p. 38.

⁴² *The Mirror* has no apparent plot. Instead it rhythmically combines contemporary scenes with childhood memories and newsreel footage. Tarkovsky mixes flashbacks, historical footage and original poetry to illustrate the reminiscences of a dying man about his childhood in WWII, adolescence, and a painful divorce in the family. The loose flow of visually oneiric images has been compared to the stream of consciousness technique in literature. The structure of the film is discontinuous and non-chronological.

⁴³ Tarkovsky suggests that film itself is fashioned from time – a quality recognised by him in *Sculpting in Time*, whose title refers both to the centrality of time and memory in the creation of identity, and to the fabric of film itself. He argues that cinema stands out within all other time-based art forms, such as ballet or music, as giving time a visible and real form. Tarkovsky, A. *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema*, trans. by Kitty Hunter-Blair (London: Faber and Faber 1989) p. 118.

⁴⁴ The mainstream's mode of representing narrative anachronisms.

contemporary Hollywood flashback in many ways resembles earlier attempts to portray the personal past in film. The majority of contemporary flashback techniques incorporate the same devices as the early ones,⁴⁵ and considerable technical and aesthetic progression in other areas of filmic representation has not rendered the flashback redundant. However, although the flashback has not evolved in its representation or its visual code, what have changed are its uses as a narrative structure together with the increased sophistication of audiences and their ability to read different levels of flashbacks.

While Everett takes the position that “functioning as present within present, filmic memory parallels the process of remembering,”⁴⁶ I would suggest the flashback is understood and accepted not because the spectator recognises a cognitive process that he himself possesses, but because it has become a convention. While cosmetic resemblances to real memory persist, the flashback has become a self-contained phenomenon of its own, to be understood in the context of cinematic narrative rather than in the context of real life. As Chatman argues: “The ‘camera eye’ names a convention (an illusion of mimesis) which pretends that events just happened in the presence of a neutral recorder.”⁴⁷

Thus conventionally the scene the character ‘flashes back’ to is often the given cause of a present situation or trauma, which is causally motivated. An important version of flashback helps us to understand why something has happened in the way it has. In this sense it contributes to a unified action in an Aristotelean sense. Often the narrative priority is for the flashback to deliver the missing information and to contribute to the answer of an initial dramatic question. Because of this, the process of transition is rendered as smoothly and inconspicuously as possible; as a literal visual merging of two scenes, a swift flow from one time to another.

⁴⁵ Turim makes the observation that “The most recent Hollywood flashbacks ... are often less sophisticated than those found in films of earlier periods” and comments that “they are redundant in their internal coding and serve primarily to deliver missing narrative exposition.” p. 7.

⁴⁶ Everett, p. 107.

⁴⁷ Chatman, S. *Story and Discourse* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press 1978) p. 154.

It can be seen therefore that flashbacks insert an element from the narrative past into the narrative present, juxtaposing different moments of cinematic reference.⁴⁸

Just as dramatic structure tells a story, narrative structure underlies how that story is arranged⁴⁹ and thus how an audience will interpret its events. Robert McKee refers to narrative structure as “a selection of events from the characters’ life stories that is composed into a strategic sequence to arouse specific emotions and to express a specific view of life.”⁵⁰ It is the writer’s vision of those events and how to break them down into acts and scenes and how to arrange those fragments which affect how an audience will see characters and events.

Aronson refers to structure as “the business of creating the best vehicle to carry and display the idea.”⁵¹ By ‘idea’ Aronson means the story concept which drives the narrative. In this respect, parallel storytelling (whether flashback or otherwise) can, and does, continue to use the classic three-act narrative structure. As discussed earlier, put simply this is giving the screenplay a beginning, middle, and an end; opening with a form of equilibrium, which is then disrupted in Act 2, and restored by the end of Act 3.⁵² However, in the case of flashback narrative structure it is the order and way in which those parts are arranged which give it its complexity.

David Bordwell in his book *Narration and Fiction Film* posits: “When information is missing, perceivers infer it or make guesses about it. When events are arranged out of temporal order, perceivers try to put those events in sequence. And people seek causal connections among events, both in anticipation and retrospect.”⁵³

⁴⁸ Everett, p. 106.

⁴⁹ Dramatic structure refers to the events which make up the separate parts of the story, while narrative structure refers to the structural framework that underlies the order and manner in which a narrative is presented.

⁵⁰ McKee, p. 33.

⁵¹ Aronson, p. 39.

⁵² Although this structure is often attributed to the Bulgarian philosopher and theorist, Tzvetan Todorov, he suggested a slightly more complicated description. His version of the classic three-act structure actually comprises five elements. They are: a state of equilibrium at the outset; a disruption of the equilibrium by some action; recognition that there has been a disruption; an attempt to repair the disruption; and a reinstatement of the equilibrium. It must be added that the concept of equilibrium etc. is not seen as the basis of three acts by all theorists, but for the purpose of this thesis this is the interpretation I am going to adopt.

⁵³ Bordwell, D. *Narration in the Fiction Film* (London: Methuen 1985) p. 34.

So how does this re-organising of events affect the writing of a biopic in particular, with a view to maintaining a 'truthful' portrayal of the character and his life?

The task of any biopic writer is to do her research and to consider the status, nature and reliability of her sources, then to decide upon her interpretation of that information and settle on the story she wishes to tell. In the development of my screenplay *Hellish Nell*, my own experience was that in many ways my own narrative decisions were similar to those of a biographer using conventional linear structure. Certainly none was critical to my decision to adopt flashback structure, nor were the decisions about biographical inclusions or exclusions dependent on Aronson's framework. However, as I developed my screenplay *Hellish Nell* questions regarding time frames and chronology became more significant, as well as the implications of point-of-view, issues I explore more fully in Chapter Two.

Moreover, certain biographical parameters, such as the early death of Harry Price and the fact that Loseby was in Hong Kong at the time of Tom's investigation, did affect my approach to developing the narrative. By choosing to set the present day narrative in 1956, at the time of Helen's death, there was an inevitable gap of twelve years between her trial in 1944 and her death in 1956 in which certain events took place. However, although these events affected how I was able to portray the story in the present – for example using Molly Goldney to relate the events leading up to the trial, rather than Harry Price – the actions covered in the flashbacks did not need to be significantly altered.

Gaps or lacunae can appear in any narrative but because events are arranged out of temporal order in flashback narratives these gaps can appear more pronounced.

Turim points out that flashbacks can skip back over decades, years, days, hours, or just a few minutes and that a "flashback can cover a period of time in the past understood as being several years long or conversely, just a few moments"⁵⁴ so it is clear that these changes in time frames need to be carefully handled and signposted in order to avoid confusion. In *Hellish Nell*, for instance, I used voice-overs in several scenes, such as with Molly Goldney at the end of Scene 19 in the present to connect

⁵⁴ Turim, p. 8.

with Scene 20 at the Old Bailey in the past, to carry the audience from the story in the present to the story in the past. The Goldney flashback sequences⁵⁵ covers the period from August 1930 and Helen's arrival in London until her trial in March 1944. Careful consideration therefore had to be given to links between past and present, and this is an area I examine in detail in Chapter Two in the analysis of my own script development, as well as in Chapter Three in the analysis of four contemporary films. Another example of signposting was the use of sounds in *Surfacing for Air* in Outline Three⁵⁶ in which the clatter of a hospital trolley rolling past in the present becomes the rattle of the wind against the window panes in the story in the past. Both of these devices are put forward as examples of the way a filmic text codes its temporality as indicated by Turim.⁵⁷

Again looking at the Goldney flashback sequence it can be seen that there is a gap between Helen's last encounter with Harry Price in 1931 (Scene 18) – and her subsequent departure from London – and the next flashback (Scene 20) which shows Helen's arrival at the Old Bailey in 1944. In earlier drafts I included another flashback scene, which revealed Helen's trial and conviction in Edinburgh in 1932. There was also a present day scene in which Mollie revealed that, despite this conviction, Helen's popularity continued to grow and she was given a full-page column in Scottish weekly the *People's Journal*, entitled 'My Second Sights Secrets' in 1933. However, ultimately I felt that both these additional scenes detracted from the importance of the trial at the Old Bailey. The need to maintain dramatic focus had to take priority and this meant that certain events had to be omitted. However, this compression in time and the consequent lacunae were not a result of friction with Aronson's framework as such, and did not radically alter Helen's story or the way I wished to portray my subject and the events of her life.

The issue of authenticity is an important concern to any biopic writer. In my own case, apart from spending long weeks at the British Library, I spent several days at the Imperial War Museum going through their sound and visual archives, viewed numerous archival materials at the Public Records Office in Kew – including the

⁵⁵ The Goldney sequence runs from Scenes 10 – 21.

⁵⁶ This outline is discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.

⁵⁷ Turim, p. 15.

letter from Churchill described in Scene 49 of *Hellish Nell*⁵⁸ – scrutinised all the pertinent newspaper records concerning Helen’s Old Bailey trial at Collingwood Library, and conducted many personal interviews ranging from several in London to others as far afield as Guernsey and Hong Kong.⁵⁹ From there I went on to identify what I believed to be the key moments of Helen’s life. These were her arrival in London, and her meeting with her nemesis, Harry Price, her revelation about the sinking of *HMS Barham*, her arrest, and her trial at the Old Bailey. I decided these events should be highlighted as flashbacks in the story in the past.

In my outlines for *Surfacing for Air*, however, it became clear the narrative required one further flashback. That was Helen’s revelation about what had happened to Connie’s son, since this was at the crux of their relationship and at the heart of the script itself. This was the final flashback and served to answer the dramatic question posed at the start of the script. Interestingly, the addition of this flashback in the third act is contrary to Aronson’s framework which indicates that there are no further flashbacks after the past has caught up with the present, and the triggering crisis – in this case Connie’s attempted suicide – appears a second time.⁶⁰

In *Hellish Nell*, however, since Helen’s trial is the centre of the piece, I decided the script would benefit from dividing that period into several flashbacks. I therefore included three further flashbacks: one to enable the audience to see the Government’s machinations behind the scenes, and a further two to examine the view of Helen and her supporters in the build-up to, and after, the trial.

The next issue to be addressed was one of point-of-view. In the various thwarted dream outlines of *Surfacing for Air*, as examined in detail in Chapter Two, I alternated between a fictional character, Connie, and Helen as the protagonist in the story in the past, as I attempted to achieve the correct balance of distance and emotional engagement. In these outlines the story in the present is from the point-of-view of her doctor, Edward. However, in *Hellish Nell*, the case history flashback narrative structure, I explored a different protagonist recalling events for each

⁵⁸ File PRO HO 144/22172 viewed at Public Records Office, Kew.

⁵⁹ Details of these personal interviews can be found in Appendix 3.

⁶⁰ Aronson, p. 111.

separate flashback. In particular, I chose to tell Helen's story as case history through eight separate flashbacks: six flashbacks were told by six separate protagonists, key to those events, and the final two flashbacks allow Helen's viewpoint to finally be seen. Although two of the protagonists having the flashbacks were fictional characters, the events they were recalling were well documented and I felt that my interpretation of the proceedings was as accurate as possible, with the audience being positioned to key information and historical fact.

However, the decision to adopt a certain point-of-view at a given moment is clearly an important one, particularly in a biopic, and my choice of varied and opposing protagonists in *Hellish Nell* was deliberately made to try and achieve a balance between all the different views and opinions concerning Helen's authenticity and the events of her life.

Inevitably the choice of protagonist in each flashback must, and does, alter the audience's perception of those events, and this issue is covered in more detail in Chapter Two in the analysis of the development of both *Surfacing for Air* and *Hellish Nell*.

Flashback Functions

To return to the function of flashback narrative, as has been argued, the mainstream flashback is primarily used as a way of introducing missing information or providing a sense of (temporal) depth to a character or story.⁶¹

Turim proposes a further list of functions for the flashback, setting out what she considers to be the key characteristics, and although this primarily refers to the American Silent Cinema Period, the types of commonly used flashbacks, surprisingly, have changed very little. Therefore it is useful at this stage to examine Turim's list and set them out in order.⁶²

⁶¹ Syd Field states: "The flashback is a technique used to expand the audience's comprehension of story, character and situation." Field, S. *The Foundations of Screenwriting* p. 33.

⁶² Turim, p. 33.

Turim's suggested functions are as follows:

1. Story within the story – contemporary frame/past history.
2. Trial testimony – presenting the words of witnesses as visual renderings with various ideological consequences.
3. Didactic reminder to the audiences of events already seen – almost always coupled with some other function.
4. Haunting of the past – representing a certain character's obsession with the past, sometimes pathological, sometimes an emblem of loyalty or fidelity; a subjective focalisation – thoughts rather than a story are told here, thus the voice is internal rather than external.
5. Character's narration – a story of the past to which a character gives voice; a subjective focalisation – often used in an extended format for biographies.
6. Character's past explained – a means of filling in expository material, the traits of a character through imagery of the past, not necessarily focalised as a subjective view of the character.
7. Revealing an incident withheld from the exposition of the narrative for the purpose of suspense, or to engender comic misunderstandings.

In my own practice several of these functions occur. In *Hellish Nell*, for instance, the repeat of Helen's arrival at the Old Bailey (Scene 107) is an example of Turim's function 3, and Connie's remembrance of her son's death in the outline of *Surfacing for Air* is an example of Turim's functions 4, 6 and 7.

Turim's list of supposed functions is in many ways similar to those suggested by Aronson, that is, her two main models: flashback as thwarted dream and flashback as case history, and the subsets: flashback as life-changing incident, flashback as illustration and autobiographical flashback. These distinctions will be clarified in

subsequent sections of the thesis but for the moment I want to note that Aronson's model for autobiographical flashback incorporates Turim's function 5 in particular, but also functions 4 and 6, and Aronson's model for life-changing incident uses both Turim's function 4 as well as 7, which are used in Outline Two of *Surfacing for Air* as shown in Chapter Two.

However, significantly, what sets Aronson apart from Turim is the way she approaches her analysis of the criteria of why and when to use flashback. Aronson has condensed her categories so that they are defined by structure as well as by purpose and function and it is this area which I intend to focus on and investigate in greater detail through my own writing practice, as will be shown in Chapter Two, as well in the analysis of four contemporary films in Chapter Three.

As with Turim's list of functions, Aronson's categories can, and do, interweave and occur in combination and in conjunction with each other, but it is worth considering her two main categories in depth to show precisely what are their central functions.

Assessing Aronson

To do this, I wish to break down Aronson's theory on these two categories into two main areas of concern, as I believe that they are entirely separate:

1. How to assess whether or not to use flashback narrative structure.
2. How to apply flashback narrative structure.

How to assess whether or not to use flashback narrative structure

According to Aronson, with both flashback as thwarted dream or flashback as case history, the first three criteria which must be met when deciding whether or not to employ flashback narrative structure are the same. They are:

- The story in the past is more important than the story in the present
- There is a strong element of a detective story

- The enigmatic outsider in the story has a central role. (Aronson states that often the central tension of the film concerns a conflict between the enigmatic outsider's personal life or well-being and their professional duties)

However, from this point the criteria differ according to whether or not flashback as thwarted dream or flashback as case history is employed.

Flashback as thwarted dream should be used in narratives:

- Where the enigmatic outsider is seen from the inside
- Where the person having the flashbacks is the enigmatic outsider
- When the flashbacks explain the enigmatic outsider
- Where the enigmatic outsider appears capable of change

Flashback as case history should be used in narratives:

- Where the enigmatic outsider is seen from the outside
- Where the person having the flashbacks is not the enigmatic outsider
- When flashbacks do not explain the enigmatic outsider
- Where the enigmatic outsider does not appear capable of change

It can be seen that the differences between flashback as thwarted dream and flashback as case history are primarily affected by whose POV is being presented during both the present and the past scenes. A screenwriter would employ flashback as thwarted dream, for instance, if their aim were to explain the actions/character (usually appearing strange and alienating in the first act) of the enigmatic outsider. The revelation of the flashbacks works to explain the reasons behind the outsider's strange behaviour and is employed and structured in a way to make the audience more sympathetic towards him or her. For this reason it is essential that, although the outsider is the antagonist in the present story, he becomes the protagonist in the past story so that the audience can see past events from the outsider's POV and can thus understand his actions.

However, conversely, a screenwriter would employ flashback as case history if his or her aim were to keep a distance between the audience and the enigmatic outsider by keeping them as ultimately unknowable, or presenting them as a case for analysis rather than a subject for sympathy. In this situation the audience should never get inside the head of the outsider and, for this reason, it is essential to keep the outsider as the antagonist in both the past and the present stories.

At this point, before I analyse how to apply Aronson's two main theories, it is worth reviewing her three sub-sets and the reasons I rejected them.⁶³

1. Flashback as life-changing incident

This type of flashback - the first of Aronson's three subsets - is used to show a character's state of mind at one particular moment. Films such as *Ordinary People* are models for this device and use a particular, incomplete flashback which re-occurs at various points throughout the film, at moments of trauma for the protagonist until the sequence is seen in its entirety, revealing the mysteries and motives of the protagonist.

Although I felt that, in the case of Helen Duncan, I could use her revelation of the sinking of *HMS Barham* as such a life-changing incident, or indeed the moment she is convicted under The Witchcraft Act at the Old Bailey, I did not feel that this would benefit the audience's understanding of why she had been convicted, which I gauged to be of most interest. I also concluded that by giving the POV to Helen Duncan this would take away the ambiguity as to her genuineness, which I wished to retain. Therefore I chose not to employ this version of flashback narrative structure.

2. Flashback as illustration

According to Aronson, this flashback narrative device – the second of the three subsets – is most suitable for use in a detective film set in the present where a

⁶³ It is worth reiterating at this point that one of the guiding principles of the development of my work was the desire not to explain Helen Duncan or present her POV as a means of interpreting the narrative, and this is the basis on which I rejected these three approaches.

suspect or witness relates their version of what happened in the past. Aronson cites *Crimes and Misdemeanours* as an example of this type of flashback. Although I felt that my screenplay would involve the uncovering of an incident or crime in the past of one or more of my characters, I concluded that Aronson's contention that this model should be used primarily to make a character's dilemma in the present more vivid – and is often used to show the character's state of mind at that moment – meant that it would not be suitable for *Hellish Nell*. Although I believed that a great injustice had been done to Helen Duncan, reducing her to a broken woman, my main concern was to tell the story in the past and not the story in the present, and for this reason I decided I should not test this model in the development of my screenplay.

3. Flashback as autobiographical narrative

Films such as *The Notebook* follow the model for autobiographical narrative flashback, using voice-overs by the protagonist in the story in the present. This device can be used in conjunction with either of Aronson's two main categories but I judged this was not a model I wished to pursue as I wished to keep Helen Duncan as an enigmatic figure/outsider throughout. I also wished to present contradictory POVs through the flashback and for that reason I rejected this model of flashback narrative structure.

Having explored Aronson's sub-set models I now wish to return to the second area of concern in my analysis of both flashback as thwarted dream and flashback as case history – that is, their application.

How to apply flashback narrative structure

The question as to whether or not the outsider is capable of change impacts upon the structure of the screenplay as it ultimately decides how and where the screenplay both begins and ends.

Aronson suggests the screenplay in both flashback as case history and flashback as thwarted dream should start at what she refers to as the triggering crisis. In both frameworks this must be at a turning point or crisis for the enigmatic outsider's life

and it serves to set in motion the flashbacks to the story in the past as well as triggering the story in the present. The triggering crisis always appears twice (once at the start of the film and again after flashbacks have depicted the story in the past in full, always chronologically) and the past has caught up with the present. After the triggering crisis appears a second time, there are no more flashbacks. The film ends at this point (case history) or proceeds with new action in the present towards the climax (thwarted dream).

In flashback as thwarted dream, this triggering crisis (or hook) is usually the second act turning point in the enigmatic outsider's story. This more often than not marks their lowest point and it creates the moment (or disturbance) that kicks the present day story back into the past and the first flashback. In narrative terms, the film has started at the end of Act 2, i.e. two thirds of the way through the narrative, and this means it must return to that point by the end of the series of flashbacks. Thus the screenwriter still has the whole of the third act in which to allow the outsider to fight their final battle and regain (or at least pursue) their 'dream', with the climax depicting the quest either won or lost.

Flashbacks – far from simple

The issue of where to establish that beginning image in flashback narrative is also examined briefly by Linda Segar who agrees with Aronson on the importance of finding what she calls 'a crisis point' that sets everything in motion. She states:⁶⁴

“At crisis point, characters are particularly vulnerable to being thrust in new directions. They are ready for something new to unfold because, in some way, their old world (or old story) has been destroyed, and a new story is emerging.”

However, although flashback as thwarted dream starts at the second act turning point, flashback as case history is constructed differently.

⁶⁴ Segar, L. *Making a Good Script Great* (Los Angeles, Silman-James, 2010), p. 101.

Here Aronson's triggering crisis (or hook) is often the death of the outsider (either literally or in some cases spiritually) which is in fact the end of the third act being used as the opening of the film – leaving room only for a final climatic twist if desired. The outsider's death kicks off the story in the past, and it is the protagonist/investigator's task in the story in the present to review their life and to try and get inside the mind of the outsider. Significantly, according to Aronson, though the protagonist can be changed by their interaction with the outsider and their story, the outsider remains ultimately enigmatic.⁶⁵

The decisions about where to insert the remaining flashbacks are critical. Aronson suggests that in both thwarted dream and case history these should be arranged chronologically. She also asserts it is essential to place the flashback at a crucial dramatic moment and to move back and forth between cliffhangers in the past and cliffhangers in the present. This is a point also made by Robert McKee who suggests that flashbacks fail when they flash back to flat scenes with dull, unwanted expositions, which serve only to slow the pace.⁶⁶ This is an opinion also held by Syd Field, who goes one step further and calls flashback narrative structure a dated technique.⁶⁷ He quotes the producer/director Tony Bill as saying: "When I see a flashback in a script, I know the story's in trouble. It's an easy way out for the novice writer."

However, I would argue it is precisely the complexity of flashback narrative structure which causes the problems. The question must be, therefore, why is it that flashback narrative structure meets with these negative responses and why do most screenwriting theorists (with the exception of Turim and Aronson for example) devote so little space in their books on screenwriting towards trying to analyse it?

I would suggest that lack of enthusiasm stems from a combination of factors. It is true many inexperienced screenwriters use the framework inappropriately (for exposition purposes when a simple visual would work far more effectively, for

⁶⁵ Aronson states: "The purpose is to show a normal personal (the investigator-protagonist) being affected by someone so strange and possessed of such an odd mentality that, however much they are researched and analyzed, they will always remain a mystery." p. 119.

⁶⁶ McKee, p. 341.

⁶⁷ Field *Screenplay*, p. 137.

example) but it is also apparent it is far from the simple device that it may appear at first.

As discussed earlier, Aronson has set out concisely how to assess which sort of stories lend themselves to flashback narrative. Using those three main guidelines (that is: the story in the past is more important than the story in the present; there is a strong element of a detective story; and the enigmatic outsider in the story has a central role) a screenplay's suitability for flashback narrative can be evaluated quite clearly. However, what is more problematic is the second area: how to apply flashback structure. I would suggest that often a screenplay's failure to use flashbacks effectively revolves around this second area of concern and I set out to determine what other guidelines, if any, would prove useful in this respect. To achieve this I analysed Aronson's theoretical framework against both the various stages of the development of my own screenplay, and applied it to the break-down of four mainstream contemporary films which employ flashback narrative structure, as set out more fully in Chapters Two and Three.

The key flashback questions

The four main narrative elements I intend to investigate further are:

- The triggering crisis or hook
- The first flashback
- Subsequent flashbacks
- POVs

Although Aronson devotes considerable space to setting out the necessary structural elements for developing a single successful three-act screenplay, the challenge of juggling what is effectively two (or possibly more) separate narratives in different time frames creates its own pitfalls.

Since narrative structure involves the events of the story and the way they are positioned, the choices and subsequent decisions as to where to place those events

become even more complex when flashback narratives are involved. In very basic simplified terms, screenwriting theorist Michael Hauge claims that narrative structure “consists of the specific events in a movie and their position in relation to one another. Proper structure occurs when the right events occur in the right sequence to elicit maximum emotional involvement in the audience.”⁶⁸

This point is key to the success of flashback narrative and is part of a long tradition of thinking about what makes a well-formed narrative. Aristotle’s writings on the nature of drama highlight this: “The various incidents must be so arranged that if any one of them is differently placed or taken away the effect of wholeness will be seriously disrupted. For if the presence or absence of something makes no apparent difference, it is no real part of the whole.”⁶⁹

This argument is carried further by Ed Tan in his book, *Emotion and the Structure of Narrative film*, based on his own research with film audiences. Here he states: “A feature film is not an arbitrary series of mutually independent events capable of evoking emotions, but rather a continuing series of causally related changes.”⁷⁰

In this Tan identifies one of the main issues. An inappropriate decision made within its narrative structure may mean a screenplay loses not only its coherence but also its emotional core and dramatic strength. Tan believes the consciousness of the audience contains recollections of events in the immediate past and expectations of events in the immediate future and he identifies the dramatic force of the unexpected. He goes on to state:

“During each scene expectations are created that the viewer expects to see fulfilled in the present course of the action, as well as expectations with regard to events that the viewer believes will take place much later, in all probability outside the present scene.”⁷¹

⁶⁸ Hauge, M. *Writing Screenplays that Sell* (London: Elm Tree Books London 1988) p. 82.

⁶⁹ Aristotle/Horace/Longinus, *Classical Literary Criticism*, trans. T.S. Dorsch, (London: Penguin 1965) p. 43.

⁷⁰ Tan, E. S. *Emotion and the Structure of Narrative Film*, (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Assoc. 1996)

p. 62.

⁷¹ Tan, p. 104.

The supposition is that a scene will answer one or more questions, while at the same time setting up new ones, as well as leaving others to be answered at a later date. However, in the case of flashback narrative Tan allows that an audience: "often have only the vaguest idea of when or indeed whether a certain long-lived anticipation will be fulfilled..."⁷²

This highlights the importance not only of choosing the correct re-connection point between the past and present narratives in flashback narrative structure, but also of maintaining the audience's level of interest in both stories. Tan posits:

"If a film is not entertaining, for example, because there is too little structure in it ... the natural viewer of the traditional feature film will have negative feelings."⁷³

Again this emphasises the consequences of too little structure in a film and of choosing the incorrect cross-overs or what Aronson refers to as the 'dramatic high points' which act as links between the past and present stories.

Apart from the issues discussed above, the last area of concern I set out to analyse further in the writing of my screenplay were the problems inherent to a shifting narrative POV. Seymour Chatman in his book *Story and Discourse* suggests: "Access to a character's consciousness is the standard entrée to his point of view, the usual and quickest means by which we come to identify with him. Learning his thoughts insures an intimate connection."⁷⁴

It is my contention that often when a screenplay involving flashback narrative fails, its weakness lies in its inability to identify correctly whose POV the audience is supposed to be following. As Linda Segar states: "A writer must engage an audience with a film. To do this, the writer needs to decide how much we, the audience, need to know to identify and empathise with the main character."⁷⁵

⁷² Tan, p. 104.

⁷³ Tan, p. 64.

⁷⁴ Chatman, p. 157.

⁷⁵ Segar, p. 86.

The power of a shifting narrative POV is precisely that it allows an audience's engagement with the characters and their stories to move throughout the film with the shifts in POV and also that it allows the power relations to change with the altering viewpoint, since story knowledge and interpretive power are so intimately related. The influence of a shifting POV is clearly illustrated in *Hellish Nell* where the protagonists change with each flashback.

However, the danger is that audiences often find shifts in narrative POV, and time, confusing and this ultimately creates a barrier, and causes a lack of emotional connection with the characters. With my own screenplay, *Hellish Nell*, because of my deployment of POVs in my story and screenplay, I am very aware the shifting narrative POV will affect the audience's perception of Helen Duncan. However, this allowed me to pursue my dramatic intent while remaining within the framework I set myself, as explained in the Introduction.

The overall conclusions of these points led to questions of how to obtain the right balance between those viewpoints, and how to alternate the emotional tension between the various characters, and these are issues upon which I focus further in this thesis. It was these reflections which led me to consider modifying Aronson's model, and these key issues are some of the concerns which I explore through the analysis of my own screenplay's development in Chapter Two, as well as through a critical examination of four contemporary mainstream feature films in Chapter Three.

CHAPTER TWO

Testing Aronson's theories in practice

This chapter focuses on Aronson's thwarted dream and case history narrative structures, and the results that arose from testing their applicability against my own writing practice. In order to explore their effectiveness I analysed each model's relevance against separate screenplay versions, assessing their usefulness at various stages of my research development. My methodology was to adhere as closely as possible to Aronson's guidelines at each stage of development to allow me to analyse and pinpoint potential problem areas.

The chapter is divided into two parts. The first section deals with the examination of Aronson's thwarted dream narrative structure through the development of *Surfacing for Air*.⁷⁶ The findings of this analysis have been truncated in this thesis since it was decided not to progress the outlines to screenplay stage, but the results were of paramount importance as it was through this initial investigation that the significance of theme and genre was first identified. It also pointed to the crucial role of point-of-view. This led to these areas of concern being explored further in both the analysis of Aronson's case history narrative structure and also through the breakdown of four contemporary films as set out in Chapter Three.

The second section deals with the examination of Aronson's case history narrative structure through the development of the screenplay *Hellish Nell*. This two-part examination also investigates four crucial topics. These are the placing of the triggering crisis, the first flashback and subsequent flashbacks, as well as assessing how to make the connections between past and present stories successful.

Helen Duncan's Story

In order to understand how the stories in the past and present are structured and interwoven, here is a brief summary of Helen Duncan's story, so that the

⁷⁶ For a brief outline of *Surfacing for Air* see Appendix 4.

amendments and decisions involved in the development of each of the outlines and/or screenplays (*Surfacing for Air* and *Hellish Nell*) can be explored more easily.

Victoria Helen Duncan was born in Callander, Scotland, on November 25th 1897,⁷⁷ fourth child to Isabella and Archie MacFarlane. Her father was an upper-working-class skilled artisan.⁷⁸ She was a tomboy, with a reputation for a fearsome temper when provoked. As a child she showed some sign of having a 'second sight'.⁷⁹

Helen became pregnant in 1914⁸⁰ and, being unmarried, was sent away to Dundee in disgrace. She never saw her family again. To keep herself, Helen joined the workforce at the jute mills and there met Jean Duncan, who encouraged her to write to her brother, Henry, who was fighting at the front. He eventually returned home, ill with rheumatic fever, and Helen and he fell for each other at first sight.⁸¹ Henry never fully regained his health and although he tried to work as a cabinet maker,⁸² times were hard, and Helen had to be the breadwinner of the family.

The Duncans moved back to Dundee and it was here that Helen took the first steps towards becoming a medium.⁸³ Once success came, Henry and Helen decided to seek the Spiritualists' National Union's diploma which would give her full credibility as a medium.⁸⁴ To achieve this, they left Scotland and came down to London to the London Spiritualist Alliance in 1930 to undergo a series of tests.⁸⁵ It was here that Helen encountered Harry Price, who was determined to prove her a fraud.⁸⁶ Although she met with initial success at the LSA,⁸⁷ suspicions that she was a charlatan began to be voiced, and although none of the accusations were proven,

⁷⁷ Armour, p. 13.

⁷⁸ Brealey, G. *Two Worlds of Helen Duncan* (London: Regency 1985) p. 15.

⁷⁹ Crossley, A. *The Story of Helen Duncan: Materialisation Medium*, (Greenford: Psychic World Classic) p. 11.

⁸⁰ Gaskill, p. 45.

⁸¹ Crossley, p. 13.

⁸² Hartley, R. *Helen Duncan: the Mystery Show Trial* (London: HPr 2007) p. 29.

⁸³ Brealey, p. 33.

⁸⁴ During the C19th and early C20th, the Spiritualist movement was popular and saw a growth of women mediums, as Alex Owen notes: "Spiritualists believe that it is possible for the living to contact and communicate with the spirits of the dead, but ... also held that women were particularly gifted as mediums of the communication." Owen, A, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England*. (London: Virago 1989) p. 1.

⁸⁵ Shandler, p. 23.

⁸⁶ Hazelgrove, J. *Spiritualism in British Society*, (London: Cresset 2000) p. 212.

⁸⁷ Hartley, pp. 31 – 33.

Henry and Helen went back to Scotland. Here, despite being tried as a fraud in 1933,⁸⁸ Helen's popularity and fame continued to grow.

The outbreak of the war brought Helen into even greater demand. She began to travel across the country, giving séances in every major city.⁸⁹ She told of the loss of *HMS Hood*,⁹⁰ and also *HMS Barham*. The first had been public knowledge but the sinking of the *Barham* had been top secret and Helen's announcement set the Admiralty on full alert.⁹¹ How had Helen known about the sinking of this ship? Had there been a security lapse – or worse, had she really got some sort of psychic powers? Either way, she was a security risk and had to be stopped.⁹²

Helen Duncan was arrested at one of her séances for fraud just as plans were being drawn up for D-Day.⁹³ The usual sentence for such an event was a small fine⁹⁴ but instead it was decided Helen was to be tried at the Old Bailey under the Witchcraft Act of 1735.⁹⁵ The trial was a media sensation. When Helen was found guilty and sent to prison, many started to question the validity of the trial and pointed to Government (and MI5) involvement, demanding an appeal. But it was turned down.⁹⁶

Helen emerged from her sentence a broken woman. She died in 1956 following a police raid at one of her séances.⁹⁷

Thwarted Dream Narrative Structure

My Approach

As with any biopic, the immediate questions to be addressed were what to include and where would be the most appropriate place to start. Although the hardships Helen Duncan faced as a young girl and single mother impacted upon her character

⁸⁸ Brealey, p. 71.

⁸⁹ Hartley, p. 45.

⁹⁰ Crossley, p. 47.

⁹¹ Most secret loss of *Barham* Board of Enquiry April 1944 ADM 1/11948 PRO Kew.

⁹² Hartley, p. 59.

⁹³ Gaskill, p. 192.

⁹⁴ Crossley, p. 49.

⁹⁵ Gaskill, p. 193.

⁹⁶ Barbanell, M. *The Case of Helen Duncan* (Oxshott: Spiritual Truth Press 2003) pp. 135-136.

⁹⁷ Shandler, p. 218.

and life, I felt the main point of interest was her trial under the Witchcraft Act at the Old Bailey and the decision was therefore made to concentrate on the events surrounding, and leading up to, this incident. The question of narrative space has to be considered and this, combined with my decision to focus on the trial, led to the exclusion of the earlier life of Helen. However, this decision was not a reflection of the restrictions or influence of the flashback narrative structure itself but rather of my own narrative concerns about the story I wished to tell.⁹⁸

The next issue to be addressed was the specific question of point-of-view. As stated earlier there were two main issues of concern in portraying Helen's story: my own personal ethical position over the 'myth' of Helen Duncan and my doubts about her authenticity, which determined my whole approach.

As is clear, the question of focalisation (and therefore audience identification and perception) is closely connected with the concepts of subjectivity and objectivity.

For the purposes of this thesis I use the term focalisation as the term used in modern narratology for 'point-of-view' – that is, for the kind of perspective from which the events of a story are witnessed. Celestino Deleyto in *Focalisation in Film Narrative* maintains that focalisation is an essential code in film narratives and can be external or internal.⁹⁹ Further, for the purpose of this thesis I use the term subjectivity when a perspective is seen to be influenced by individual, or personal, character considerations and emotional perspectives, and I use the term objectivity when a perspective is seen to be free from any character's personal considerations and emotional perspectives.

⁹⁸ Periods of time that have been left out of the narrative are often referred to as ellipses. The ellipsis is usually marked by a gap that indicates some events in the story have been skipped over. This plot technique allows a writer to focus on events that are more significant than others and to juxtapose in the narrative different times and different settings. Flashbacks often fill in ellipses; sometimes flashbacks themselves contain gaps or fragments.

⁹⁹ Deleyto, C. *Focalisation in Film Narrative* (Atlantis, vol. XIII, nn. 1-2, noviembre 1991 pp. 167-175).

Edward Brannigan suggests in his book, *Point of View in Cinema*: "Subjectivity is not to do with what the film is about – a particular character/topic/theme – but how the film presents or portrays its characters of the story."¹⁰⁰

Brannigan's argument indicates the importance of achieving the correct balance between focalisation, identification and subjectivity. In my own practice, through the development of various script outlines, this proved to be an important factor in my decision-making in the overall narrative.

Given these concerns, my decision to use the thwarted dream flashback narrative structure because of the attraction of starting at the climactic scene and flashing back appealed to me as a means of telling Helen's story, which meant that a number of narrative issues had to be addressed. Aronson states that the two main models of flashback narrative films are very specific in their use of protagonist and antagonist to create intimacy and distance. The immediate question which arose regarding my own screenplay was how could Aronson's thwarted dream flashback model be employed to tell Helen's story, without influencing the audience by revealing too much of her inner thoughts and conflicts? This question was addressed in the development of *Surfacing for Air*.

The Development of *Surfacing for Air* – a thwarted dream

The answer to this problem lay in telling Helen's story from another person's point-of-view. This also addressed my other concern, namely the lack of a dream to fulfil in Helen's life story.¹⁰¹ For this reason a fictional, second character, Connie Hutton, a character with just such a dream, was introduced. Her story showed the effect that her friendship with Helen Duncan had upon her life and began with her first meeting

¹⁰⁰ Brannigan, E., *Point of View in Cinema: a theory of narration and subjectivity in classical film*, (Berlin: Mouton Publishers Berlin 1984) p. 1.

¹⁰¹ I initially considered three potential dreams for Helen: to escape the unhappiness of her early life; to be accepted as a genuine medium; or to help the bereaved and the grieving. However, I rejected the first dream as I felt it took away the emphasis of the trial and the part of Helen's life on which I wished to concentrate, and rejected the second and third dreams as I judged that in order for the audience to be willing Helen to succeed in the final act they should unquestionably believe in her gifts and intentions. As Aronson states, the intention and effect of the flashback in the thwarted dream model is to win the outsider enormous sympathy and goodwill from the audience who then wills him/her to succeed in achieving his/her dream in Act 3 (Aronson p. 120) and I felt this to be in conflict with my own ethical position with respect to Helen Duncan as set out in Chapter One.

with Helen. This had the benefit of allowing an audience to see the events of Helen's life as they were understood by another character, and gave me the freedom to create a thwarted dream for Connie to attain and fulfil in the final act.

Thus, in my screenplay *Surfacing for Air*, Connie is the antagonist in the story in the present, and the protagonist in the story in the past.

Where is the Hook?

In deciding where to start my screenplay *Surfacing for Air*, it was essential to establish where the opening 'hook' should be. Aronson states that the triggering crisis in the thwarted dream narrative structure should be at the second act turning point in the enigmatic outsider's story (that is Connie's), and is normally at their lowest point – where they are often symbolically shut out or are close to real or spiritual death. How helpful was this guideline to my own proposed screenplay?

In Connie's story, the lowest point is at the moment she decides to take her own life. Thus Connie's story – and the story in the present – starts with her attempted suicide. This choice of hook also accords with Aronson's argument that it should appear at the second act turning point in Connie's story.

In the opening of *Surfacing for Air* as set out below, the effect that this choice of hook has on the proposed screenplay can be seen. In the first outline of *Surfacing for Air* the opening scene is of Connie wading out to sea and being rescued and her half-conscious body being dragged to shore as described below.

Hook - Outline One

Portsmouth 1948

On a rainy winter's day beautiful CONNIE HUTTON tries to take her own life. But she is saved by a young doctor, EDWARD BALFOUR, who drags her unconscious from the sea. Taken to the local hospital, she is put under his care.

No-one comes to 'claim' Connie, and EDWARD becomes fascinated by her, intrigued by her beauty and mystery. Edward sits by Connie's bed, trying to get her to talk. But she won't. He tells her that she has so much to live for. She mumbles that he wouldn't say that if he knew she were a murderer. Edward is now intrigued even further by this confession. Is she really a murderer, or is it in her imagination? And if she is, whom did she murder?

The present day scenes of the triggering crisis then lead back into the past story and a flashback of Connie's first meeting with Helen, and as set out by Aronson's guidelines they act as a trigger to the story in the past. This is an instance which indicated the applicability of Aronson's theory to this specific part of my writing practice.

However, although the opening scenes posed the active question as to what had brought Connie to this state and whom had she murdered, thus filling Aronson's principle that the hook should make an audience more interested in the story in the past than the story in the present, a stronger link to the event/events which drove Connie to such despair – namely the death of her son – was needed to sustain narrative interest for the audience as the screenplay developed.

One consideration was to have a flashback to follow the point when Connie confesses to Edward in hospital that she is a murderer, so that the brief scene which follows her confession is viewed in flashback and immediately adds another mystery, which the audience has to solve.

But how could I keep within Aronson's guidelines if I brought in this new flashback at this point?

The answer lay in re-considering one of Aronson's sub-sets, namely flashback as life-changing incident.

Although all three of these sub-sets had already been reviewed and rejected, it became clear that flashback as life-changing incident could indeed be applied successfully to this part of my working practice. The first fragmented flashback could be brought into the opening sequence and be repeated at various relevant stages to build to finally reveal the truth about Connie's son's death, while at the same time the

main story (with Connie as antagonist in the story in the present and protagonist in the story in the past) could continue to be developed according to Aronson's thwarted dream framework.

This fits in with Aronson's guidelines, which state that the sub-sets can occur both independently or within or alongside the two major flashback models.

Thus the new outline now read:

Hook - Outline Two

Portsmouth 1948

On a rainy winter's day beautiful CONNIE HUTTON tries to take her own life. But she is saved by a young doctor, EDWARD BALFOUR, who drags her unconscious from the sea. Taken to the local hospital, she is put under his care.

No-one comes to 'claim' Connie, and EDWARD becomes fascinated by her, intrigued by her beauty and mystery. Edward sits by Connie's bed, trying to get her to talk. But she won't. He tells her that she has so much to live for. She mumbles that he wouldn't say that if he knew she were a murderer. Startled, he asks her what she means.

Edward is now seriously hooked on her case, intrigued even further by this confession. Is she really a murderer, or is it in her imagination? And if she is, whom did she murder?

Connie stirs. It was raining she says.

Quick flashback: POV someone stumbling down a dark alleyway, rubble and bricks strewn across the path: sense of urgency.

Edward tries to ask her what she means. She looks at him blankly. You said it was raining, Edward tells her. She shakes her head, she can't make the connection. You must be able to remember something, he insists. Again she shakes her head. She closes her eyes. A trolley rattles past ...

We then cut out to the first major flashback sequence of Connie's first meeting with Helen, as before.

However, although the new quick flashback scene of running feet created a greater sense of intrigue, its impact would be heightened if it was moved to the opening sequence to become part of the triggering crisis. Therefore this flashback was subsequently included in the scenes before Connie is taken to hospital, the sequence of which can be seen below in detail. This is still in keeping with Aronson's guidelines and it gives the opening more power and mystery.

Another concern which had to be addressed was the issue of the significance of Helen Duncan in Connie's life. I judged this feeling could be created more strongly in the audience's mind if her importance was introduced in the opening hook rather than waiting until the first major flashback sequence. Again, this did not alter the applicability of Aronson's thwarted dream model to this outline.

Thus:

Hook - Outline Three

Portsmouth 1948

Quick Flashback: POV unseen runner. Rain is beating down heavily. Sound of short frantic breathing.

A woman (Connie) is looking up at a boarded-up building. She is in obvious distress. She starts to bang on the door. The house is clearly empty. She knows this but can't bring herself to acknowledge it. She calls out the name "Helen!" but no-one comes. Finally, exhausted, she stops banging on the door, then leaning with her back to the front door, sinks down onto the pavement with a sob.

Connie is now sitting alone on a bench on the sea-front looking out to sea.

She stands up and moves towards the waves. She starts to walk in, fully clothed. As she does so, scene is intercut with:

Quick Flashback: POV runner. Breathing has become more laboured as the runner stumbles on through what is now seen to be a narrow bombed-out alley, past craters and rubble of collapsed buildings.

The woman continues to walk purposefully out into the sea. She strides out into the crashing waves. She appears oblivious to all about her.

Quick Flashback: The runner falls, scrambles up, and stumbles on wildly. There is a feeling of tense urgency to his every movement.

The woman is now out of her depth. There are shouts from the beach behind her. She starts to sink below the surface.

Quick Flashback: The feet run on. Trip, falling into what seems to be a deep dark hole.

The sea is starting to close around the woman.

Darkness.

Bright whiteness of a medical coat. Connie opens her eyes and focuses on the stark whiteness of a doctor's coat. DR. EDWARD BALFOUR is bending over her. He sees she is starting to stir, and gently asks her what she can remember. She says nothing.

Connie lies in hospital. Edward goes through her bag but there is nothing inside to help identify her. In fact nothing at all, except one small worn teddy bear. No-one seems to know who the patient is, and no-one comes to claim her. Edward sits by her bed, trying to get her to talk, but she won't. He tells her she has so much to live for. She mumbles that he wouldn't say that if he knew she were a murderer. Startled, he asks her what she means, but she closes up again. He asks who Helen is. He tells her she was murmuring her name in her sleep. Connie can't remember. But Helen's name somehow feels familiar. But she isn't certain.

Connie blinks, obviously confused. A trolley rattles past ... Becomes:

First Major Flashback: The rattle of wind against windows. Connie is playing with her son Philip on the floor of a sitting room. Across the hallway is her father's doctor's consulting room.

First Flashback

This first major flashback sequence sets up the audience for Connie's first meeting with Helen.

The changes are important because they make a considerable difference to the script. They create a strong and immediate emotional connection between Helen and Connie and hint at Connie's dependency on Helen. However, while still keeping to Aronson's framework, what is also interesting is that the amendment affects the structure and balance of the script and the choice of what to include in the first major flashback.

Although Aronson does not refer to this issue, one of the reasons for this is that the changes made in the hook scenes alter the genre of the script. Whereas in Outline One the question posed is 'whom did Connie kill?' – which therefore pushes the screenplay towards the thriller genre¹⁰² – the inclusion of Helen and the running feet, as well as the teddy bear found in her bag, in Outline Three, shifts the screenplay more towards being a personal drama,¹⁰³ in which the central problem of the character drives the plot and provides the motivation for all the action.¹⁰⁴

Aronson maintains that the first flashback of the film will almost always depict the event in the past that started the initiating event of the story – in structural terms. This is clearly the case in my own screenplay, in which the first main flashback depicts the initial meeting between Connie and Helen, although the content of these scene changes between the different drafts. However, in all of the drafts the opening flashbacks enable the audience to see Helen's actions from Connie's viewpoint. Thus, while the outline maintains a focus on Helen, it is from a distance without the influence of subjectivity.

This process of decision-making to select links between past and present stories continued through a series of sixteen outlines, staying as closely as possible within Aronson's thwarted dream framework. However, as *Surfacing for Air* developed, it became clear that the choice of the links was also affected by an emerging understanding of the genre of the story and its theme and therefore it was necessary to review where it was appropriate to make changes in the subsequent crossovers to

¹⁰² Phil Parker lists five subsets in the Thriller genre. These are: the relationship thriller, the conspiracy thriller, the investigative thriller, the murder mystery, and the action thriller. pp. 154-156.

¹⁰³ Phil Parker lists five subsets in the Personal Drama genre. These are: the inner drama, the domestic drama, the rites of passage drama, the communal drama, and the epic drama. pp. 159-161.

¹⁰⁴ Parker, p. 159.

ensure that the screenplay maintained its emotional power and suspense while still keeping within the genre expectations.

I also found that theme impacted upon the choice of connections between the past and present stories. Although Aronson is aware of the importance of theme in linking characters in films using tandem or sequential narrative, citing *City of Hope* as an example where the plot not only illustrates the theme but also shows how the theme of graft and corruption affects all the characters, she does not posit it also affects the choice of connections between past and present stories and, as my development of Helen Duncan's narratives made clear to me, this is an important omission.

Theme as an important element in its own right is a great aid to the structuring of films using flashback narrative as it helps the writer narrow down the dramatic focus. As McKee says: "The more beautifully you shape your work around one clear idea, the more meanings the audiences will discover in your film as they take your idea and follow its implications into every aspect of their lives."¹⁰⁵

In *Surfacing for Air*, for example, it was Helen's battle against the authorities and Connie's struggle against her husband and the hospital in the story in the past which was reflected in the story in the present, through Edward's fight against the powers that be who wanted to dictate the way in which he treated his patients.

In flashback as thwarted dream Aronson suggests that flashbacks start at the triggering crisis and continue until they have told the story in the past and the audience is back at the original starting point, where now both the past and present stories meet. This gives the screenplay its impetus into the third act and moves the search to achieve the thwarted dream back to the forefront. The importance of this final act is emphasised by Drew Yanno in his book *The 3rd Act: Writing a Great Ending to your Screenplay*, who states: "A film's ending is crucial ... more than any other part of the film, the ending determines whether the audience likes a film or not."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ McKee, p. 115.

¹⁰⁶ Yanno, D, *The 3rd Act: Writing a Great Ending to your Screenplay*, (New York and London: Continuum 2006) back cover.

In my outlines for *Surfacing for Air* this is the point where the theme becomes the strongest. It is where Edward defies the hospital authorities' instructions and stops Connie's treatment in order for her to be able to leave, where Connie finds the strength to confront George, and where Helen flouts the court order against her holding any more séances in order to help Connie find out the truth about her son's death. Thus all three storylines are propelled through Act 3 towards the dramatic climax. This is in line with Aronson's structural model.

However, despite having established that *Surfacing for Air* was well suited to flashback narrative, it also became clear that although this version covered the main events of Helen Duncan's life and in particular the trial, it failed to maintain focus on her in the most effective way.

To counter this I decided to deviate from Aronson's framework by including three brief flashbacks, which would focus entirely on Helen Duncan and were seen from her viewpoint. These were key moments and designed to give the audience a small insight into her emotional state at that time and thus increase audience engagement.

Nevertheless, despite these additions it remained clear that the introduction of Connie as the protagonist in the story in the past, while fulfilling Aronson's requirement for a thwarted dream narrative, detracted from portraying the key events in Helen's life.

This naturally threw up several concerns, particularly the question of point-of-view, which I believe exposed one of the limitations of Aronson's thwarted dream flashback narrative structure in its applicability to telling Helen Duncan's story as developed in *Surfacing for Air*.

As stated previously, in my interpretation of Helen Duncan I wanted to keep her as unfathomable as possible, without losing the focus on her. In *Surfacing for Air*, I proposed to achieve this by introducing Connie as the enigmatic outsider, through whom the audience would gain access to Helen Duncan's character and dilemmas.

By seeing the events through Connie's eyes I aimed to maintain a distance between Helen and the audience.

However, it became clear as the script outline progressed that there would be a potential problem in adhering to Aronson's criteria for the final act. This is the moment when the enigmatic outsider (that is Connie) finds the strength to fight the final battle and fulfil her 'dream'. For Connie, this is to stand up to George and to win back not only her sense of self-worth, but also her daughter. However, since I needed to keep the focus on Helen Duncan as well, it was important to bring Helen to the forefront and to include her in solving the mystery surrounding Connie's boy's death. Therefore, although Edward, the doctor, (as the protagonist/ investigator in the story in the present) led Connie to believe in herself again, it was Helen who provided the key to solving the mystery about her son.¹⁰⁷ However, this conflicted with the ethical element highlighted in my initial framework.

Indeed, it was the issue of how I wished to portray Helen Duncan which ultimately presented the main challenges of employing Aronson's thwarted dream flashback structure.

Although Aronson's advice regarding the triggering crisis and first flashback were applicable and especially useful, Aronson's criteria on which points-of-view to employ in past and present stories impacted on both the emotional balance of the screenplay and the issue of audience identification.

It is worth noting that this also appeared to be one of the issues revealed in two of the four films (*Hollywoodland* and *The Constant Gardener*) analysed in Chapter Three. This would indicate that Aronson's theory on points-of-view in flashback narrative structure is too rigid, and that these limitations impact upon the direction that a script may take.

¹⁰⁷ The addition of this flashback in the final act goes against Aronson's suggested framework, as discussed earlier in Chapter One. Aronson, p. 111.

Conclusion – thwarted development

Having thoroughly tested Aronson's thwarted dream flashback narrative structure against a series of outlines, my conclusion was that it was not suited to my own particular vision of the story I wished to tell. For this reason, I decided not to pursue the development of *Surfacing for Air* any further.

Instead I decided to consider the possibility of developing Helen Duncan's story using Aronson's case history flashback narrative structure as framework. I felt this might prove to be far more suited to my particular story and the reservations I had about how to portray Helen Duncan.

Aronson states that in this kind of narrative structure the outsider is treated with scientific distance¹⁰⁸ and the flashbacks are used to make the audience see the outsider from the outside, as an ultimately unknowable character, which suggested that this could offer the opportunity of creating a screenplay which maintains the focus on Helen Duncan, while at the same time still presenting her as an enigmatic and mysterious figure.

Case History Narrative Structure

My Approach

Having tested, and rejected, Aronson's thwarted dream flashback model, I then tested the applicability of Aronson's case history flashback narrative structure to my own writing practice, analysing it against the various stages of the development of the next version of Helen Duncan's story, my screenplay *Hellish Nell*.

I assessed its usefulness to the development of my script through sixteen outlines, four step outlines and fourteen drafts of *Hellish Nell* and used these as examples to show the details of the amendments and the decisions involved. My methodology was again to adhere as closely as possible to Aronson's guidelines at each stage of development to allow me to analyse and pinpoint potential problem areas.

¹⁰⁸ Aronson states: "The flashbacks in case history . . . make the audience a scientific observer. . ." p. 118.

As before, I continued to use a framework of the four key points in Aronson's theory as the basis of my investigation, examining the impact of employing different points-of-view as well as assessing where was the most appropriate point to construct the connections between the past and present.

Aronson's guidelines for applying flashback as case history invites and encourages the audience to view the outsider figure from an external point-of-view in ways that can heighten the opacity or mystery of this character. In order to achieve this, the character having the flashbacks is not the outsider but a person or persons who have known the outsider. A famous example of this is the film *Citizen Kane* (1941) in which the reporter, Thompson, interviews a number of Kane's acquaintances to try and establish the truth about him and it is their experience of Kane which the audience sees in the flashbacks.

How does this new structure and change of point-of-view affect Helen Duncan's story and my screenplay?

Aronson describes flashback as case history as giving a documentary reality to the action and maintains this creates a feeling that the audience is ultimately an observer. As stated earlier, the creation of distance between the audience and Helen was precisely the effect I wished to generate. However, while it was necessary in *Surfacing for Air* to create another character, Connie, in order to keep that distance, the structure of flashback as case history differs from that of the thwarted dream in such a way that this was no longer necessary.

One of the distinct differences between the two flashback models is that in case history the enigmatic outsider is the antagonist – both in the story in the past and the story in the present. I therefore concluded that in the screenplay *Hellish Nell* Connie's presence in the story for the purpose of maintaining Helen as an enigmatic figure was no longer relevant. Rather, the narrative in the past, adhering to Aronson's structural model, concentrated on Helen Duncan's story as told by persons other than Helen herself, moving from one to many witnesses, but never told from Helen's POV.

In turn, the story in the present, instead of revolving around Dr. Edward Balfour and his discoveries about Connie and Helen's relationship in *Surfacing for Air*, is now focussed on journalist Tom Bradley and his search for the truth about Helen and the reasons for her arrest and trial. These links to Helen's story in the past, as set out by Aronson's flashback as case history model, were now seen through the eyes of people who knew her.

Having established the potential suitability of employing flashback as case history for *Hellish Nell*, it is useful at this stage to examine the two storylines (Tom's present day story and Helen's past story). For clarity of presentation the two stories are presented in tabular form.

| HELEN'S STORY | TOM'S STORY |
|--|---|
| <p>Helen's childhood. She meets Henry. Helen comes to London to the LSA and meets Harry Price. Helen is found guilty of fraud.</p> | <p>Tom is asked to write an obituary about Helen Duncan. Tom interviews Mollie Goldney, Harry Price's assistant.</p> |
| <p>Helen tells of the sinking of <i>HMS Barham</i>. Helen is arrested.</p> | <p>Tom interviews Sheila who was present at the <i>Barham</i> séance. Tom interviews Mary, a policewoman who was present at the arrest.</p> |
| <p>Helen is tried at the Old Bailey under the Witchcraft Act.</p> | <p>Tom talks to Joyce, secretary of Freddie Wiseman, Defence Minister, about Helen.</p> |
| <p>Helen is found guilty.</p> | <p>Tom talks to Geoffrey Wilson who acted as clerk for Loseby, Helen's barrister. Tom finally reaches Loseby in Hong Kong. He tells Tom that Maude, the prosecution's lawyer, was MI5. He believes they caused Helen's death.</p> |
| <p>Helen is released but is in poor health.</p> | <p>Tom's editor will not run Helen's story.</p> |
| <p>Helen dies as a result of a police raid. Helen is buried.</p> | <p>Henry Duncan tells Tom he will help with the story. Tom says it's too late.</p> |

Hook or Triggering Crisis

One of the main differences between thwarted dream flashback and case history flashback is where the starting point is positioned in the story in the present. As shown previously, thwarted dream flashback structure starts two-thirds of the way through an unfinished story and uses the final third to put forward new action in the present. However, case history flashback structure starts with a story that is over except for an ironic twist or climax. An example of this is in *Citizen Kane*, where the audience (but not the reporter Thompson) is allowed to see in the last scene that Rosebud is not the name of a long-lost love of Kane's as many believed, but is in fact that of his prized sledge, his last link with his lost childhood.

Aronson states that in flashback as case history the hook is usually placed at the enigmatic outsider's death and with *Hellish Nell* this seemed to be a suitable point to start. I therefore opened with a scene depicting the police raid, which leads to Helen's death.

However, having made that decision, there was another to be made. Although Aronson does not make the point, I would contend that, while it is clear where the screenplay should start, the specific contents of that scene are particularly important.

Although by opening with the enigmatic outsider's death a certain amount of curiosity is automatically generated, especially if they are famous, I would argue it is not so much that a death has taken place which is the hook in flashback as case history, but rather the manner in which it has occurred. That is to say, if we examine the opening scene of *Citizen Kane*, it is the fact that an obviously rich man dies alone in a huge mansion whispering the name Rosebud which stimulates the audience's curiosity. Similarly, in *Hollywoodland* which I discuss in more detail in Chapter Three, it is the circumstances of Reeves' death which prompts audience interest.

In *Hellish Nell* the question which triggers the story in the past (and thus the first flashback) is what has this woman done to warrant such a forceful police raid? In later versions, this scene was expanded further to include the presence of two men who could either be plain-clothed policemen or possibly MI5, creating the added

question as to who exactly instigated the raid and why. I would suggest, therefore, that in addition to the correct placing of the hook, the contents of the opening scene are critical in generating the appropriate questions in order to stimulate the audience's interest and to allow the script to flow into the rest of the opening sequence, confirming my earlier findings in the development of *Surfacing for Air*.

In *Hellish Nell* the opening sequence leads to a newsroom scene in which the editor, Ellery, gives reporter Tom Bradley the task of writing Helen's obituary. This fulfils Aronson's criteria that the hook should trigger flashbacks to the story in the past as well as triggering the story in the present. It also meets Aronson's requirement that the story in the present always contains a person or people (in this case Tom) asking questions.

However, it is worth examining what should be included in the scenes leading up to the first flashback. Aronson states the story in the present can be truncated or even skeletal. Nevertheless she posits it should be a genuine ongoing story and argues that a character who simply sits thinking will not be effective. As discussed in Chapter Three, this is a fault in the film *Nixon*, where the hunt or quest, which Aronson stipulates should be present, does not have adequate impact as it is never brought to the fore sufficiently.

Although the story in the present surrounding the reporter Thompson in the film *Citizen Kane* is also skeletal, the difference is that his quest to find out the truth about Kane is kept to the forefront and gives the story dramatic impetus.

In my own screenplay, I experimented with several different versions of the opening scenes in the narrative present leading up to the first flashback. One of the key questions was how much did we need to know about Tom, the reporter?

In the first six outlines I kept Tom's role to a minimum, depicting him more in the vein of Thompson, purely as a journalist commissioned to write an obituary about Helen Duncan and to uncover new background information about her. This decision obviously impacted upon the first scenes.

However, Aronson states that the “story in the present often features a spiritual journey or quest”¹⁰⁹ and after consideration, I judged it would benefit the screenplay to develop Tom’s role to be able to reflect this. In order to ensure the stories in the past and present had cohesion, I chose to connect them through a unifying theme – that of ordinary people finding themselves pitted against the State. Thus, Tom’s story and that of his wife, Stella, who is a communist sympathiser, was developed to show the effects of the anti-communist activities in Britain by the State during the mid-1950s. Thematic continuity establishes connections between the story in the past and the story in the present. Aronson ignores the issue of thematic continuity in her discussion of flashback structure and, as I have argued earlier in this chapter, she therefore overlooks an important element in the creation of a successful flashback narrative.

To clarify the way in which the story in the present expanded and also to illustrate other changes made, below is an expanded table of Helen’s and Tom’s storylines illustrating all the key turning points in the narrative.

| HELEN'S STORY | TOM'S STORY |
|--|--|
| <p>(The Hook) Police raid Helen's séance. Two shadowy figures watch from afar. Helen dies as a result of the raid.</p> | <p>Tom is asked to write an obituary about Helen Duncan.</p> <p>Tom's wife, Stella, reveals there is a communist witch-hunt at the studio and as a communist herself she feels vulnerable.</p> <p>Tom tries to interview Henry Duncan but fails. Tom interviews Mollie Goldney, Harry Price's assistant.</p> |
| <p>(First Flashback) Helen comes to London to the LSA and meets Harry Price.</p> | |

¹⁰⁹ Aronson, p. 102.

HELEN'S STORY

(Second Flashback)

Helen tells of the sinking of *HMS Barham*.

(Third Flashback)

Helen is arrested.

(Fourth Flashback)

Helen is found guilty.

(Fifth Flashback)

Helen is sent to Holloway.

TOM'S STORY

Tom interviews Sheila who was present at the *Barham* séance. She tells him of the visit by the Admiralty. Tom begins to suspect there is more to the story.

Tom interviews Mary, a policewoman who was present at the arrest. Mary reveals the order from the top.

Stella is sure the Government is involved in some way.

Tom tries to talk to Joyce, secretary of Freddie Wiseman, Defence Minister, about Helen. She refuses to talk.

Tom's editor tells him that Suez is about to break so he has only 24 hours to wrap up the story.

Tom meets Geoffrey Wilson who acted as clerk for Loseby at Helen's trial.

Tom meets up with Joyce who admits Wiseman was determined to trap Helen. Tom is being watched – is it to do with Helen's case or with Stella's past involvement with the communist party? Tom believes MI5 might have been involved with Helen's arrest although as yet he can't find proof.

Tom finally reaches Loseby in Hong Kong. He tells Tom that Maude, the prosecutions lawyer, was MI5. He believes they caused Helen's death.

HELEN'S STORY

Helen is released but is in poor health.

Helen is raided by the police.
Helen dies as a result.

Helen is buried.

TOM'S STORY

Tom tries to find Joyce to confirm his suspicions but she's been sacked and has disappeared.

Tom tracks down Joyce, but she won't help him.

Tom is picked up by MI5 and told to drop the story.

Pressure is brought on Stella's boss and she is sacked as a warning to Tom. He now realises how powerful the State can be against an individual.

Tom's editor is persuaded not to run Helen's story.

Henry Duncan comes to see Tom and says he'll help with the story. Tom says it's too late.

But he now believes that Helen was wrongfully imprisoned and he promises the truth will be told about her – maybe not now but in the future. He will make sure of it.

As can be seen above, in the opening sequence of *Hellish Nell* in the final draft I also decided it would add more dramatic impact to include a scene in which Tom tries to approach Helen's husband, Henry, to find out the truth about the trial, but Henry refuses to talk to him. There were several reasons behind this decision.

The first was to maintain the audience's focus on the events of the trial. This was necessary because the first flashback, as will be discussed in more detail later, covers an extended period of Helen's life, with the trial being touched on only briefly. The second reason was to set up an element of anticipation. Tom and the audience suspect that Henry knows the truth, not only about the events of the trial, but also as to whether Helen was a fake or not. By delaying this information it creates another level of expectation.

This is a point taken up by Tan who states: “the film narrative makes use of acceleration or deceleration or the withholding of information or the foreshadowing information. Elements that clarify the significance of a situation can be presented at almost any subsequent moment in the film.”¹¹⁰

It is also important at this stage to bear in mind the purpose of the opening sequence of the story in the present. These pages are critical to the script. As the screenwriting theorist Ray Frensham indicates, the first few pages are where the screenwriter sets up four major elements: the main characters, the theme, the dramatic circumstances of the story and the genre.¹¹¹

In *Hellish Nell*, these four essentials are established in the opening sequence. Tom and his wife Stella are introduced, as well as Ellery. Through Stella’s difficulties at work, highlighting the Government stance against communism, the theme of the individual against the State is put into place. Likewise, with Tom starting his investigation into Helen’s death and trial, the dramatic premise is set up and the genre (conspiracy thriller) is clearly marked.

Crucially, however, when employing flashback narrative the setting up of the scenario has to be realised in both the story in the present and the story in the past. Whereas these fundamentals are established in the first few pages of the screenplay for the story in the present, it is only at the point of the first flashback that these essentials are clarified in the story in the past. It is clear, therefore, that the significance of the first flashback should not be underestimated.

Aronson’s guideline on placing the triggering crisis is clear-cut and applicable to my own script. However, to ensure this sequence works as a successful ‘hook’ to the entire script, further consideration needs to be given to the content of this opening scene to ensure it raises the active question of the script as a whole. I would argue that Aronson’s guidelines would be improved by expanding these to include this element. This also returns to the issues about genre and theme, which I discuss more fully below.

¹¹⁰ Tan, p. 61.

¹¹¹ Frensham, R. *Screenwriting*, (London: Hodder Headline, 1996) p. 102.

The First Flashback

Aronson maintains the first flashback will almost always depict the event in the past that started it all – in structural and dramatic terms. Following Aronson's guidelines, it is plain that this event in *Hellish Nell* is at the moment when Helen comes down to London to be assessed by the LSA. It is here she meets Harry Price, who takes it upon himself to try and prove her a fraud. The lead from the story in the present to this first flashback is Tom's discovery of Harry Price's involvement in Helen's Witchcraft trial, and this leads naturally into his meeting with Mollie Goldney (Price's assistant – Price had died before Tom starts his investigation). The first flashback sets in motion their initial encounter in 1930 and the chain of events leading up to Helen's trial thereafter, as seen from the POV of Mollie. Helen, as set out by Aronson in the guidelines to flashback as case history, is the antagonist in this sequence.

This choice of the timing of the first flashback did not change throughout the various versions of *Hellish Nell*, although its content was modified. In the outlines and the first three drafts I covered this period of Helen's life in more detail, and included her first trial in Scotland in 1933, when she was found guilty of fraud. This was the first major test of her credibility as a spiritualist and so anticipates and echoes the trial that the audience already knows about, and marks her move to being a 'national' rather than a 'local' figure. This was also relevant from Mollie's POV as both she and Harry Price had been directly involved in the case. However, it became clear that the inclusion of this trial not only detracted from the events of Helen's Old Bailey trial, but also slowed the pace of the opening flashback sequence. Again, this reflected the importance of dramatic focus, and the need to cut material, which does not support the writer's interpretation of the life. Thus the succession of flashback scenes (Scenes 11 – 20) finishes at the moment Helen arrives at the Old Bailey for the start of her trial, again as seen through Mollie's POV.

This scene leads back to the present and Tom questioning Mollie about Helen. She is adamant that Helen was a fraud, but under pressure admits to Tom that no evidence against Helen was actually ever found. Its effect is to counteract the flashback sequence which, since it was from Mollie's POV, sets out to show that

Helen was a fraud. Its inclusion leaves Tom (and thus the audience) unsure as to what to believe.

As the investigator and protagonist in the story in the present it is important to remember that Tom acts as an intermediary between the audience and the story, suggesting possible emotional responses to it and raising questions about its truth. Thus in the next scene in which Tom discusses with Stella his uncertainties about whether or not Helen was genuine, this is precisely the point I, as the screenwriter, want the audience to be at. Consequently, by keeping Helen as the antagonist throughout the first flashback, it is possible to keep the audience at a distance and to create an element of uncertainty as to what is the truth.

Further, Aronson claims that one of the attractions of flashback narrative structure is that it allows the telling of two stories in different timeframes in tandem. However, I would suggest that this raises important issues as to what happens when the genre of the story in the past differs from that of the story in the present. What my own research through the development of *Hellish Nell* has shown is how significant an area of concern this is, not only in the choice of first flashback but also in subsequent links between the past and present stories.

Phil Parker states: "At the beginning of any narrative the audience has no idea of what particular type of narrative this is going to be ... this makes the opening moments of a narrative crucial in telling the audience what specific type of narrative this one is ... therefore, the first images and events of any narrative inform the audience of what to expect from the rest of the narrative."¹¹²

This is also true of the flashback narrative and what my research through my own writing practice has indicated is that the genre of the flashback narrative is dictated by the story in the present (unless skeletal) rather than the story in the past. For instance, in *Hellish Nell*, although the story in the past is a personal drama, the story in the present is a conspiracy thriller and not only presents the active question which

¹¹² Parker, pp. 162-163.

needs to be answered by the end of the film, but also is key to decision-making regarding links between the past and present stories.

Thus, for example, if I had decided to recount Helen's story from the angle of her relationship with Henry, while the present day story would still have been that of a quest, it would no longer have been a conspiracy thriller with a hunt to find the 'conspirators'. Rather it would act to reveal Helen and Henry's story, and be either a personal drama or a romance. With that consideration, the first flashback would then reflect the impact of Henry's and Helen's first meeting and instant attraction – with all further links also reflecting this. However, since the genre of *Hellish Nell* is a conspiracy thriller, then the event in the past that starts it all, as stated previously, is not her meeting with Henry, but rather the moment Helen comes down to London seeking to be recognised by the L.S.A. as a medium, since it is through this course of action that she eventually attracts the attention of the authorities and the State.

The issue of dominant genre in flashback narrative is an important one and I will be investigating this further in my analysis of four contemporary films in the next chapter. This reinforces a concern about Aronson's account that I have already indicated, namely her lack of attention to questions of theme and genre.

Subsequent Flashbacks

In the next and subsequent flashbacks the manipulation of audience viewpoint continues. Aronson maintains that the classic preoccupation of case history flashback is "that people are ultimately indecipherable by their public or personal actions."¹¹³ Thus, the flashbacks in this model present a sequence of incomplete versions of the enigmatic outsider's life, which added together may tell us the events of their life, but do not tell us the whole truth about the outsider or his or her actions.

Aronson's point is extremely valuable as it exposes both the advantages and pitfalls of using flashback as case history. Since audience identification and engagement is crucial in the kind of screenplay I wanted to write, the question which arises is how

¹¹³ Aronson, p. 164.

can their interest and emotional engagement be maintained and their curiosity stimulated if they are not permitted to see the enigmatic outsider's POV and are kept at a distance from them?

Clearly, in flashback as case history, while each of the accounts tells only part of the enigmatic outsider's story, each is a complete episode and this gives each flashback impetus and closure. However, there can be a danger that every time a viewpoint switches, although this gives the audience information and new perspectives, it can also cause the script to lose momentum. To counter this, and to stop the screenplay becoming merely a series of short episodes about the enigmatic outsider, it is essential that each story starts and ends at a dramatic high point in his or her life, building towards a final joint climax.

In my own screenplay, *Hellish Nell*, it became clear that in keeping with Aronson's recommendations, each flashback should give a different version of selected events in Helen's life. However, after testing its applicability against several drafts of my screenplay, I decided I needed to deviate from the guideline that flashbacks should tell the story in chronological order. Although Aronson allows that in flashback as case history there is sometimes an overlap as different people may be telling the same version of an event, in my own screenplay I felt the issue at the heart of the screenplay was Helen's trial and that this should be brought to the forefront to keep the audience's focus on this event and to maintain suspense about the truth behind it. This meant flashbacks sometimes needed to be taken out of sequence. This was particularly the case in the flashback of the trial told from Geoffrey Wilson's point-of-view (Flashback 4) which in the first drafts of the screenplay were placed chronologically and occurred after Tom's interview with Joyce and her flashback of events in Wiseman's office leading up to the trial. However, it became clear that this placement choice affected both the emphasis on revealing the truth behind the story in the past and the tension in the story in the present and, after consideration, I decided to move the scenes involving Geoffrey to precede, rather than follow, Joyce's flashback to gain maximum dramatic effect.

This returns to the question of dramatic links back and forth between story in the past and story in the present and it is this aspect which I wish to focus on before discussing the later narrative changes and genre questions.

As already discussed, my first flashback established Helen as seen through the eyes of Harry Price's assistant, Mollie Goldney, and was structured in a way to prompt the audience to query Helen's authenticity, as well as setting up the dramatic question of who was actually responsible for bringing Helen to trial at the Old Bailey. Tom, in the story in the present, now has doubts that Harry Price was implicated in this and has discovered another lead which might clarify the situation, which leads him to try to find out what happened at the séance at which Helen revealed the sinking of *HMS Barham*. This new motivational sequence is set up with the next flashback, which is shown from the point-of-view of Dorothy Woolcroft, the mother of a young sailor drowned after the sinking of *HMS Barham*. Again, this fits with Aronson's suggestion that it is the story in the present which acts to propel the story in the past forward.

This is an important sequence. It effectively initiates Tom's investigation in the present, for it was after Helen revealed *HMS Barham's* destruction that the authorities began to believe she was a possible security risk and needed to be dealt with.

In the first three drafts of this sequence, the link between past and present was a straightforward move from a present day scene in which Tom interviews Dorothy back to Helen's séance in the past, the moment after she had revealed the fate of the *Barham*. However, although this followed Aronson's principle of the links being between dramatic highpoints, other considerations emerged and the specific link scene between past and present changed with subsequent drafts.

In the first few drafts this flashback scene started when Helen approaches Dorothy after the séance, confirming that it is the *Barham* which has gone down. However, since this announcement has such far-reaching consequences, it became clear that the actual moment of Helen's revelation needed to be on screen, rather than solely referred to by Dorothy after the event.

Another reason for altering the structure of the sequence was that, significantly, this flashback scene is the first moment the audience hears Helen speak. It therefore seemed appropriate that the power of her words and her vision were highlighted and shown to full effect, rather than omitted, or played down, as had been the case in the earlier drafts. Consequently, I decided to discard the present day scene of Tom talking to Dorothy and instead to plunge the audience right into the séance scene. As well as being dramatically powerful, it also keeps the mysterious edge to the scene, as it starts in darkness and the audience has no idea precisely where they are – or what is happening – at first.

However, the most important question to be considered in this flashback scene is one of point-of-view. Although it is almost entirely seen from Dorothy's view point, there is one significant moment when it is clear that a change of POV could bring considerable dramatic impact to the scene. Aronson's model for flashback as case history sets out that the enigmatic outsider should remain as the antagonist in the story in the past, and although initially this approach seemed the most relevant to my particular needs, as the screenplay developed it became clear this created a certain inflexibility which was not always to the best dramatic or emotional advantage.

Crucially, it became evident that it was possible to move the POV to Helen on certain occasions while still being able to keep the audience at a distance and without losing the sense of mystery. Therefore the concern here was whether there was an advantage to adhering strictly to Aronson's guidelines or whether more might be gained by deviating from them.

It is interesting to note that very few screenplays using flashback as case history appear to keep precisely to the point-of-view restrictions suggested by Aronson. This can be seen in the analysis of *Hollywoodland* and even in the example that Aronson puts forward herself, *The Usual Suspects*, the enigmatic outsider's point-of-view is shown in certain scenes. This does not detract from the surrounding mystery and I would argue that in my own screenplay this is also the case.

Therefore in this flashback sequence I decided Aronson's framework was not wholly applicable and determined that adding a brief moment from Helen's POV would

enhance, rather than detract from, the narrative and would still allow the audience to arrive at their own truth.

Again, as with the first flashback, this sequence finishes with Helen's trial at the Old Bailey, but puts forward a slightly different version of what happened from that proposed by Mollie Goldney. This was a tactical choice on my part designed to encourage the audience to question which of the character's viewpoints to believe.

The screenplay now leaves this second flashback sequence and returns to the present. Tom, through his interview with Dorothy, is aware that following Helen's *Barham* revelation, the Admiralty started investigations into her activities. He also now believes it was the police, rather than Harry Price, who set out to entrap Helen prior to her Old Bailey trial, and that one of the prosecutor's witnesses, Worth, was possibly a police stooge. He tries to contact Worth but fails. In a further scene, the audience, though not Tom, is shown that Worth has purposely avoided speaking to Tom and obviously has something to hide.

In the final draft, this feeling of intrigue is intensified by the inclusion of a scene showing Clyde and Wilson (the two shadowy figures in the background in the opening scene of the screenplay) alerted to the fact that Tom may cause them problems. The point here was to add a sense of jeopardy to Tom's story and help to increase the sense of pace and mystery. Thus, as suggested by screenwriting theorist Phil Parker, this is in keeping with the essence of a thriller, and the requirement that the main active question is kept to the forefront of the narrative.¹¹⁴

Tom now makes contact with Mary Parsons, a policewoman who was present at the arrest of Helen Duncan. From here we move to the third flashback and Mary's version of Helen's arrest. This sequence reinforces the theme which links past and present stories, that of the State versus the individual and how people can be put behind bars without proper evidence. As Mary recounts the events it becomes clear that the order to arrest Helen came not from the police, but from someone high up at the Ministry of Defence.

¹¹⁴ Parker, p. 157.

This dramatic highpoint links back to Tom's present day investigation. This shows not only the importance of making the connections between cliffhangers in the past, and present, stories but also confirms Aronson's view that the story in the past is pegged to the story in the present, with the story in the present being the scenario that permits it to proceed.

Thus the story in the present continues with Tom trying to unearth a contact at the Ministry of Defence, to uncover their involvement with Helen's arrest. While he does so, a package is brought in for him. It's a copy of a hand-written letter from Churchill to the Home Office concerning Helen's arrest under the Witchcraft Act. It's the second piece of information that Tom has received from an anonymous outside source. He's aware things go deeper than he ever imagined.

Tom finally makes contact with Freddie Wiseman at the Ministry of Defence, but he is of no help. However, Tom suspects his assistant, Joyce, may know something about the events leading up to Helen's arrest. He approaches her later, attempting to set up a meeting later that night. But although she says she cannot help him, something in her manner suggests she not only knows the truth but also may be sympathetic to his cause. Again, the decision to use a delaying tactic here allows the build-up of suspense and pace in the present day story, as well as preventing the audience receiving vital information about the story in the past too early in the screenplay.

Tom now turns to his final lead, Geoffrey Wilson. This is Tom's last chance to establish the truth behind the trial. At this point, on consideration, I decided to include in the final draft a scene in which Tom's editor, Ellery, gives him just twenty-four hours to tie everything up. I felt this was important as it adds a sense of urgency to Tom's story and helps to increase the sense of pace. It also sets up the opportunity to intensify the tension in the final act by adding time pressures to Tom's problems in resolving his investigation. This is crucial, as according to Aronson, structurally in flashback as case history, there is a danger of the script losing pace at the climax point. Therefore, by adding this scene at this stage, it foreshadows events to come and underlines the problems Tom must overcome.

Aronson is clear that one of the attractions of flashback narrative structure is that it allows the telling of two stories in different timeframes in tandem. However, I would argue the requirements of both stories are at their most pressing at midpoint and that extra care is needed to ensure that the added inner tensions of both genre and theme are recognised and kept to the forefront at this stage in order to prevent the script from flagging.

Thus, with my own screenplay, in the Geoffrey Wilson sequence the theme of the individual against the State is highlighted with the gradual revelation that there were sinister forces involved with Helen's arrest and trial. This theme is reflected in the present day story with Mary Parsons being questioned about her involvement with Tom, and the sense that the authorities are about to close their net around Tom himself.

By bringing the theme to the forefront in both the past and present stories, this makes the connection between the two stronger and addresses the potential problem of a flagging midpoint in the screenplay. It also deals with the possible difficulty of a loss of identification with Helen herself. For by reinforcing the theme of the individual against the State in the present day story – and by showing Tom's inner motivation and conflict – the audience can see that this is not just Helen's problem brought about by her 'peculiarity' and therefore can identify more easily with Helen's dilemma through Tom facing the same problem.

This fourth flashback concentrates on the heart of the trial and through Geoffrey Wilson looks at the events in depth. Through his revelations, Tom is now convinced Helen's trial was a sham and instigated by powers high up in Government. This fits effectively into Aronson's guidelines that 'dramatic moments' often occur at turning points in both the stories in the past and present.

What is also important about this flashback is that it portrays events of the trial and, as stated earlier, in chronological terms it should have occurred after the events of the fifth flashback, if Aronson's guidelines were to be followed. However, the point to be considered here is one of pace, and the importance of maintaining the level of suspense. Phil Parker states that suspense is "dependent upon planting an

expectation that something will happen, and then watching and waiting for the expected to happen.”¹¹⁵ Thus, the decision to leave the audience wondering whether or not Tom will be able to convince Joyce to meet him in the story in the present – and holding back the information which Joyce’s story in the past will reveal – acts to raise the dramatic stakes within the narrative. This is vital, particularly when employing the thriller genre, and it fulfils the need for the dramatic cycle of action to continue rising towards the final climax.

Therefore, in the fourth flashback the audience learns that the judge denied Helen the chance to demonstrate a séance before the jury, which she thought would significantly help her cause, while at the same time allowing the prosecution lawyer, Maude, considerable leeway in his methods of cross-examination. In the first two drafts this flashback sequence was considerably longer, covering several witnesses taking their stand at the Old Bailey. These were taken from a transcript of the trial at the time¹¹⁶ and again reflect my biographical concerns as set out in the Introduction.

However, it became clear that the inclusion of more than one scene depicting Maude’s cross-examination technique was superfluous. Far from adding additional drama to the sequence, it slowed down the script’s pace. Consequently I took the decision to keep only Maude’s cross-examination of Harold Gill in the flashback. This gave the sequence more impact and it allows the audience the space to sense Loseby’s frustration at the judge’s various decisions, which go against Helen. The sequence also shows the beginnings of doubt creeping into the minds of both Helen and her barrister, Loseby, as they struggle to make their case.

This dramatic high point in the past leads back to the story in the present, with Tom trying to contact Loseby in Hong Kong to obtain his view of the trial, and the events leading up to it. At the same time, new conflicts are introduced, with the police visiting Mary to interview her about her meeting with Tom, thus giving the audience information unavailable to Tom and creating another element of suspense.

¹¹⁵ Parker, p. 131.

¹¹⁶ Bechhofer Roberts, C. *The Trial of Mrs. Duncan*, (London: Jarrolds, 1945).

When Joyce arrives at the pub, having finally decided to talk to Tom, the audience knows the net is closing around Tom, though he is totally unaware of the potential danger he is in. This is in keeping with Aronson's awareness of the advantages of introducing 'the ticking clock'¹¹⁷ to add to the feeling of jeopardy. Although she refers to this as part of her analysis of the thwarted dream structure, I feel it is relevant to the case history structure as well and is worth including.

This leads the audience into the fifth flashback and to Joyce's revelation that her boss, Wiseman, with the Government's backing, deliberately set out to construct a case against Helen in order to have her imprisoned. This exposure works to a twin purpose. It not only discloses the lengths to which the Government was prepared to go in its determination to convict Helen, but it also confirms the audience's sense of how strongly and oppressively states can behave and that Tom's enemies are powerful people who will stop at nothing if they feel threatened. Thus at this point, both the stories in the past and present are brought into line and mirror each other in a common theme and direction.

This heightening of tension is designed to drive the audience forward into the next present day dramatic highpoint, in which Tom is followed after his meeting with Joyce. His vulnerability is further highlighted by the next scene in which it is clear that he is being watched by someone outside his own home, thus underlining the fact this menace extends also to the heart of his family. The question of why Tom is at risk is answered when Tom finally manages to speak to Loseby later that night and he reveals Maude was in fact an MI5 agent working undercover to investigate security leaks, with the specific role of containing them, whatever the cost. It is also evident Loseby blames the authorities for effectively killing Helen.

It is clear that this sequence answers the dramatic question posed at the start of the screenplay: why Helen was tried under the Witchcraft Act in 1944.¹¹⁸ It therefore leaves the narrative and subsequent flashbacks to focus on what will happen to Tom, thus revealing the truth about the Witchcraft trial – although there are two final

¹¹⁷ Aronson, p. 122.

¹¹⁸ The importance of the dramatic question being answered in Act 3 is emphasised by screenwriting theorist Drew Yanno who states that Act 1 raises a question, and Act 3 answers it. Yanno, D. *The 3rd Act: Writing a Great Ending to your Screenplay* (New York and London: Continuum 2006) p. 18.

flashback sequences, which I will examine later as they serve a totally different purpose.

Thus, since Helen's story is now all but told, the audience's interest must change direction. As the screenplay heads towards its climax, their concern should be with Tom and with the dramatic question of the present day story, that is whether or not he will be able to finish his article and expose MI5 and their 'dirty' tactics. Therefore the screenplay now concentrates on resolving this issue as Tom convinces Ellery to give him more time to get the final information he needs to finish his article.¹¹⁹

One of Aronson's concerns regarding flashback as case history is that structurally there is an inevitable loss of pace at the end, since we already know the outcome of the story in the past (that is, Helen's death) and the story in the present, unlike the final act in flashback as thwarted dream, has no dream to pursue and therefore nowhere to go dramatically.

One of the solutions to this limitation, as indicated in my own screenplay, lies in building up the concerns and pace of the story in the present to such a degree that the audience's engagement automatically transfers to that timeline the moment the flashbacks cease.

Therefore, in *Hellish Nell* in the final present day sequences the feeling of mounting tension is heightened as Tom tries to speak to Joyce for verification about Maude, and realises that she has been sacked. He needs to find her in order to get the final proof he needs. However, when he finds her at last, she refuses to talk to him. The authorities have gagged her. She is unwilling to help him further.

Now the threat to Tom is further increased. As he leaves Joyce's flat he is picked up by Clyde and Wilson and violently threatened. He is to drop the story. It is also clear that they have brought pressure on Stella's boss and she has been sacked, again as a warning to Tom.

¹¹⁹ Bordwell suggests: "Deadlines stress the forward flow of story action: the arrows of the spectator's expectations are turned towards the encounter to come, the race to the goal." Bordwell, D., Staiger, J. & Thompson, K. *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, (London: Routledge 1985) p. 45.

Tom is still determined to expose the Government, but the audience knows that pressure has been brought to bear on Ellery by his newspaper boss. Tom arrives at the newspaper offices to be told Ellery is pulling the piece. Henry Duncan arrives at the offices to inform Tom he is willing to talk, but Tom knows he's too late. At the very moment the key witness has decided to come forward, the journalistic momentum of the story has been disrupted by State intervention. Henry is incredulous, insisting that Tom can't let it drop. Helen was innocent and her imprisonment destroyed her.

This brings the screenplay to the two final flashbacks. It is of Henry's memory of Helen, of her last days before she was sentenced – and hence emphasises the evidence Tom can no longer use. In the first drafts this sequence was spread over seven pages. Its purpose was to show Helen's viewpoint and her suspicion that she had been set up because the Government thought her a danger. However, on consideration, I judged this could be cut significantly without losing its impact. The audience had already been given this information through previous flashbacks, and although it seemed important to leave the final impression as Helen's to maintain emotional engagement with the audience, I concluded tightening the sequence would strengthen its ultimate effect. I decided instead to include a further scene, which shows Helen being led into the court for the first time.

This is the same sequence as in Mollie Goldney's flashback (Flashback 1) but now the audience sees it from Helen's POV, showing how nervous and afraid she really was, with Henry's voiceover revealing how he admired Helen that day for her bravery, thus refuting Mollie's claim that Helen was so sure of herself. The flashback shows Helen's vulnerability and leaves the audience with the feeling that, whether or not they believe her guilty of fraud, she didn't deserve to be tried under such an archaic Act in the way that she was. This conclusion is echoed by Tom, who promises Henry that although the story won't run now, one day people will know the truth about Helen.

From here the screenplay switches back to the present and shows Wiseman telling his secretary to lose the files on Helen Duncan. It's as if she never existed. The final part of the Government cover-up has begun.

Finally we see a series of quick flashbacks of Helen being taken to prison, her bewilderment there and her discharge. It is clear the sentence has taken its toll. This epilogue is a very complex one and it flips time and space four times in the last few scenes. By juxtaposing these scenes next to the sequence showing Wiseman getting rid of Helen's files, it emphasises the theme of the individual against the State and shows the price that some individuals have to pay.

To highlight this, these last two flashback sequences are seen primarily from Helen's POV. Although this is a move away from Aronson's guidelines, I determined it was important to give the audience a small insight into Helen's emotions at this crucial moment. I am very aware that the shifting narrative point-of-view may possibly alter the audience's perception of Helen, but believe this works to the benefit of the screenplay. I wanted the audience to be aware of the full weight of the consequences of Helen Duncan being jailed as a witch in 1944 and I felt I couldn't show this to complete effect without showing her POV. Whatever the audience's opinion of Helen and her 'genuineness', I wanted them to be aware that the Act was a very unjust one, and that being sent to prison all but destroyed Helen's life.

The last scene shows Tom attending Helen's funeral, while on screen a postscript tells the audience that Helen was the last person in England to be tried and imprisoned under the Witchcraft Act. It was repealed in 1951.

Point-of-View

From all the above comments it is clear that the issue of POV is an important one and represents my biggest departure from my original intentions.

Interestingly, what initially attracted me to employ the case history framework for my own screenplay, *Hellish Nell*, was Aronson's statement that in this particular model the person having the flashbacks is never the enigmatic outsider. However, as

discussed earlier, this threw up a problem: how to maintain the audience's emotional engagement with Helen while keeping that distance.

According to Hauge,¹²⁰ audience identification can be engendered in several ways. A screenwriter can:

- Create sympathy for the character as soon as he appears on the screen, by giving him an undeserved misfortune, putting him in jeopardy or making him likeable (by being a good or nice person, being funny, or being good at what he does)
- Introduce the character as soon as possible
- Show the character as being 'in touch with his own power', whether 'power over other people', 'power to do whatever needs to be done, without hesitation', or 'power to express one's feelings regardless of others' opinions'
- Place the character in a familiar setting
- Give the character familiar flaws and foibles

With my own screenplay I chose to develop two of these approaches. I introduced Helen in the first scene, as well as creating sympathy (as well as mystery) towards her, both by putting her in jeopardy and by giving her an undeserved misfortune, through the violent police raid.

However, as the screenplay progressed, I judged this was not sufficient and came to the conclusion that *Hellish Nell* would be more effectively served if Aronson's guiding principle on POV was not adhered to rigidly, and the audience was allowed to see Helen Duncan's viewpoint at key given moments.

CONCLUSION

My approach to testing the applicability of Aronson's model of flashback as case history against my own screenplay was to try to adhere as closely as possible to her guidelines in my own working practice. However, although Aronson's model was a

¹²⁰ Hauge, p. 41.

useful starting place, my own writing practice identified the problems and pitfalls of pinpointing the correct links. As in the thwarted dream model, my analysis showed the crucial part both genre and theme play in this evaluation.

The point here is that by including these two elements into the decision-making process the stories naturally lock into each other and have thematic meaning. As Phil Parker points out, one of the most powerful uses of theme in narrative construction is for all the stories in the narrative to reflect the same basic theme.¹²¹ I believe this cohesion is particularly useful in giving a script employing different stories in different timelines a strong coherence and emotional appeal.

With regard to the second of Aronson's assertions that flashbacks should be placed chronologically, I found that this advice was not relevant to my own screenplay. Indeed, I found that this constraint worked against certain crucial elements, such as pace and plot. I felt that my decision to place flashbacks out of chronological order, far from making the script confusing instead improved its effectiveness. I would suggest, therefore, that it is not necessary to keep flashbacks in chronological order – although each flashback link needs to be chosen with extreme care if this approach is adopted – and this finding will form part of my recommendation of modifications to Aronson's guidelines.

Finally, although Aronson argues that the audience should never get inside the head of the enigmatic outsider, I concluded it would serve my screenplay more to ignore this advice and to allow the audience a glimpse into her emotional state by allowing Helen's POV to be seen. I purposely kept these flashbacks brief, so that although they allowed the audience to gain some insight into Helen's predicament, they still kept Helen as an enigmatic outsider.

How to obtain the right balance between those viewpoints, and how to alternate the emotional tension between the various characters are issues which proved challenging, but in the end I believe that the inclusion of these scenes from Helen's POV did not

¹²¹ Parker, p. 93.

detract from her mystery, and gave an added dimension to both Helen and to the screenplay itself.

In summary, I believe Aronson makes many extremely valuable points about flashback as case history, aspects of which can be adopted by most screenwriters in their writing practice. However, my analysis shows her framework model would benefit from further expansion – in particular the consideration of such issues as the impact of point-of-view, genre and theme.

However, in my testing of Aronson's theory I did not want to rely exclusively on my own practice as a screenwriter. The areas of concern about Aronson's theory that had emerged in the writing of *Hellish Nell* needed to be examined in relation to other examples of flashback structure in contemporary film. This examination is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

Aronson argues that one of the most interesting aspects about flashback narrative structure is that, far from being a complete breakaway from the three-act model as it might appear, each one of the narratives she discusses is in fact structured according to the three-act model. Moreover, “successful movement between the two stories depends on bouncing from one to the other at significant moments within the three-act structure.”¹²²

As part of my practice-based methodology it was important to try and assess how to make those connections between past and present stories successful. However, since I did not wish the argument of my thesis to be confined to the impact of Aronson’s theories on my own practice alone, I decided to test her theory against other screenwriters’ results to provide a context for my findings through my own writing practice.

In her book, Aronson analysed five flashback films to reveal their structural breakdown and to show how the stories in the past and present are interwoven. I did not wish to rely on her own examples, and the screenplays I chose (with the exception of *Nixon*) were all written after the publication of Aronson’s book as I judged it was important to find out whether flashback in film had developed in ways not conceived by Aronson.

My methodology was therefore to analyse four contemporary films to try and determine those ‘significant moments’ and to establish whether or not Aronson’s theory could be applied to their structure. I investigated the same four main areas which I used in the above analysis of *Hellish Nell*: the triggering crisis, the first flashback, subsequent flashbacks and POVs.

However, I also wished to examine whether or not theme and genre impacted upon where and when those links should be made. Although Aronson does not investigate either of these areas in her book, I came to believe as a result of my own practice that these are both important aspects, and further analysis using these two additional

¹²² Aronson, p. 110.

criteria may help me to establish their significance, particularly in deciding where a screenplay's initial hook should be placed and what should be included in the first flashback.

The four films I chose appeared to be representative of Aronson's two main categories. *Hollywoodland* and *Iris* are examples of flashback as case history and *Nixon* and *The Constant Gardener* are examples of flashback as thwarted dream. For the film *Hollywoodland* I have shown the breakdown of how the stories in the past and present are structured and interwoven them to demonstrate the process I followed. Each flashback scene is numbered in sequential order in the analysis of *Hollywoodland*; however, in *Iris*, *Nixon* and *The Constant Gardener* not every scene is described and I have truncated the breakdowns to concentrate on specific aspects.

HOLLYWOODLAND (2006)

Hollywoodland is a fact-based mystery/thriller around the apparent suicide of George Reeves, TV's *Superman* star, in 1959. His death is investigated by a fictional private detective, Simo, who finds there are reasons to suspect Reeves may not have killed himself after all.

Breaking Down Its Flashback Structure

Triggering Crisis

PRESENT STORY

Police investigate the apparent suicide of Superman actor, George Reeves. Unscrupulous private eye, Louis Simo, agrees to take on a job of spying on the wife of an oddball, Sinclair. Simo sees his ex-wife. His son, Evan is distressed by Superman's suicide.

PAST STORY

PRESENT STORY

PAST STORY

Simo follows Mrs. Sinclair.

Simo talks to his old police buddies.

Del tells him Mrs. Bessolo, Superman's mother, wants a Private Eye. She does not believe her son's death was suicide.

Mrs. Bessolo insists George's fiancée was a money-grabber and denies George was depressed. She takes on Simo.

Simo goes to the morgue to see George's body. He finds George's watch, which is inscribed 'Love Always, T. M.'

The film starts with the apparent suicide of George Reeves, star of the TV series *Superman*. Aronson maintains that in films where the enigmatic outsider is dead at the outset of the film, as in *Citizen Kane*, then the hook or triggering crisis is the end of the story in the past, often the climax, and this indicates how the case history flashback narrative structure model should be used. However, according to Aronson, in this case the enigmatic outsider is the antagonist in the story in the past, which acts to keep the outsider as inaccessible or mysterious. Interestingly, in *Hollywoodland* Reeves is in fact the protagonist in the story in the past, not the antagonist, and this appears to go against Aronson's structural model.

Nevertheless, I believe this opening scene is the right starting point as it fulfills the need to trigger flashbacks to the story in the past, as well as triggering the story in the present. Further, I would suggest there is another reason which makes its choice appropriate. That is, it fulfills the active question posed by its genre – that of an investigative thriller.

If we take the notion of genre into account, it is clear in the opening scenes of *Hollywoodland* that Reeves' death automatically creates the active question in the

audience's mind: was it suicide or was it murder – and if it was murder who killed him? For the thriller genre this is obviously a pertinent place to start and at the same time it satisfies Aronson's criteria that the hook creates audience interest in the past. Thus I would suggest that by fulfilling its genre requirement¹²³ the opening also neatly fits into Aronson's assessment of what is required for a successful 'triggering crisis'.

The next few scenes are used to set up the protagonist in the present story, seedy private eye Simo. However, they also kick-start the secondary story – that of the oddball Sinclair who employs Simo to collect evidence against his wife. I would argue they also fulfil another function. Apart from introducing Simo and his problems, these scenes establish the theme of the film, that is, the power of love and jealousy. Again, though Aronson does not indicate that theme plays a part in the decision of where to place further links, this analysis shows it is a useful tool and I shall be considering this in more detail shortly.

First Flashback

| PRESENT STORY | PAST STORY |
|---|---|
| Simo goes to the jewellers who sold the watch. He finds out T. M. stands for Toni Mannix. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. George sees casting director Zimmerman and makes a bee-line for him. Among his group is Toni. George takes her back to his flat. 2. George finds out Toni is the wife of the powerful General Manager of MGM, Eddie Mannix. He is worried Eddie might ruin his career. Toni assures him Eddie has a mistress and won't worry. |

¹²³ As discussed in Chapter Two the genre of the flashback narrative is dictated by the story in the present. Thus, the genre of *Hollywoodland* is that of a thriller (following the genre of the story in the present) rather than a personal drama (following the story in the past).

Simo's discovery of the watch leads to Flashback 1 and George's meeting with the beautiful and mysterious Toni. This is an appropriate link as it sets up the intrigue and introduces Toni, soon to become his mistress, whom Simo will later suspect of having murdered George. Again the significance of both genre (thriller) and theme (love and jealousy) are indicated in this link.

The next scene returns to the present when Simo find out that T. M. stands for Toni Mannix. At this stage we do not know exactly who she is, and it is in the next flashback (2) the audience finds out – at the same time Reeves does – she is in fact the wife of the very influential Eddie Mannix, General Manager of MGM.

What is interesting here is how, instead of answering the question of her identity immediately, the film delays relaying the information until Flashback 2 in order to build dramatic tension.

Subsequent Flashbacks

| PRESENT STORY | PAST STORY |
|--|---|
| Simo reluctantly agrees to go on spying on Sinclair's wife. | |
| George's Will is read. He leaves everything to Toni, not Leonore. Simo tells the waiting reporters George still loved Toni and insinuates Leonore's exclusion from the Will could be motive enough for murder. | |
| Simo goes to see Evan. He is still upset about Superman's suicide. | 3. Toni asks Eddie to buy a house she has seen. George moves in with Toni. Art tells him he has got the Superman part. George is not happy. It is a cheap children's show. But he reluctantly agrees. |
| | 4. George has an accident on the set of <i>Superman</i> . |

The link from Flashback 2 to the present takes us back to the weirdo Sinclair and his obsession with his supposedly unfaithful wife. Why is this an appropriate link? I would argue it is because it connects the past and present stories through their shared theme of love and jealousy. While Eddie Mannix (supposedly) may not be the jealous kind, the audience is made aware of what a destructive power jealousy is. This connection works successfully as it foreshadows the action to come.

The next link moves from Simo finding out George left his money to Toni and not his fiancée Leonore – which prompts him to insinuate this might be a motive for murder – to Flashback 3. Here George is in a restaurant with Toni and her husband, along with Eddie's mistress. Although everyone seems relaxed, the positioning of this flashback scene after the present day scene in which Simo moves from suspicion of Leonore to accusing her of murder acts to reinforce the possibility that Leonore might have been pushed to a jealous violent act, and keeps alive the active question of what happened the night Reeves died.

At this point, the story in the past moves on to Reeves taking on the Superman role. This is a natural movement forward as it progresses Reeves' story in chronological order as suggested by Aronson. However, the introduction of Reeves' role of Superman also raises another issue, which touches upon both the present and past stories. The story engages with the question about what it means to play a part, and thus of the relation between an actor and the roles he or she plays. This in turn leads on to another issue of the story: the disillusionment that can happen when someone discovers that a role is just that and not the reality of the person playing it. In an earlier scene, Simo's son Evan is upset by Superman's suicide. Superman is supposed to have special powers and Evan believes Reeves is the part he plays. The juxtaposition of Flashback 4 showing the actuality of the show, with Reeves working with cheap, shoddy equipment and uninspiring scripts, works against Evan's rose-tinted vision of Superman to create empathy for Reeves' character by showing the reality of the show's shortcomings and Reeves' disenchantment.

It is at this stage, however, that the script shows signs of flagging. I would argue this is because the links back to Simo's son are not as relevant as the other connections,

and by concentrating on unimportant details in Simo's life the pace is slowed. This is an issue I considered with my own screenplay. While it is important to have a genuine ongoing story in the present it is essential to remember the heart of a piece lies in the story in the past.

However, the flashbacks here work to create a sympathetic insight into Reeves' character by keeping to his POV,¹²⁴ and the film is careful to pick up the plot again and accelerate the pace with the investigation.

| PRESENT STORY | PAST STORY |
|--|--|
| <p>Simo takes Mrs. Bessolo to George's house as a publicity stunt. He tells the police it wasn't suicide: the gun was wiped clean, three shots were fired and Leonore waited 45 minutes before calling the police.</p> | <p>5. Leonore argues with George about calling off the wedding. They fight and she accidentally kills him.</p> |
| <p>Edie asks his publicity man, Strickling, to find out about Simo.</p> | |
| <p>Simo visits Carole, Leonore's friend. She admits Leonore came round the night before George died, saying he'd called off the wedding.</p> | |
| <p>Simo sits outside George's house, imagining what might have happened.</p> | |

¹²⁴ Through my research I identified four types of flashbacks: firstly 'personal' flashbacks which are derived from a specific character's memory; secondly 'subjective' flashbacks which are not derived from a character's memory, but do depict a character's POV; thirdly 'objective' flashbacks which are free-floating flashbacks and which do not depict a character's POV and are not derived from a character's memory; and fourthly 'historical' flashbacks, which are based on archival material. To clarify this, for the sake of reference, I have indicated examples of all four of these different flashbacks in the film *Nixon* which I analyse in this chapter.

PRESENT STORY

PAST STORY

Simo snoops around George's house. He finds Leonore taking money out of a drawer. She denies killing George.

Simo believes this probably might prompt the police to reassess the case.

The first few scenes insinuate Leonore's guilt and Flashback 5 shows what Simo imagines happened that night with an imagined flashback showing Leonore and Reeves arguing about the wedding and Leonore accidentally shooting him.

This version appears to be confirmed by linking back to Simo discovering Leonore rifling through Reeves' possessions, looking for money. These links are effective as they propel the investigative storyline forward together and this indicates the importance of genre in making a successful connection.

PRESENT STORY

PAST STORY

6. Kellogg's picks up *Superman*. George reassures himself that no-one will watch it but it is a huge success. Kellogg's commissions more episodes. Kids flock around George.

George auditions for a part in the film *From Here to Eternity*.

Kit, Simo's assistant, discovers George was on painkillers after he'd crashed his car. The brake fluid had been drained. Simo wonders if either Toni or Leonore were responsible.

PRESENT STORY

Mrs. Sinclair implores Tom to stop following her. She warns him her husband is unstable.

Strickling prevents Simo from interviewing Toni.

At George's funeral, Strickling tries to buy off Simo. He refuses. He tells the reporters about the brake fluid, again implying murder.

Simo is beaten up and warned off the case. He realises one of his attackers was Del.

Simo angrily accuses Del. The attack encourages him to believe George really might have been murdered.

Simo goes to meet Sinclair. He finds he has brutally murdered his wife, Mrs. Sinclair.

PAST STORY

7. George is uneasy at a children's party when a child points a loaded gun at him to see if bullets really do bounce off Superman.

8. George asks Toni to use her influence in getting him a job. She buys him a gun to protect himself after the incident with the child.

9. Art and Toni celebrate with George after he gets a part in *From Here to Eternity*.

10. George and Toni attend the preview of the film. But the audience associates George with Superman and he is cut. Depressed, he claims Superman has killed off his career.

The film returns to Flashback 6, and Reeves' *Superman* success. This is intercut with Simo's discovery that Reeves had had a car accident after someone drained the brake fluid, thus keeping the active question of whether it was murder to the

forefront. The subsequent flashback returns to Reeves' role as Superman. In Flashback 7 a child points a loaded gun at 'Superman' to test whether a bullet really bounces off him or not. This is a deepening of the idea of what is real or not, as well as setting up Flashback 6, in which Toni gives Reeves a gun for protection, foreshadowing his murder/suicide.

The present day plot line now changes direction as Simo is warned off by Strickling, MGM's publicity man. These scenes link back into Flashbacks 8, 9 and 10, in which we see Reeves' relationship with Toni start to cool. By linking these past/present scenes the audience is now being teased by the possibility of another answer to the active question. When Simo is beaten up and warned off the case, it seems likely Mannix is behind the assault, either to protect Toni or himself. Here again I would argue it is the theme of love and jealousy which connects the past and present and makes the links successful, and the notion that love/jealousy can trigger violence is further reinforced by the present day scene which follows. Here Simo turns up for a meeting with Sinclair, only to discover he has brutally murdered his wife.

PRESENT STORY

Simo is drunk, trying to appease his guilt about Mrs. Sinclair. Leonore reveals George hated his mother. They hadn't spoken in years.

Simo realises Mrs. Besselo has conned him. He angrily tells her to keep her money.

A drunk Simo tries to pick up Evan from school. Laurie, his ex, arrives. She asks him why he has to fight everyone all the time.

PAST STORY

11. *Superman* is cancelled. George is thrilled. He tells Toni he is setting up his own production company. He is off to New York to talk to backers. Toni is clingy and this annoys George.

12. Leonore chats up George in New York. They spend the week together.

PRESENT STORY

Patterson, a cop involved in George's case, admits to Simo they were pushed to close the case fast. Patterson leaves a file which hints Eddie Mannix was involved in his first wife's death and implies cover-ups and mob connections.

Simo stands outside George's house. He imagines the attack. But could it have happened this way?

PAST STORY

13. George confesses to Toni he has fallen in love with Leonore. She makes him feel young. Stung, Toni retaliates by telling him that he is getting old and, far from holding him back, Superman was as good as he was ever going to get.

14. Art rings with a wrestling programme offer. George turns him down. He is about to direct his first film. He is with Leonore. Outside Toni is watching them. She is very upset.

15. Toni sits in her car crying. Eddie sees her.

16. Eddie instructs Strickling to ensure George's project doesn't go through and to deal with him.

17. George is attacked and shot by Eddie's men.

This theme of love and jealousy is developed through Flashbacks 11, 12 and 13 which track the breakup of Toni and Reeves, when Reeves falls for the younger Leonore. Two links back to the present occur within this sequence. One shows Simo realising Reeves' mother has duped him. Far from being the doting parent, Reeves had not spoken to her in years. This connection works well and progresses the main

story. However, the scene in which a drunk Simo arrives to pick up his son slows down the pace rather than accelerating it and takes the story away from the active question. Again, although this ties in with the idea of disillusionment, I would suggest this is a prime example of a wrong 'significant' moment.

The next present day scene, however, puts the investigation back on track. Here investigating cop Paterson hands Simo a file, which shows Mannix has mob connections and has no qualms about making problems disappear. The audience is now aware what Mannix is capable of, and the following flashback scenes (15 and 16) create anticipation of the pay-back, as imagined by Simo in Flashback 17. It is interesting to note Flashbacks 15 and 16 are the only flashbacks which are not from Reeves' POV. Here they are used not only to heighten the tension, but also to present Eddie's viewpoint so that the audience can get inside his head and see him as the protective husband who might conceivably be moved to avenge Reeves for the uncaring way he has treated his wife, Toni.

PRESENT STORY

Simo tries to see Toni. Eddie threatens him.

Simo accuses him of killing his first wife and George.

Eddie goes to see Toni. He tells her whatever has happened she is safe with him.

Art admits to Simo that Eddie, Toni and Leonore all could have killed George. But he gives Simo the promo wrestling tape George made. He tells Simo to watch it and then make up his mind. Being Superman would have been enough for most people, he says, but it wasn't for George. He wanted more.

PAST STORY

18. Art tells George his directing deal has been cancelled. All that is left is the wrestling job.

PRESENT STORY

Simo watches the tape. George is old and stiff.
He knows he is past it.

Simo imagines what happened.

Simo accepts George might have committed suicide.

Simo watches a home movie of his son and wife. He sees how happy they once were.
Discovering the possibility that George shot himself because he was disillusioned by life liberates Simo to take charge of his own life. He knows he must change.

Simo goes to take Evan out. He is spruced up and sober. He is ready to move on.

PAST STORY

19. George despondently goes up to his room.
He sinks down on his bed. It is clear he is about to shoot himself.

Having set the audience up to believe Mannix was in some way involved in Reeves' death, the present day story moves forward with Simo trying to interview Toni. His attempt fails and he is dragged before Mannix and thrown out.

However, just when it seems certain Mannix is in some way involved in Reeves' death, there is one final twist. Art, Reeves' agent, gives Simo a tape which Reeves recorded as a promo for a wrestling programme in which he hoped to be involved. Simo watches the tape and sees an ageing Reeves, struggling to appear fit and agile. He senses his hopelessness. George is never going to make a comeback.

This scene leads naturally to Flashback 19, in which Simo imagines a depressed George despondently picking up the gun to shoot himself. Finally Simo accepts this is what probably happened. The final present day scene shows a sobered-up Simo putting his life back together and going to meet his son.

Hollywoodland Conclusion

What this analysis shows is, in the absence of obvious underlying plot connections between the two timelines, theme and genre serve to join the two together. For example, the link between Flashback 2 and Toni assuring George that her husband won't worry about their affair, and the present day scene which follows in which Simo has to deal with his client Sinclair's jealous obsession with his supposedly unfaithful wife. Here the theme of love and jealousy links the past and present stories and also acts to foreshadow the action to come.

Another interesting aspect is that, as has already been established, the POV in the flashbacks is almost entirely Reeves', which conflicts with Aronson's guidelines on case history framework but provides the audience with an insight into his inner emotions and conflict.

However, although this is a well-structured screenplay I would suggest there is too much superfluous activity with Simo and his ex-wife and son, and a preoccupation with failed and failing relationships, which serves to dissipate the tension in the present day story. Since my own screenplay is also a thriller, this was an aspect I was aware of in my own working practice and tried to avoid.

In conclusion, I found this film interesting as it showed an atypical use of POV in the case history structure. I also felt that, although the links followed Aronson's suggestion that they moved between cliffhangers in the present and past stories, these links were influenced by both genre and theme and appeared to confirm my own findings on the significance of both.

***IRIS* (2001)**

The next film I examined was *Iris*. This again uses flashback as case history and follows the 40-year relationship between the critic John Bayley and his wife, the novelist Iris Murdoch, who eventually died from Alzheimer's disease in 1999.

Breakdown

The breakdown again focuses on Aronson's key points: Triggering Crisis, First Flashback, Subsequent Flashbacks and POV.

Triggering Crisis

| PRESENT STORY | PAST STORY |
|--|--|
| Iris is swimming with John. | 1. A young Iris is swimming with John. |
| Iris is writing. She falters a little in her work. | 2. Iris and John are bicycling exuberantly down a country lane together. |

The narrative opens with twin scenes of Murdoch and Bayley at a countryside swimming hole in both the 1950s and the 1990s. Simple, yet effective, the scenes act as a prologue and immediately present the audience with an intimate and inviting emotional hook to both past and present stories. Again, I believe it is genre which dictates this beginning, for *Iris* is not so much about the life of the author, but about her relationship with Bayley, and is therefore effectively a love story. Here, the opening scene with its twin visions of Iris and John not only acts as the hook, but also heralds the forthcoming change in Iris. Aronson states that the flashback as case history normally starts at the enigmatic outsider's death or when they are 'beyond change',¹²⁵ and I would argue that the opening scenes showing the start of

¹²⁵ Aronson, p. 117.

Iris's Alzheimer's disease, heralding the death of both her career and her intellect, fit those guidelines.

First and Subsequent Flashbacks

PRESENT STORY

Iris is at Oxford giving a talk on the importance of the freedom of the mind.

Iris talks about the power of love and the imagination.

John says love is the only language he understands. Iris repeats something.

John comments that she often does that.

Iris is vaguely uneasy to hear this.

Iris is at her desk trying to write. She gets confused.

PAST STORY

3. Iris, at Oxford, is with a group of friends. She meets John Bayley.

4. Iris and John are bicycling. John says he is having a book published. Iris admits that she is too.

5. Iris flirts with John at a party.

The opening scenes show a mature Iris giving a lecture at Oxford on the importance of the freedom of the mind. This scene is intercut with a flashback to Iris and John bicycling down a country lane together. As Iris continues her lecture, talking about love and the power of the imagination – thereby setting up the theme – the film cuts to Flashback 3 in which the young Iris first meets John Bayley – and then moves on to Flashback 4 in which John tells Iris he is about to have a book published, and Iris confesses that she is too. Thus, through flashbacks we are able to witness the beginning of a relationship and its continuity/ending within the same narrative.

The script then returns to the present and Iris writing in her study. There is the second hint all is not well when she hesitates in her work. This problem is again touched upon in the following scene in the pub, where Iris repeats something and John hints she has been doing that often of late. This contrasts sharply with Flashback 5 in which Iris vivaciously flirts with John (and everyone else) at a party, again showing the contrast of youth and age.

This pattern of the connections between past and present continues in the same vein, flipping between the two separate different time periods. This narrative structure allows for the immediate contrast between the younger, free-spirited, sexually-liberated Iris with the more sombre scenes set in the 1990s as the older Iris struggles with the onset of Alzheimer's disease.

| PRESENT STORY | PAST STORY |
|--|--|
| Iris goes to the BBC for an interview. | |
| | 8. Iris is interviewed about her first book. She says people have fears and passions they do not admit to. |
| Iris gets confused and loses track of what she is saying at the interview. | |

Again, when Iris goes to the BBC for an interview, we see a youthful Iris being interviewed (Flashback 8), clearly emphasising the change in her and showing the audience how confident and articulate she once was. The powerful use of juxtaposing mirror scenes continues throughout the script to poignant effect, reflecting not just events, but the long arc of the relationship between Bayley and Murdoch, and flashbacks enable a cinematic narrative to explore what lasts in this relationship and what changes, which thus heightens the emotional impact.

It is clear the script carefully balances the story in the present – and Iris's decline – with the story in the past – and Iris's ascent. Flashback 11 is effective in contrasting with the present day mirror scene which shows how far Iris has fallen – being unable

to dress herself – while Flashback 14, with Iris spinning off the pages of her new book against the present day scene of her trying to write and producing only nonsense, illustrates very poignantly her deterioration. This shows the power of juxtaposing emotional high/low points, as well as dramatic high/low points, when selecting suitable links and this was a point which I bore this in mind when selecting my own links in *Hellish Nell*. The script continues with connecting past and present stories through mirror scenes with Flashback 16 and then progresses the events from her past until the moment Bayley proposes to her. From here the script moves on to the present, and shows Iris being taken into a home.

| PRESENT STORY | PAST STORY |
|--|--|
| Iris goes into a home. | 22. Iris makes a brilliant speech, capturing her audience. |
| John is with Iris when she dies. | 23. Iris continues with her speech. She states everyone needs to believe in something divine – love or goodness. |
| John is sorting out Iris's things. He finds the petticoat she wore when they swam together when they were young tucked away at the back of her drawer as a keepsake and knows that Iris loved him greatly. | |

As Iris arrives at the nursing home, the last flashback repeats the original scene of a coherent and engaging Iris giving a lecture at Oxford.

Aronson states that in flashback as case history there is no third-act search for the thwarted dream and so when the final flashback is reached for the second time, it marks the end of the film. This is certainly the case in *Iris*. Aronson also states there is usually a resolution which provides a final, powerful kick. This can be seen clearly in the last scene in which Bayley finds the petticoat Iris wore when they swam together, knowing she'd kept it as a memento and that, despite her earlier wildness,

she had loved him very much. But the scene also shows evidence of Bayley's love for Iris, because of what he has had to deal with in Iris's final illness and the sign therefore refers to both the past and the present sequences in the film.

***Iris* Conclusion**

While the pattern of mirror scenes is very effective, it is interesting to examine what are considered 'significant moments'. Because the film tells their love story from the perspective of Bailey, all the links to the past are tied into those moments which involve them both, rather than the important incidents in Iris's life. In many ways this gives a very one-sided viewpoint of her and barely touches upon her writing. Nor does it really examine her friends and her life without Bayley. If Iris is seen with anyone else, this is again seen through Bayley's eyes. However, this fits in with Aronson's guidance that in films using flashback as case history the story in the past will usually feature the enigmatic outsider as antagonist.

Nevertheless, I would argue here again it is both theme (Love) and genre (Romance) which ultimately dictate where the links between past and present should be, and this works effectively as, in many ways, the genre of the film echoes Murdoch's preoccupation with the nature of love and its relation to power.¹²⁶

By telling the narrative in two parts (flashback and present) the audience is aware that Murdoch's and Bayley's love sprang from intellect, and is aware, as Iris deteriorates, what Bayley has lost. In the sequences in the past a young, confident Murdoch is seen in her formative years, a woman revered by men and openly bisexual, with the young and apprehensive Bayley hopelessly pursuing her. This portrait of her makes the links to the present all the more poignant. Here we see a drastic role reversal for the couple, with Murdoch in her 70s descending into Alzheimer's disease, with the once-subservient Bayley now taking control. Using the technique to bind two eras to each other, the narrative often alternates with similar scenes in both the 1950s and the 1990s. Thus we see John and Iris at a countryside swimming hole in two scenes in the present, the first moving to Flashback 1 and the second linking with Flashback 11 to mirror this in the past.

¹²⁶ Murdoch's novel *Bruno's Dream*, for example, has as its theme the blinding yet paradoxical power of love.

Again, when Iris goes to the BBC for an interview, we see a youthful Iris at an earlier interview (Flashback 8), and when John and Iris visit her friend Janet at her beach house in the present day story, the link is back to the same house (Flashback 14). By juxtaposing these scenes together and linking them through their setting, the image of the young Iris busily writing her novel, as compared to the older, confused Iris being unable to put down one word, works in a compelling way to remind the audience of the magic that was once there.

Iris is not so much a biography of Iris Murdoch but more John Bayley's remembrance of things past. If the genre had been a personal drama based around Iris herself, rather than a romance, it is clear the connections would have been placed elsewhere and a totally different story would have emerged.

NIXON (1995)

This personal drama explores former President Richard Nixon's life from childhood to Watergate. This film uses the thwarted dream narrative structure.

Breakdown

Triggering Crisis

It is no surprise the triggering crisis in *Nixon* is a scene in 1972 showing Howard Hunt organising the raid on Watergate. This is the turning point in the second act in the story in the past, and heralds Nixon's downfall. This indicates that, according to Aronson's guidelines, the film's narrative structure is that of thwarted dream model rather than case history.

In this sequence the present day story moves on to December 1973 and shows the incriminating tapes being delivered to Nixon at the White House. Nixon complains he has always been misunderstood and hated (thereby setting up the theme of Desire of Validation – which ties in with the film's genre of personal drama). This is intercut with the opening black and white scenes of a training film, which promotes the importance of the appearance of sincerity, thus foreshadowing events to come.

However, while the delivery of the tapes is a 'significant moment' its choice produces a dilemma as to how the story in the present can progress. The point here is that they effectively portend Nixon's downfall and thus allow little room for a build-up of tension in the present day story since the outcome is already clear.

First Flashback and Subsequent Flashbacks

PRESENT STORY

PAST STORY

1. 1972 and back to the raid. Nixon agrees that Lillie should take the rap for Watergate. Howard Hunt is still implicated and since he is on the White House payroll this could cause problems. Nixon complains the Kennedys always get away with things. Quick flashbacks: Chappaquiddick/Howard Hunt/the shooting of Wallace.

2. Nixon agrees to pay for Hunt's silence. John Dean asks what Hunt has got on them and Nixon replies if it were to go public it would be a fiasco. It would open up the whole Bay of Pigs.

The scene with Nixon turning on the tapes leads seamlessly into Flashback 1 and the moment after the raid when problems have arisen because Hunt was still on the White House payroll when the raid took place. This conforms to Aronson's guidelines that the first flashback usually depicts the event in the past that started it all – in structural terms.

It is interesting to note the scenes are all seen from Nixon's POV, both past and present. This differs from Aronson's framework, in which she suggests the enigmatic outsider in the thwarted dream model should be the protagonist in the past story but the antagonist in the present. Nevertheless, I would argue the effect here is to create a more human interpretation of the scandal-ridden Nixon and works to the film's advantage.

PRESENT STORY

As Nixon listens to the tapes, he drops his tablets on the floor. It is clear he is ill and under pressure.

PAST STORY

3. 1960 – Nixon/Kennedy debate. Nixon loses.¹²⁷

Nixon believes his personality was to blame for his defeat. He isn't from the right family.¹²⁸

4. B/W 1925 Nixon as a boy helps his parents run the store. His father tells him it is the struggle that gives life meaning not victory.

5. B/W 1930-34 Nixon at university.

6. 1962 – Nixon returns to politics against Edmond Brown. Brown wins. Pat tells Nixon he has changed. She wants a divorce. Nixon won't give her up without a fight. He says they belong together.

7. B/W Nixon meets Pat. Quick montage of their courtship/wedding/honeymoon/birth of their daughter.

The next few flashbacks are noteworthy because they cover three time frames, showing the links between the present, the recent political past and finally Nixon's childhood.

As can be seen, the film switches from the present day and an agitated Nixon to Flashback 3 and the 1960 Nixon/Kennedy live TV debate. After he loses, Nixon's

¹²⁷ This is an example of an objective flashback. It is not derived from a specific character's memory nor is it seen from a particular character's POV.

¹²⁸ This is an example of a subjective flashback. Although it is not derived from a specific character's memory, it is seen from a particular character's POV (in this case Nixon).

feeling of failure sets up the link back to 1925 and Flashback 4, with Nixon as a boy helping his financially hard-pressed parents run the village store. I would suggest that all these flashback sequences are linked through the Validation theme and this is what makes these links connections successful. The b/w flashback continues with Nixon at university, trying for the football team. The coach remarks he is hopeless but he has got guts.

These repetitions of the past in the present offer the connection back into the 1962 Flashback 5. Here Nixon refuses to give up the political fight, despite the pressure it is putting on his marriage to Pat. This sets up the link back to a b/w montage of Nixon and Pat's first meeting/courtship and marriage. This connection takes the audience effortlessly through various time frames, all showing key moments in Nixon's early life.

Although Aronson recommends flashbacks should be in chronological order, these links are so clearly marked (either by being in black/white or by signposting with dates) that the narrative is easy to follow and the chopping and changing between Nixon's political past and his younger days does not detract from the emotion and tension of the film. Indeed interspersing glimpses of Nixon's tough childhood in amongst his political ducking and diving offers the audience a new insight into the man himself. The emotional baggage Nixon carried, as well as the huge chip on his shoulder, emphasise Nixon's longing for validation. This is signalled early on in the b/w flashbacks and act to foreshadow many of his actions to come, and show them in a more sympathetic light.

However, I would argue the present day scenes achieve little and add nothing of emotional or dramatic impact. This can be seen again in the next present day/past connection in which Nixon is simply sitting in his office reminiscing about the past.

PRESENT STORY

PAST STORY

16. Hoover says he will get to Bobby Kennedy. He doesn't want another Kennedy in the White House.

PRESENT STORY

Nixon says the CIA etc. are all involved in Cuba. It all goes back to the Bay of Pigs.

PAST STORY

17. Footage of Cuban downfall and Howard Hunt's involvement.

The final link back to Nixon's childhood ties in with Bobby Kennedy's assassination and is another significant moment in Nixon's life: the death of his brother Harold. His death means Nixon's family can send Nixon to law school. This last link back to Nixon's childhood is important as it signals his chance to break away from his small town living and to make his mark in life. It also adds psychological complexity to Nixon showing his feeling of guilt that he benefited from his brother's death, just as he was to benefit, in the end, from the death of a charismatic political rival.

PRESENT STORY

Aide says two deaths cleared the way for Nixon (i.e. the Kennedys) but Nixon says it was four.

PAST STORY

18. Bobby Kennedy is shot. His death clears the way for Nixon.

19. Nixon's second brother, Harold, dies of TB. His death means the family can now afford to send Nixon to law school. His mother tells him what matters is strength in this life, happiness in the next.

The rest of the flashback scenes 21–36 (not written up in detail) follow in chronological order without any links back to the present. The script now returns to 1968 and Nixon's election. These straight consecutive flashback scenes follow Nixon's political path from that moment, recording the war in Vietnam and Cambodia

¹²⁹ This is an example of a personal flashback. It is derived from a character's memory (in this case Nixon's).

– and his Christmas bombing of Hanoi (Flashback 33),¹³⁰ his decision to set up his own Intelligence Unit and his daring decision to recognise Red China. By Flashback 37 however, clearly the press are only interested in Watergate.

Through Nixon's POV the audience is aware of the gathering danger. Finally Flashback 44 shows Butterfield, Nixon's deputy assistant, at the Watergate hearings, disclosing the existence of the taping system in the White House.

This is the last flashback and as Aronson indicates in her framework for the thwarted dream model, here the present day story and flashback story converge with the emergence of the revealing tapes. This is the Act 2 turning point and the script now moves into Act 3 in the present to conclude Nixon's political story. The film finishes – barring the epilogue – in 1974 with Nixon being told if he resigns then he won't have to hand over the tapes to the Supreme Court.

Nixon Conclusion

While *Nixon* conforms to Aronson's thwarted dream structure in certain aspects – the placing and content of the triggering crisis and first flashback for instance – it differs in that it does not always follow chronological order and in its POV interpretation, by keeping Nixon as the protagonist in all three timelines. However, as discussed, I believe that these departures work to the film's benefit.

Nixon covers three main timelines and although the links between near past and b/w childhood past clearly show seamless connections, the links between the present and the near past are less successful. The problem here, as shown earlier, is that until the end of the flashbacks (Flashback 44), a genuine ongoing present day story does not exist. Aronson allows that the present day story can be skeletal or truncated, but at the same time insists it must have a proper action line.¹³¹ She maintains the story in the present always contains "characters who ask questions, or

¹³⁰ This is an example of an historical flashback. It contains archival footage of the bombs being dropped on Hanoi.

¹³¹ The exception to this are films which use the 'bookend' of a story in the present to wrap around the story in the past which is usually told in one straight chronological section. Films which use this technique include *Titanic* and *Walk the Line*.

who want questions answered,"¹³² and I would argue the lack of this creates a problem in *Nixon*. It is also apparent that, although the theme of the Desire for Validation links the childhood and near-past stories, there is no such connection between the story in the present and the story in the near-past and this works to the film's disadvantage.

What can be seen here, as in *Hollywoodland*, is the importance of theme and that where there are no underlying plot connections between the stories in the past and present, how it can successfully link the two.

THE CONSTANT GARDENER (2005)

The final film I analysed was *The Constant Gardner*. This is a thriller set in present day Kenya in which a diplomat, Justin Quayle, tries to find out why his wife, Tess, was murdered, and uncovers an explosive secret involving corporate corruption and the illegal testing of drugs by a pharmaceutical company.

This film corresponds to Aronson's thwarted dream model and is of interest because of its shifts in narrative POV and the structuring and positioning of the flashbacks.

Breakdown

Triggering Crisis

| PRESENT STORY | PAST STORY |
|---|------------|
| Diplomat Justin Quayle sees his wife Tess and her friend Arnold Bluhm off at the airport. | |
| A truck crashes. Soldiers carry a body away from the truck. | |

¹³² Aronson, p. 134.

PRESENT STORY

PAST STORY

Sandy Woodrow tells Justin he thinks Tess has been in a crash. He adds reluctantly that rumours are that Bluhm and Tess shared a hotel room the night before they drove to Lake Turkana.

The film starts with the death of Justin Quayle’s wife Tess. This triggering crisis is in accordance with Aronson’s model for the thwarted dream structure, which states that the hook occurs at the lowest point in the enigmatic outsider’s story. As required, it also forms the disturbance in that it is the event which sets the present day story in motion. As with *Hollywoodland*, I would suggest that it also sets in motion the active question posed by its genre – that of a thriller.

First and Subsequent Flashbacks

PRESENT STORY

PAST STORY

1. Justin is giving a lecture. Tess grills him about the UN being ignored. Afterwards they go for a drink then go back to her house and make love. She says she feels safe with him.

Sandy and Justin go to the morgue and identify Tess’s body. Justin is detached but Sandy throws up at the sight of her blackened body.

The narrative leads from the present day scene of Justin finding out Tess has been killed – and the possibility she was unfaithful with her travelling companion, Arnold – to Flashback 1 which shows their first encounter at a lecture Justin is giving. They

meet as strangers who plunge at once into sudden sex, and by placing this scene here it emphasises the possibility that the easy-going Tess may have had an affair with Arnold – hinted at by Justin’s friend, Sandy.

This is emphasised further by the present day scene showing Justin’s reaction in the morgue. Whereas Sandy is so shocked he throws up, Justin appears too controlled and unmoved. This appears to cast further doubt on the state of Tess and Justin’s marriage and underlines the fact that the film’s central theme is love and betrayal. This scene is also of interest as the audience’s emotional engagement is heightened when this same flashback scene is later repeated and its source and origin is revealed.

| PRESENT STORY | PAST STORY |
|---------------|---|
| | 2. Tess wants to go to Africa with Justin. He is shocked. They hardly know each other. She says he can ‘learn her’. |

The narrative now moves back to Flashback 2 to follow Tess and Justin’s relationship. Tess tells him she wants him to take her to Africa with him. She quickly squashes his protests that they hardly know each other, telling him that she feels safe with him. A slightly bemused Justin gives in. Tess goes to Africa with him, her motives unclear in his mind – and partly so to the audience too.

The next scenes (Flashbacks 2 – 14) tell in straight chronological order the story of Tess and Justin’s return to Kenya. The interesting point here is that it is told in an unbroken section, with no return to the present until we rejoin the moment of the crash or the triggering crisis. This means that although Tess’s death occurs at the start of the film, by presenting her in one long uninterrupted sequence, she remains, through flashback, a powerful and intriguing personality.

Thus we follow Tess in the teeming streets and clinics of Nairobi, usually accompanying Arnold Bluhm, a black doctor, and as she spends more and more time with him, we are aware that Justin's suspicions they are having an affair might have credence.

The sequence shows the development of Tess and Justin's relationship, her pregnancy and the loss of her child, while at the same time showing that her activism on behalf of the poor is causing tensions, and that she is beginning to make enemies. After she loses their baby she becomes obsessed that Wanza, a girl in the hospital, was murdered by a white doctor testing drugs on her. She begs Sandy to help her send a report she and Arnold are working on about illegal drugs testing to Sir Bernard Pellegrin, and he agrees. Tess doggedly continues her work in the slums, despite Justin's plea to stop, and when Justin overhears her referring to a 'marriage of convenience' he begins to question whether Tess ever loved him.

At the same time this sequence also hints at Tess's rebelliousness, and points to the fact that many regard her as a troublemaker, thus making sure that the active question as to whether her death was an accident or murder is kept to the forefront.

PRESENT STORY

PAST STORY

12. It is pouring with rain. Justin is waiting for Tess. She is late. She has been with Arnold, but she won't say what she has been doing.

13. Tess asks Sandy if he has heard from Pellegrin. He warns her she is stirring up trouble. She says she will sleep with him if he lets her see Pellegrin's confidential reply to him. He agrees.

14. Justin sees Tess and Arnold off at the airport. Hitmen pile into a blue pick-up van and speed off out of a village. Tess's truck overturns.

PRESENT STORY

PAST STORY

Justin and Sandy go to the morgue.

In the next few scenes, the flashbacks are again used to influence the audience, as Tess's unfaithfulness appears to be likely in Flashback 12. Her easy attitude seems to be borne out by Flashback 13 in which Tess agrees to sleep with Sandy in return for letting her see Pellegrin's confidential reply about her report.

It is at this point we return to the triggering crisis and the crash. But one more scene is added to this repeat Flashback 14. It shows a group of armed men piling into a blue pick-up van and speeding out of an African village. It explains nothing and only teases the audience with its hint of menace. Then we return to the original scene of Tess's overturned truck followed by the scene at the morgue. However, now it appears Sandy was having an affair with Tess, a new insight is given to this scene, seeming to disclose why he throws up at the sight of her blackened body, and why Justin appears so detached.

It is at this point the film returns to the present. What is interesting here is that by telling the first half of the story in flashbacks with a shifting POV between Tess and Justin, this means there are a lot of assumptions the audience has been led to make about Tess's character and her actions.

The importance of shifts in narrative POV is shown clearly here and in *The Constant Gardener* it is used to great effect. By delaying information disclosure it manipulates the audience directly, and therefore the empathy created for the characters shifts throughout the film. It also affects the power relations between characters as they change with the shifting of POV, since story knowledge and interpretive power are so intimately related.

Aronson states that in flashback as thwarted dream it is in the final section, when the film has come full circle back to the triggering crisis and returns to the present, that the enigmatic outsider is energised to pursue the lost dream. *The Constant Gardener*

conforms to this model, and it is in the elongated Act 3 that Justin, having gained new understanding and courage, is propelled into what Aronson calls 'the final great battle'.¹³³

Thus, as Tess and Arnold's deaths hit the news and the present day story takes over, the suspense is allowed to build slowly as Justin starts to investigate his wife's death. Justin uncovers not only a big business conspiracy but also what truly made Tess tick, allowing him to get to know his wife for the first time and review their relationship. As this new information unfolds, the audience too has to revise what they thought they knew about Tess.

So, for instance, when Justin discovers what appears to be a love letter from Sandy to Tess it seems to confirm the earlier scene when Tess promised to sleep with Sandy in return for seeing Pellegrin's letter. But gradually as he struggles with his own investigation, Justin realises the lies and deceit were not from Tess, but his colleagues. Nothing is quite what it seems and *The Constant Gardener* is so structured that we, the audience, learn the truth about Tess at the same time as Justin does.

Justin returns to England, and there meets up with Han, Tess's cousin, who helps him further. Here Justin finally accepts Tess was not unfaithful to him. This is dealt with beautifully by a series of flashbacks (15 and 16) in which the audience sees a repeat of Flashback 1 at Tess's house. What then appeared to be purely a wild and sexy encounter is now repeated, but can be seen as a loving and tender moment. As we hear Tess tell Justin that she feels safe with him, we – at the same time as Justin – realise how badly he let her down. Here the theme of love connects the past and present, and the juxtaposing of what was imagined and what was real makes this an effective sequence in enhancing the audience's potential emotional engagement with the narrative, as finally it is clear that Justin has got to know Tess better after she died than he did, or perhaps ever could do, while she was alive. Thus the film uses flashbacks and Justin's memories as a recurring theme to show the evolving love affair between him and Tess and this serves to create a poignant underscore to the investigation.

¹³³ Aronson, p. 122.

PRESENT STORY

PAST STORY

Justin finds a letter from Tess to Han saying how much she hates herself because she has just made a promise to a creep that she has no intention of keeping (i.e. sleeping with Sandy). As Justin watches a past video of he and Tess together he is now sure Tess was faithful to him. He goes to Tess's house.

15. Justin and Tess at the house as they make love. But this repeat scene when seen again shows it is a tender moment, rather than a purely sexual one.

As Justin wanders around the house he remembers how happy he and Tess were. He breaks down, realising how much he loved Tess and how badly he misjudged her.

16. Justin and Tess lie in bed together. They are obviously very happy together. She tells him she feels safe with him.

Justin is more determined than ever to find out the truth about Tess. He contacts a woman, Birgit, in Germany, also involved in exposing the testing scam.

The present story continues with Justin determined to bring Tess's revelatory Dypraxa report exposing the company's illegal drug testing to light. As he travels to meet his final contact, Dr. Lorbeer – whom Tess saw in the hospital with Wanza – Flashback 17 takes the audience back to a happier occasion when Tess was with him. As she tells Justin she loves him for the first time he – and the audience – know this is true.

As Justin journeys to meet Lorbeer, he is stopped by Tim Donohue, Head of Station, who warns him there is a contract out for him. He also confirms Justin's suspicion that Pellegrin ordered Tess's death. Here we flashback (18) to see the chain of command (from Pellegrin through to Curtiss's henchman, Crick) that brought about her murder.

PRESENT STORY

Justin leaves for Loci. He imagines Tess is with him.

Justin is being followed. It is Tim. He tells Justin it was Pellegrin who ordered Tess's murder.

Tim warns Justin there is also a contract out for him. He advises him to leave while he can. Justin refuses, so Tim leaves his gun with him for protection. Justin gets on a UN plane going to the Sudan where Dr. Lorbeer is working with the refugees.

PAST STORY

17. Tess is walking through the bush. She tells Justin she loves him.

18. Montage showing Pellegrin calling Head of Security who calls Curtiss's henchman, Crick, who in turn organises a hit squad. The blue pick-up van pulls out of the village on its way to kill Tess.

Justin finally obtains the letters and documents he needs to incriminate both Pellegrin and all those involved and, after requesting the pilot to post them to Han for him, he asks to be set down at Lake Turkana. He is well aware he is signing his death warrant.

As he waits for his killers, we flashforward to hear Pellegrin giving the eulogy at Justin's funeral. But then Han stands up and reads out Pellegrin's letter saying that Tess must be stopped at all costs. Pellegrin's guilt is clear.

As Justin waits at Lake Turkana the final brief flashback (19) confirms Crick's involvement in Tess's murder as he watches her body being dragged from the truck.

Justin sits imagining Tess is right beside him. He isn't afraid of dying. He now knows the truth about Tess and his faith in her has been completely restored.

The Constant Gardener Conclusion

Although *The Constant Gardener* conforms to Aronson's thwarted dream structure in the placing and content of the triggering crisis and first flashback, what makes this film particularly interesting is its different use of POVs and how it affects the emotional tension between the characters. The story is told in remembered moments, passages of dialogue, and in scenes that are interrupted and completed later, and this jigsaw structure keeps the audience guessing as to what is true and what is not.

Experiences and impressions have to be revised by the audience to fit in with fresh circumstances and are consequently endowed with a new meaning. The film, through flashback, moves through emotion and time, so that gradually the audience understands Tess's motives and sees her in a whole new light. The two flashbacks which show Tess and Justin at Tess's house work particularly well. The repeat of their passionate love-making is simple but very powerful, and this shown against Justin's breaking down and finally giving way to the grief he could not at first express is especially poignant. In my own screenplay I used a repeat scene of Helen Duncan arriving at court, first seen through the eyes of her nemesis, and then through the eyes of her husband, and it is interesting to see in this film how influential a shift in POV can be.

What is of interest too, is that all the flashbacks in the second half of the film (with the exception of Flashback 18) are derived from Justin's personal memories, making

Tess feel present throughout and ensuring that the plot has a deeper, more affecting level, always rooted in Justin's pain and bewilderment.

Finally, it is worth noting how theme (Love) is used in this film to connect certain past and present moments, such as in Flashbacks 15, 16 and 17. I believe it works to give the script another level and almost turns the film into a retrospective love story as Justin, the quiet man driven to action by tragedy and doubt, rediscovers his true feelings for Tess.

Overall Conclusion of Film Analyses

Aronson states: "flashbacks do not occur at random and their content is not arbitrary".¹³⁴ What is clear from the analysis of these four films is that the connections between past and present are far from accidental and have to be planned with great care.

Aronson states this is carefully linked to the demands of the three-act structure. Whilst I agree with this assertion, I would suggest, as can be seen in the breakdown of the four films discussed, that theme and genre also have a part to play in choosing how to connect those dramatic points and that their use gives a screenplay more depth and cohesion than simply moving from cliffhanger to cliffhanger. This confirms my own findings in the development of my screenplay *Hellish Nell* as discussed in Chapter Two.

These are both important aspects of my investigation and this analysis provides further evidence for expanding Aronson's framework and revising some of her guidelines, which I shall do in the concluding chapter.

¹³⁴ Aronson, p. 134.

CONCLUSION

It is clear from the preceding analysis, and the findings based on my own practice, that flashback narrative in modern cinema has evolved since Syd Field¹³⁵ declared that its use in a script signalled that the story was in trouble. Certainly, although flashbacks have not altered greatly in their representation, they have evolved in their narrative uses and flashbacks are now used in a more complex way to tell stories than was the case in the 1990s as audiences have become more attuned to new developments. This change of practice can be partly traced to Linda Aronson who pointed out their strengths and advantages. She was also responsible for demystifying the process and structure of flashbacks to the extent that they are now used in more and more complex forms in film today.

Aronson's work was ground-breaking at the time. Her work is the major text on the practice of flashback narrative and, as I have demonstrated, her narrative framework has been applicable to numerous screenplays which have been produced since she published her work. Her recognition that the flashback narrative form in both the past and the present stories "relied heavily on the traditional rising three-act model to create jeopardy, unity, pace and closure",¹³⁶ encouraged screenwriters to play with narrative structure and push the boundaries. Her work therefore helps create the environment in which such ambitious flashback films as *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004) with its repeated flashback cycles which, when pieced together, effectively tell a love story in reverse.

However, the latter example illustrates the point that the whole nature of flashbacks has developed and become far more advanced than even Aronson could have envisaged. Although her contribution was probably the zenith of the structuralist wave of screenplay analysis, I would argue that because of the growing complexity of flashback narrative, the emphasis has now moved away from structure alone as a means of constructing and deconstructing a screenplay. Factors such as emotional

¹³⁵ Field, S. *The Screenwriter's Workbook* (New York: Dell Publishing, New York, 1984) p. 87.

¹³⁶ Aronson, p. 106.

connection, as identified by screenwriting theorist Laurie Hutzler,¹³⁷ are now considered to play as central a role in dramatic writing.

The importance of these other considerations became clear in my own working practice as I tested the applicability of Aronson's models against the development of my own screenplay. This led me to investigate the possibility of establishing additional guidelines to help identify the most appropriate links and connections between the stories in the past and present.

For this reason I adopted my methodology so that, rather than writing a screenplay and then testing the applicability of Aronson's theory against the final draft, I adhered as closely as possible to Aronson's guidelines at each stage of its development to enable me to pinpoint potential problem areas. I believe this approach gave me an insight into specific issues that might not have emerged from other approaches to the subject.

Although Aronson's flashback narrative guidelines were useful as a starting point, there were limitations and gaps that needed to be addressed in order for my own screenplay to fulfil its full dramatic and emotional impact. Although these considerations were particular to my own needs, I believe their identification has a bearing on, and is useful to, screenwriters who employ flashback structure in general.

The first concern to emerge was how to assess the 'dramatic highpoints' in both the stories in the past and present which form the links between the two time frames. In order to evaluate these I investigated four foci of Aronson's theory:

- The triggering crisis or hook
- The first flashback
- Subsequent flashbacks
- POVs

¹³⁷ Laurie Hutzler, Emotional Toolbox (ETB Screenwriting), www.emotionaltoolbox.com.

In flashback as thwarted dream Aronson states that the first triggering crisis appears at the second turning point in the script – that is at the end of the second act. In flashback as case history the hook is placed at the end of the third act – that is just before the climax. I believe that both these starting points were applicable to all three versions of my screenplay – that is, *Surfacing for Air* (which used flashback as thwarted dream) and *Hellish Nell* (which used flashback as case history).

However, although the triggering crisis points were appropriate, it became clear that as well as considering the structure of these, analysing what their content should be was equally significant. In order to assess this, my research and writing practice has led me to see that it is essential to correctly identify what active questions these opening scenes need to pose. This would suggest that, although Aronson does not put forward this view, both genre and theme influence this decision and must be considered at this point because it is the genre of the film which will dictate the active question which arises from the selection of the triggering crisis.

Again, if we now consider the first flashback, it can be seen through the detailed breakdown of the development of my screenplays how important these two elements are here also. Aronson maintains the first flashback usually depicts the event in the past that started it all – in structural terms. I found this a sound guideline in both versions of my screenplay. However, it became apparent how strongly both theme and genre impact upon this choice and it significantly affected my decision, not only where to place the first flashback, but also what to include within it.

Aronson is aware that the advantage of being able to tell two stories at the same time is also one of the pitfalls of flashback narrative. It is for this reason that she stresses that the links should be at 'cliffhanger moments'. She suggests that flashbacks do not occur at random, nor is their content arbitrary, but believes that placing and content are carefully linked to the demands of the three-act structure in both stories. Aronson posits these points as the disturbance, first-act turning point, second-act turning point, and climax.

While I agree with this view, my own working practice indicated that it is not enough to identify dramatic high points by way of structure alone. I would suggest, once more, that theme and genre are an essential part of this decision-making. One of the aspects demonstrated is that, in order to unite the screenplay, genre and theme allow the screenwriter to go deeper into the subject material and make creative choices. In addition, genre and theme allow a screenwriter not only to engage the audience emotionally but also to critically choose which points are the most dramatic 'cliffhanger' moments.

I believe that my analysis of the four films (as shown in Chapter Three) reflects this clearly. This appears to indicate that the limitations of Aronson's purely structural approach can be seen in scripts using flashback in general, rather than in the single example of the development of my screenplay.

Further, I would suggest this need for cohesion through genre and theme, as shown throughout the subsequent connections between past and present stories in all versions of the screenplay, is becoming increasingly significant as scripts become more and more complex.

Returning to my own writing practice, another question which emerged was how to deal with pace falling off at both the midpoint and in the final segment of a screenplay using flashback as case history. Aronson herself is aware of this latter problem and suggests that this occurs at the end because an audience is already aware of what happens in the story in the past (the antagonist's death) – and the story in the present has nowhere to go dramatically. Her solution to this problem is to introduce an ironic twist to the climax of the story in the present.

In my own screenplay, *Hellish Nell*, I confronted the weakness she'd identified and came up with a solution suited to my own aims for this particular narrative. This resulted in a decision to build up the concerns and pace of the story in the present to such an extent that the audience's engagement transfers automatically to Tom the moment the flashbacks cease. By mirroring Tom's problem to Helen's – so that both face a similar threat from the authorities – the shift is seamless, and thus the

screenplay does not lose pace or direction. Again I would argue that this points to the importance of establishing a common theme between the two stories.

The problem of pace slowing at the midway point proved a little trickier. In the first three drafts of my screenplay this point occurred in the scenes in which Tom interviews Geoffrey Wilson. These are extremely important scenes as the screenplay revolves around Helen's trial and Geoffrey's account leads Tom to be sure there was foul play at work. I experimented with content and length of these scenes which alleviated the problem to some extent, but found the final solution was to bring this flashback sequence forward. This went against Aronson's stipulation that flashbacks should be in chronological order and led me to the conclusion that the importance of maintaining dramatic drive and suspense should override this requirement.

It is interesting to note that *The Constant Gardener* does not conform with this guideline, using the repeat of certain flashback scenes of Tess and Justin together to give a new interpretation and emotional meaning to them. In addition, several recent films have also played with the chronological sequence of flashbacks to add pace and tension, for example *Before the Devil Knows you are Dead* (2008). Here the screenplay unfolds non-sequentially and only gradually does the audience realise the importance and implications of scenes they've already seen. The pace never flags and the intensity surges up a straight slope as more and more layers of information are revealed, the story rewinding from time to time to fill in blanks the audience was not aware of before.

I believe this ability to juggle with chronological order gives the screenwriter added power and increases his capacity to manipulate the audience by shifting point-of-view as well as time frames. For this reason I would argue that Aronson's stipulation that flashbacks should appear chronologically needs to be re-evaluated.

The final issue that I investigated was one of POV. The ability to manipulate an audience's perception of events and characters by means of altering a viewpoint was what initially attracted me to explore Aronson's theory on flashback narrative structure in my own writing practice, an area of particular concern in view of the fact

that Helen Duncan is a complex and unresolved historical figure, as discussed in both the Introduction and Chapter One.

In flashback as thwarted dream (the model for *Surfacing for Air*) the viewpoint shifts naturally between the enigmatic outsider being the antagonist in the story in the present and the protagonist in the story in the past. As seen in *Nixon*, this shift in viewpoint gives the audience a chance to understand the enigmatic outsider – letting him appear a mystery in the present, but ultimately knowable through the story in the past. I found this flexibility useful but, because I wanted to keep Helen enigmatic, adapted my story line to make another character (Connie) the antagonist in the story in the past – and thus, to fit in with Aronson’s guidelines, she also became the protagonist in the story in the past.

The effect of this was to take the focus away from Helen herself so that rather than just keeping her as distant and enigmatic, Helen’s story became secondary to that of Connie’s. This was not my intention and so I chose to abandon Aronson’s flashback as thwarted dream framework as unworkable for this particular project. Nevertheless, I would suggest the problems which arose from using this model were more a reflection of the particular story I wished to tell rather than limitations in Aronson’s model.

For the final aspect of my investigation, I turned my attention to employing flashback as case history as a framework for my screenplay *Hellish Nell*. One of the values of using this flashback model is that it allows scepticism to set up the tension by allowing two opposing points-of-view to be juxtaposed; in the case of *Hellish Nell*, that of someone who believes in her as a medium and someone who does not. It also rapidly allows the dynamics of the script to be set up by bringing to the fore tension concerning credibility of a character. By creating this opposing viewpoint, which sets up one of the dramatic cores of the film, the audience itself has to ask where it stands on question of veracity – and what happens when a possibly fraudulent medium speaks the truth.

However, it is the very power to manipulate an audience and to present varying viewpoints which exposed one of the main concerns with this type of flashback

framework. Aronson's model for flashback as case history sets out that the enigmatic outsider should remain as the antagonist in the story in the past as well as the present, but it became clear this created a certain inflexibility that was not always to the best dramatic or emotional advantage of the script. The question which emerged was how to keep audience identification, and emotional engagement, with Helen, while at the same time maintaining her mystery.

I therefore experimented with scenes at various points in the screenplay where I judged the introduction of Helen's POV would be of benefit. Regardless of whether an audience thought Helen to be a fraud or not, it was important that they should sympathise with her in some way in order to become emotionally engaged. By giving an insight into Helen's innermost thoughts and feelings, however briefly, it allows her to be transformed from merely an enigmatic outsider to something more accessible. Thus, whether she is genuine or not is no longer what is critical; rather, what now concerns the audience is what happens to her.

In addition, taking on the theme of injustice and persecution, I concluded it was essential that the audience should be allowed to see Helen's experiences from her own POV, both in court and in prison. This allowed her to be drawn into the dynamics of the screenplay and to represent the ordinary person, which in turn allowed the audience access on a much more personal level.

Crucially, as *Hellish Nell* developed, it became evident that it was possible to move the POV to Helen on certain occasions while still being able to keep the sense of mystery. I believe that the decision to challenge Aronson's guidelines on points-of-view was justified, and added a new dimension to both Helen and to the screenplay itself. This leads me to suggest that adhering strictly to her model creates a certain inflexibility which is not always to the best dramatic or emotional advantage of a script and that this requirement should be re-appraised.

In conclusion, as I tested the applicability of Aronson's models, it became clear that although her flashback narrative guidelines were useful, there were limitations.

This led me to consider a different approach to analysing how to identify where the most appropriate connections should be made between the past and present stories. I believe this approach is unique and has not been used before and it was vital in identifying the gaps.

Summary – Beyond Aronson

Having examined the implications of Aronson's theory and having explained where I have felt the need to challenge those guidelines, I believe the outcome of my practice-based research indicates that the following elements and arguments are substantiated:

Aronson's Key Points

- i) The opening hook should be at the second turning point (TP2) of the story in the past for the thwarted dream narrative structure and at the literal or spiritual death of the enigmatic outsider for the case history narrative structure. Both these guidelines proved applicable to my own writing practice and analyses.
- ii) Aronson maintains that the first flashback of the film will almost always depict the event in the past that started it all – in structural terms. The first flashback is triggered by the opening hook and sets in motion the story in the past. This proved applicable to the development of both approaches to telling the Helen Duncan story, and within the analyses of other films.

However, my findings disclosed weak points in areas which had seemed secure. These limitations point to why genre and theme in particular played a strong part in my own practice rather than just structure, and demonstrate the need for a revised version of guidelines with the amendments shown on the following page.

Aronson Amended

- i) Where there is a question of conflicting dramas, the genre of the flashback narrative is dictated by the story in the present (unless skeletal) rather than the story in the past.
- ii) The impact of genre should be taken into consideration when deciding where the dramatic connections should be between past and present stories. This should be reflected in the content of the opening scenes and reflect the dramatic question.
- iii) The impact of theme should be taken into consideration when deciding where the dramatic connections should be between past and present stories. The theme of the stories in both timelines should be the same.
- iv) The importance of maintaining suspense and pace should override the need to adhere strictly to chronological order.
- v) When employing flashback as thwarted dream, there can be an emotional or dramatic advantage in adopting a shifting POV or in having the enigmatic outsider as protagonist in both the past and present stories.
- vi) When employing flashback as case history, maintaining audience identification and emotional engagement with the enigmatic outsider is a key issue and therefore flexibility is needed when deciding on whose POV to show. It is not always to the emotional or dramatic benefit of the screenplay to keep the enigmatic outsider as antagonist in both the past and present stories.

It is clear that flashback narrative is a sophisticated tool in screenwriting and is continuing to evolve. Aronson herself states that the way of the future is probably the complex use of a variety of flashback techniques, and as screenwriters continue to experiment with different temporal time frames and flashbacks (and flashforwards) become increasingly complicated, I would argue that it is vital that the crucial part both genre and theme play in its structure is recognised.

In addition, as audiences become more confident and at ease with the complicated fragmentation of temporality, screenwriters will need to push the boundaries even further to keep up with their expectations. My unique research approach in analysing Aronson's guidelines led me to discover specific difficulties and showed clearly the need to extend her theory beyond its purely structuralist approach to create a more comprehensive framework.

I believe the six modifications I advance in this thesis will offer an alternative way forward in dealing with the complexities of flashback narrative and provide a new approach to facing that challenge.

ENDS

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APPENDIX 1

The purpose of this section is to show where and why flashback connections have been made in *Hellish Nell*. The pages have been truncated to allow for space but retain their essence. By focusing on these two examples, I hope to illustrate the thinking behind the choices made and show the decisions that a screenwriter using flashback narrative structure might make as she goes through the process of drafting a screenplay.

EXAMPLE 1

HELLISH NELL (full pages 11-19)

PRESENT DAY:

INT - TOM'S HOUSE - DAY

TOM (CONT'D)
I'm meeting someone tomorrow.
Maybe... (beat) It's like a jigsaw.
All the pieces scattered...

STELLA
All you need is cloud.

Tom doesn't quite follow.

STELLA (CONT'D)
You know. You've got hundreds of
pieces, all blue, all the same, and
then you find the edge of white. A
cloud. You know where you are then.

Tom smiles. Stella goes across and links arms with him.

STELLA (CONT'D)
Come on, let's tell the boys you are
free and unharmed.

TOM
One favour?

They step out into the hall.

TOM (CONT'D)
Play down how much you had to help me?¹

¹ Although there has been reference to Tom's meeting with Dorothy during this scene, it purposely ends on a light note rather than a "cliffhanger" moment to give the opening of the flashback scene more mystery and impact.

FLASHBACK:

INT - SMALL DARK ROOM - NIGHT²

Darkness. A weak red light glows in one corner of the room. Shadows move. Gradually it becomes clear that a group of thirty or so barely distinguishable people are gathered in rows facing a wooden cabinet set in the centre before them. Helen Duncan is visible, slumped forward, as in a trance.

Silence. There is a distinct air of anticipation. Someone in the audience coughs.

Suddenly Helen Duncan straightens, eyes wide. An old man's nasal voice cuts through the silence. ALBERT the spirit guide:

ALBERT O.S.
Someone is here. A young boy...
A sailor... Recently passed...
Very recently... Is anyone out
there for him?

The audience stay silent. C/U of various faces in the crowd. Anxious. Attentive. Half afraid/half wanting the vision to be their loved one.

ALBERT O.S. (CONT'D)
He wants you to know he's alright.
He's safely on the other side.

The light flickers slightly. The audience look at one another, unsure. Helen is still rigid, in a trance, not moving. The voice continues:

ALBERT O.S. (CONT'D)
I see... His ship... I can't make
out... Wait... Its name...

C/U of DOROTHY a bird-like woman with dark hair scraped back into a bun. She's alert now, her face tight. The plump woman beside her glances at her aware of her growing agitation.

ALBERT O.S. (CONT'D)
The *Barton*... no... no... *Barham*...

Dorothy involuntarily gasps and begins to shake. Her plump friend puts a comforting arm around her. Dorothy's face crunches

² This connection is intentionally not seamless. Rather it throws the audience into an unknown and unexplained setting. This is to create the air of mystique around Helen Duncan as this is the first time the audience both see and hear her and I felt it should have all the strangeness and ambiguity possible.

up in anguish. She falls against her friend's shoulder sobbing quietly.

POV Helen Duncan. Slowly she comes out of her trance. She looks round the room to see the startled faces looking at her. She realises something monumental has happened.³

PRESENT DAY:

INT - DOROTHY'S SITTING ROOM⁴

A light, airy sitting room, filled with good, but inexpensive furniture.

DOROTHY
And that were how I found out my son
had been killed.

Tom is with the middle-aged but still bird-like DOROTHY WOOLSCROFT.

Tom stops at the mantelpiece and picks up a photo of a young man in naval uniform. He studies it for a moment.

TOM
Good-looking boy.

Dorothy takes a deep breath.

DOROTHY
That he were.

She pours Tom a cup of tea. Tom comes over and sits down opposite her.

He takes out his notepad from his briefcase and rests it on his lap.

TOM
So had you been to many of Helen's
séances?

He starts to take notes in a quiet, unobtrusive way.

³ This is a cliffhanger moment and as Helen Duncan realises its importance so does the audience.

⁴ Rather than keep continuing with the séance meeting at this point – which I felt would have more impact if kept brief – I felt it would be an advantage to put the emotional level back to the fore by returning to the present and seeing Dorothy still affected by her son's death all these years later.

DOROTHY
I'd only gone along to be with my friend. She'd wanted to make contact with her Mum. I hadn't really wanted to go...

She stops. Even now her emotion is obvious.

TOM
Did you feel...

DOROTHY
...She were the Real MacCoy?

Tom nods.

DOROTHY (CONT'D)
I know there are them what say she were a fraud, but that night...If you'd been there...Albert - her guide - were clear about the message. I remember afterwards, just sitting, I couldn't move.⁵

FLASHBACK:

INT - SMALL ROOM - NIGHT⁶

Dorothy is sitting looking shell-shocked in one of the chairs. Her plump friend sits beside her, trying to comfort her.

Helen Duncan comes up and sits beside her. She looks concerned. She takes her hand. Dorothy looks up at her.

DOROTHY
You're sure it were the *Barham*?

HELEN
I'm that sorry. If Albert sain...

Dorothy nods as if slowly accepting this.

HELEN (CONT'D)
Sometimes I hae so many voices all wanting to be heard it hurts. But tonight, your boy...he sort of pushed

⁵ In this scene Tom is skeptical about Helen's genuineness and I felt this should be countered by Dorothy at this stage. The audience needed to see Helen Duncan as a person, rather than a medium at this point too. Dorothy's final dialogue here forms a natural lead into the next flashback.

⁶ This flashback gives the audience a brief chance to see the compassionate side of Helen which I felt was again important to counter Tom's attitude before continuing with Dorothy's narrative.

to the front, ye ken? Wanted to get through so bad. (beat) He needed you to know he was just fine. To tell you good-bye.

Dorothy wipes away a tear and gives a small muted nod.

INT - DOROTHY'S HOUSE - NIGHT⁷

Dorothy sits at home in darkness. She holds the photo of her son in naval uniform, rocking backwards and forwards.

DOROTHY V.O.

At the back of my mind, even then,
I were hoping she might have it
wrong. No-one had heard a dicky bird
about the *Barham* going down. But
Then. . . they called.

EXT - DOROTHY'S HOUSE - DAY

Dorothy is out in the garden, pulling out a few weeds. She looks up with surprise as two men come up the garden path.

INT - DOROTHY'S HOUSE - DAY

The two men are sitting with Dorothy.

ADMIRALTY MAN 1

If we can just run through this
again. Helen Duncan told you the
Barham had gone down?

DOROTHY

She said my son had died. That the
Barham had sunk. But when I rang the
Admiralty they couldn't confirm...

ADMIRALTY MAN 1

There's no official news yet.

⁷ I decided to use a voice-over here rather than to return to the present-day scene as it kept the flow of the sequence more effectively. The voice-over brings the active question to the forefront, reflecting the genre, and this continues in the next flashback scene with the Admiralty men arriving at Dorothy's house. It also reinforces the theme of ordinary people pitted against the state.

DOROTHY
So there's nothing suggesting it
might have been torpedoed?

The men look uncomfortable. They avoid her gaze. Dorothy
struggles with her emotion.

ADMIRALTY MAN 1
Mrs. Woolscroft, we need to know
where you and this Helen Duncan got
your intelligence from...

DOROTHY
I told you. She saw my son...

ADMIRALTY MAN 1

...She must have heard the rumour
somewhere. She must have spoken to
someone...

DOROTHY
...But even your department weren't
aware of it. How could Helen?

ADMIRALTY MAN 1

Mrs. Woolscroft. We are at war. We
can't have people in trusted
positions passing on rumours. We
need to discover the source.

DOROTHY
Then you must ask Helen Duncan
direct. But I know what she'll say.

The men look uncomfortable.

DOROTHY (CONT'D)
It weren't no security leak.⁸

PRESENT DAY:

INT - DOROTHY'S HOUSE - DAY⁹

DOROTHY
It weren't what they wanted to hear
of course. Made them uneasy. No-one

⁸ Dorothy's declaration is clearly a dramatic moment and an obvious point to lead away from the story in the past to the story in the present.

⁹ The audience now moves from Dorothy's belief in Helen's powers to the present and to a scene in which Tom voices his doubts. I felt it was important to keep these two opposing views in balance.

knew about the *Barham*, you see. Its sinking were top secret.

TOM

But Helen spent a lot of time in Portsmouth, maybe she'd heard something?

DOROTHY

If it were that simple, why had no-one else heard the rumour?

TOM

Maybe Helen knew someone in de-coding who'd had access to the message?

DOROTHY

You sound skeptical.

TOM

It's my job.

Dorothy smiles.

DOROTHY

It's more than that. (beat) Not that I blame you. Mind, if you'd been there that night...

Dorothy pours Tom another cup of tea. He helps himself to a biscuit.

TOM

So you never saw Helen again?

Dorothy hesitates.

DOROTHY

Just once. (beat) I went to the Old Bailey. I thought I owed her. She were the one to tell me about my son. Not the Admiralty. Not those in power. I wanted to show my support...I expect that sounds daft.

Tom shakes his head.

DOROTHY (CONT'D)

I were that glad, too. That prosecution barrister Maude made her out to be a charlatan and their

witness Worth... Almost too perfect.
Know what I mean? And Loseby couldn't
shake him, despite Worth claiming
he'd only decided to expose Helen
after that first séance and Loseby
having quite different evidence . . .

¹⁰

FLASHBACK TO TRIAL:

INT - COURTROOM NO 4 OLD BAILEY - DAY¹¹

Helen Duncan is leaning forward in the dock. She is dressed in the same fur coat. She seems reasonably relaxed.

A spruce-looking, confident WORTH is in the witness box being cross-examined by the defence barrister, CHARLES LOSEBY.

Loseby is a cadaverous, earnest-looking man. Not at all prepossessing. He glances at his notes carefully before speaking.

LOSEBY

So had you, in December 1943, already
made up your mind to bring about the
downfall of Helen Duncan?

WORTH

No, sir.

Loseby hesitates slightly.

LOSEBY

But I have evidence that long before
you officially approached the police
there was a plan to bring Helen Duncan
down. That bets were being taken in
an Oxford pub that she'd be arrested
within fourteen days. Evidence that
points to you being directly
involved.

¹⁰ Dorothy's words are a clear lead-in to Helen's trial. Since this event is at the heart of the script it was important to keep it at the forefront and this allowed the audience to see this through Dorothy's eyes to give another perspective.

¹¹ I felt this link should take the audience straight to Loseby, Helen's barrister, so that they could see him in action at the trial. This is the first time they see him, and I chose his cross-examination of Worth, as it shows Worth running rings round him and foreshadows the outcome of the trial. It also highlights the theme of the script by showing that Worth has obviously been well rehearsed.

WORTH

I know nothing at all about it.
Perhaps someone else suspected her.

LOSEBY

I do not think you are being entirely
frank, Mr. Worth.

WORTH

I was spying on my own account, if you
prefer to call it spying.

LOSEBY

Don't you think it's a pity you didn't
explain that to me when we first met
down at Portsmouth?

WORTH

No, sir.

Loseby is put off track, startled by this rebuff. He hesitates but doesn't challenge him.

Worth is unfazed, and stares at him unemotionally. It is clear he is supremely confident and not about to be rattled by Loseby's questioning.

In the dock Helen shakes her head in disbelief.¹²

INT - DOROTHY'S HOUSE - DAY¹³

DOROTHY

It were obvious Worth weren't telling
the whole truth. But Loseby couldn't
shake him.

TOM

Well rehearsed then?

DOROTHY

The more I sat there, the more I felt
we wasn't hearing what really
happened.

¹² I decided to end on Helen's reaction to Worth's testimony. It is clear she thinks he is lying. I wanted the audience to be left with the feeling that he might be too. Again this underlines the theme of the script.

¹³ The link back to the present allows Tom to voice his own concerns regarding the trial and begin to realise this is no ordinary police case. This is emphasised by Dorothy's final dialogue in the scene which hints that the Admiralty might have been involved. This automatically brings the active question back to the fore, highlighting the thriller genre.

TOM
So you don't believe it was just a
simple police case?

DOROTHY
Seemed clear she'd been set up.
That's why I thought that Harry Price
were involved.

Dorothy offers Tom another biscuit. He refuses.

DOROTHY (CONT'D)
He were there, you know.

TOM
Who?

DOROTHY
Him. Harry Price. (beat) So were my
two Admiralty men.

Tom looks at her surprised.

EXAMPLE 2

***HELLISH NELL* (original pages 53-60)**

PRESENT DAY:

INT - GEOFFREY WILSON'S HOUSE - DAY

GEOFFREY
The mood was upbeat. Everyone
thought she'd win.

TOM
Despite Maude being such a strong
adversary?

GEOFFREY
Oh, we were all wary of Maude. He had
a reputation of being able to turn a
case round. But this whole business
of witchcraft...I mean honestly.

Tom nods in sympathetic agreement.

GEOFFREY (CONT'D)

When Loseby challenged its use you could see he had the sympathy of the court...¹⁴

FLASHBACK:

INT - COURT NO 4 OLD BAILEY - DAY ¹⁵

Loseby is standing in front of the jury.

LOSEBY

How can we in this modern age believe that a woman could be a witch? It is, quite frankly ridiculous. I put it to you that the Witchcraft Act of 1735 should never have been used. It does not, and simply cannot, be made to apply to the facts of this particular case. This is not - and never could be - a case of witchcraft.

There are nods from the jury at this. Helen Duncan in the docks looks relaxed and at ease.

Maude glances at the jury's reaction and hastily scribbles something down on his notes. He whispers something to his clerk. The clerk nods and gives a conspiring smile.

Loseby sees this and for the briefest of moments has a flicker of doubt. But then he regains his composure and looks back at Helen and smiles confidently.¹⁶

PRESENT DAY:

INT - WILSON'S HOUSE - DAY¹⁷

Tom stops writing and looks up at Geoffrey.

TOM

So you felt the jury were behind you?

¹⁴ Geoffrey's dialogue sets the mood of optimism and leads the audience directly into the flashback at the Old Bailey.

¹⁵ I chose to use this particular moment from the trial as it cuts right to the issue of using the Witchcraft Act against Helen and I wanted the audience to be party to Loseby's defence argument. This link also reinforces the theme of the hopeless of ordinary people pitted against the state.

¹⁶ I chose to cut away at this point as I felt it left the audience with the first hint that issues might not be as straightforward as they first appeared but that Loseby was still confident of success.

¹⁷ By cutting straight to Tom's reaction this reinforces the idea that Loseby thought the jury were behind him at this point.

GEOFFREY

Loseby was confident. And even when Maude produced the muslin cloth out of nowhere...

TOM

...I thought the police never found such a thing?

GEOFFREY

They didn't.

Geoffrey regards Tom solemnly.

GEOFFREY

God! He was a showman that man. There he was cross examining Gill, the defence witness...questioning him about ectoplasm...¹⁸

FLASHBACK:

INT - COURTROOM - DAY¹⁹

Maude is standing in the middle of the court cross examining a middle aged man, HAROLD GILL.

GEOFFREY V.O.²⁰

When suddenly out of the blue in the middle of the courtroom he brings out a piece of cloth like a conjurer pulling a rabbit out of a hat.

Maude spins round, pulling a strip of screwed muslin cloth out of his pocket. He keeps it small in the palm of his hand, balled up.

MAUDE

Was it about this size?

Gill looks a bit startled.

GILL

Bigger than that.

Maude faces the jury and with a theatrical flourish flaps open the cloth to its full size.

¹⁸ Geoffrey's dialogue raises the concerns about Maude and leads seamlessly into the flashback.

¹⁹ I chose this particular link as it puts the audience straight into the court scene and Maude in action.

²⁰ I wanted to use this dialogue as a v/o in the flashback rather than in the present day scene proceeding as it heightens the feeling this was a key moment in the trial.

MAUDE

Like this?

GILL

Not as big as that.

Maude proceeds to screw up the cloth again so that it disappears into the palm of his hand. The jury watch intrigued. Maude unfurls the cloth and repeats the performance casually as if it has no importance. But the fact a piece of cloth can be made to appear and disappear is not lost on them.

Maude's made his point. He gives a satisfied smile.²¹

PRESENT DAY:

INT - GEOFFREY'S HOUSE - DAY²²

GEOFFREY

I thought Loseby would pull him up for such a trick - but no. I don't think he realised Maude had pulled a fast one.

TOM

And the judge said nothing?

Geoffrey shakes his head.

GEOFFREY

But you have to remember Loseby was still confident he had the upper hand. So was Helen...²³

FLASHBACK:

INT - WILSON'S HOUSE - WIMBLEDON - NIGHT²⁴

Geoffrey comes in to the sitting room. A fire is blazing in the hearth.

²¹ The scene ended here to show that Maude had achieved his mission and again brings the theme to the fore.

²² The link here is designed to give the audience Geoffrey's reaction to both the Judge and Loseby failing to pull Maude up over this trick. It also brings the active question into the fore reinforcing the thriller genre.

²³ Geoffrey's dialogue shows that both Loseby and Helen still think they are going to win the case and is designed to lead into the scene which shows why this is not so.

²⁴ Reports show that Loseby and Helen carried out trial séances at the Wilson's home in Wimbledon to see if they could be conducted in court. I thought it was useful at this point to show the behind the scenes activities of both Helen and Loseby.

GEOFFREY V.O.²⁵

He believed he still had his ace to play, you see.

Helen is sitting talking with Loseby. As Geoffrey comes in, Helen smiles at him.

HELEN

Mr. Loseby hae agreed. I kent he wud.

Loseby looks anxiously at Helen.

LOSEBY

Are you sure now?

HELEN

Once the jury see it for themselves, they maun be convinced.

Geoffrey picks up on this.

GEOFFREY

You've decided to go ahead?

LOSEBY

Well, after we tested Helen here last night. The results were so perfect. I feel sure...

GEOFFREY

It'll certainly give the jury something to think about.

HELEN

I ken we are right.

GEOFFREY

A séance at the Old Bailey? Heavens, that'll keep the papers busy.

Helen looks very relieved.

GEOFFREY

Will the Judge agree?

Helen looks shocked.

²⁵ I used a v/o here to keep the audience in flashback while maintaining the connection to Tom in the present. Loseby thought he still had an ace to play was a very important factor in his defence and I wanted to make the audience aware of the significance of this fact.

HELEN
Why shouldnae he? It's the very
substance of ma defence.²⁶

INT - COURT NO 4 - OLD BAILEY - DAY²⁷

Helen Duncan is leaning forward in the dock. She seems relaxed, confident. But then:

RECORDER
No, Mr. Loseby, I shall not allow it.
That is the end of that.

Loseby is totally shocked and dumbfounded. For a moment he can't speak.

Helen also looks anxious and bewildered. This was their trump card.

Loseby recovers his composure and tries again.

LOSEBY
But my Lord, perhaps I ought to draw
your attention...

The Recorder doesn't even let him finish.

RECORDER
You have made your offer. And that
is all there is.

LOSEBY
My Lord...

RECORDER
Mr. Loseby. We had better get on with
the evidence.

Loseby tries hard to hide his dismay at this decision.

LOSEBY
If your Lordship pleases.

Helen Duncan looks as if she's about to burst out shouting a comment, but Henry, in the gallery, gives her a vigorous shakes of his head. She pauses.

²⁶ Helen's dialogue here is designed to show both her confidence but also her naivety. It also emphasises the theme of the individual against the state. By stating the importance of the séance to her defence this also acts as a perfect link back to the next flashback.

²⁷ This link contrasts sharply with the preceding scene and immediately alerts the audience that all is not proceeding as planned. Again it reflects the genre.

Henry tries to give her an encouraging smile but it's clear the Judge's decision has knocked their plans into disarray.

Helen looks angry and dejected, and slumps backwards in her seat. She's a worried woman. All confidence gone.²⁸

PRESENT DAY:

INT - GEOFFREY'S HOUSE - DAY²⁹

Tom stops writing. He looks across at Geoffrey, confused.

TOM
Odd he wouldn't allow it?

GEOFFREY
He said it wouldn't be fair on Helen.

TOM
I don't follow.

GEOFFREY
Because if she failed, it would
condemn her out of hand.

TOM
But if she'd succeeded...

GEOFFREY
Precisely.

²⁸ I cut here to show the impact of this decision and what a fatal blow this will be to her defence.

²⁹ By connecting back to the present to show Tom's reaction to the Judge's decision the audience are made aware that it was an unusual step for the judge to make and one that was hard to justify. It prompts the question again of who exactly was behind Helen's arrest and again brings the active question in keeping with the investigative thriller genre.

APPENDIX 2

This breakdown is designed to demonstrate the importance of turning points in flashback narrative structure. To illustrate this I have included a diagram to show how the flashbacks in *Hellish Nell* act as natural turning points and how the story in the past affects and propels forward the story in the present.

Three act structure – the basic paradigm of classic Hollywood screenwriting. Act 1 sets up the protagonist and his world, and asks the dramatic question of the film's story.

Act 2 develops the protagonist's story, giving him increasingly difficult challenges and problems to overcome.

Act 3 concludes the film's story, and answers the question posed by Act 1.

In flashback narrative this three act structure is followed in both the story in the past and the story in the present.

Turning Point – an action point that is a reaction to an obstacle in the way of a protagonist's objective; turning points raise the stakes, move the action in a different direction or force the protagonist to take a new or different tack.

These can occur throughout the film's story but the two main turning points occur at the end of Act 1 (TP1) and at the end of Act 2 (TP2).

Breakdown of Flashbacks in *Hellish Nell*

Flashback 1

When Tom interviews Mollie, he believes at this point that Helen was a fraud and that Harry Price was responsible for Helen's downfall. After Flashback 1, he is unsure of both points and must go on to seek further evidence.

Flashback 2

After Flashback 2 and Dorothy's account of the sinking of the Barham and the subsequent arrival of the Admiralty, who were also present at Helen's trial, Tom is now convinced Helen's arrest goes beyond Harry Price. This is Act 1

turning point, and it drives Tom to see Ellery, his editor, to tell him he believes Helen was set up.

Flashback 3

Tom, convinced the police were responsible for Helen's arrest, now interviews Mary. It is through her flashback that he finds out that the order to arrest Helen came from a Government department. He now has to find out which department was involved and why.

Flashback 4

In this Flashback (which is out of chronological order) Geoffrey Wilson reveals the judge's apparent bias at the trial. Maude, the prosecution barrister, was given almost a free hand. It is clear that the Ministry of Defence was in some way involved but Tom now needs proof.

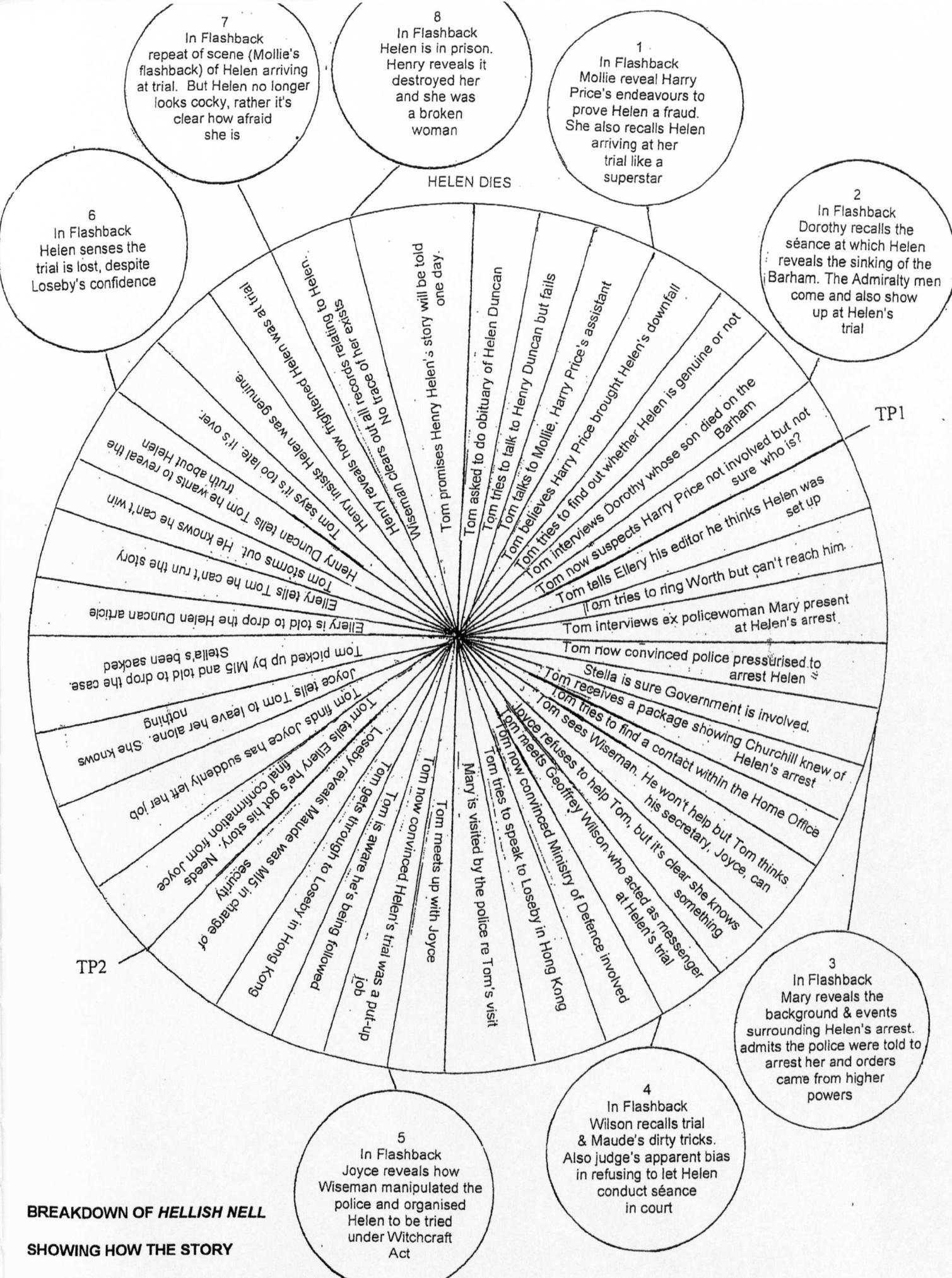
Flashback 5

Tom makes contact with Joyce, who worked at the Ministry of Defence at the time of Helen's arrest. In Flashback 5 she reveals that her boss cooked up the idea of trying Helen under the Witchcraft Act. But she also reveals the involvement of other sources. That it was clear Helen would be found guilty whatever.

This leads to Tom's discovery that Maude was MI5 in charge of security and thus to TP2. Now Tom has the evidence he needs. But Tom, like Helen, is thwarted by the power of the state.

The final flashbacks (6,7 and 8) show the affect of this on Helen herself, showing her a broken woman after her time in prison.

This leads to her death and thus to both the end and beginning of the screenplay.



BREAKDOWN OF HELLISH NELL
SHOWING HOW THE STORY
IN THE PAST AFFECTS AND PROPELS
FORWARD THE STORY IN THE PRESENT

APPENDIX 3

Personal Interviews

Dr. Richard Ellison

I interviewed Dr. Richard Ellison, specialist psychiatrist, regarding the employment of ECT for depressed patients in 1956.

Dr. Ellison is a trained psychiatrist and started his practice in 1948 after returning from the war. He trained under Roger Treadgold, psychiatrist at University College Hospital, one of the leading lights for ECT. With regards to treatment of depressed patients, Dr. Ellison was able to confirm what treatments were used in 1956 and the reaction of some of the medical profession to its use (particularly that of psychoanalysts.)

Dr. Ellison suggested that I should refer to *An introduction to Physical Methods of treatment in psychiatry* by William Sargant which was published in 1956 to gain a contemporary insight into possible treatment for depressed patients. This research led me to change Edward's approach to ECT and informed the development of Edward's present day storyline in the narrative structure for Connie's POV Thwarted Dream and Connie's POV Thwarted Dream with Life Changing Incident.

Mrs. Elizabeth Le Meseurier

As a seventeen year old Mrs. Le Meseurier worked in London for MI5 during the war. She lived in Bayswater with her father who was a correspondent for The Times.

This part of my research was as part of Connie's Thwarted Dream outline to establish the character of her husband George. In this narrative structure George is working for the MI5 – and hence his particular revulsion as to what he deems to be Helen Duncan's loose talk which may cost the lives of his team – and also Connie is working as a decoder for the MOD. I wanted to make sure that ordinary members of the public were indeed used by the MI5 and Elizabeth Le Meseurier's account confirmed this. Her account and recollections enabled me to develop the background to George as a character

and also to establish what life would have been like for Connie and her children remaining in London during the war.

Mr. Julian Prevett

Mr. Prevett's father was an officer aboard the *HMS Barham* which was sunk off North Africa and which Helen Duncan reported as being hit before it was officially announced by the Admiralty. Mr. Prevett's father was one of the survivors and he confirmed that his mother had not been informed until several months after the event that the ship had gone, nor that her husband was safe. This was very useful background information as all the reports seemed to indicate that the Admiralty had indeed kept the news to themselves and this backed up Helen Duncan's version of events. It helped inform both flashback narrative structures.

Mrs. Anne Burlingham

Mrs. Burlingham is a regressive hypnotist, helping her patients deal with their emotional problems by way of hypnotism and regression into past lives. Although she is not a spiritualist as such, she is a firm believer in the possibilities of life after death and of spirits being able to communicate with the living. However, she stated that in her working practice she had never come across anyone who had been able to materialise someone from a past life, or from the other side. I found her very informative and her point of view useful, especially when I was setting up the character of Helen herself.

Mrs. Amanda Turner

Mrs. Turner is a medium, who has practised for the past ten years. She is divorced, very well educated and comes from an upper middle class background. She first discovered her "gift" when she was in her late teens, but was frightened by it and asked for a priest to close up the "channel" connecting her to the "other side." However, about ten years ago she moved out of London and found that pictures in her new house started to move

around, and that she was aware of people sitting on the end of her bed in the middle of the night. A vicar came and blessed the house, but the visions and disturbances still went on. She moved house and found the same thing happened. It was then that she accepted the “gift” had returned and decided to embrace rather than reject it. She consulted another medium and learnt how to open and close the channels so she could control when she was contacted from - or made contact with - the other side. She also was put in touch with her “spirit guide” – who turned out to be her great-aunt. She can see people from the other side quite clearly in her mind but states that no-one else can see them. She has never heard of any medium being able to “materialise” someone from the other side, and for her own part doesn’t believe that it is possible. This was extremely useful in deciding whether or not Helen Duncan’s materialisations were genuine or not.

Mrs. Turner does not charge for her consultations. She believes that when money changes hands everything changes, and that the pressure to contact the person on the other side would then become too great. For her own part, she has not had any difficulty making contact with any loved one who has died. It happens in a matter of seconds and she does not go into a trance, although she does not always remember exactly what occurs. She does not need the lights in the room to be dimmed. She sits at the kitchen table in normal light, in very ordinary every day conditions. Again, this led me to doubt that Helen Duncan’s materialisation claims were genuine. Mrs. Turner told me that the consultation is very exhausting indeed, and uses up a lot of energy. She believes that over-use of her gift would result in it diminishing. Again, this led me to review my stance on Helen Duncan, who was in constant demand and travelled the length of the country giving séances practically every day. Mrs. Turner consults only privately and would never do so in public, although she does not condemn those who do so. She clearly believes in the spiritual world and has no hesitation in supporting other mediums and their work. I found her very informative, and her point of view and comments prompted me to review my opinion of Helen’s approach and genuineness.

Mrs. Barbara Evans

Mrs. Evans is a Spiritualist, though not a medium. However, she does “see” spirits, although they are not visible to other people present in the room at that time. She states that although the spirits she sees have a definite shape, at no time have any of them materialised into a solid tangible form. She is not aware of any of mediums that she knows having the ability to achieve this either. This again led me to question Helen Duncan’s materialisation claims and convinced me to approach her story in a different manner.

Imperial War Museum

Diaries and Audio Tapes.

I researched eight firsthand accounts of life in London during the war at the Imperial War Museum, a mixture of both visual and audio. Of particular interest was that of Phyllis Warner who provided me with interesting personal accounts, such as travelling by train in darkness to avoid being detected by bombers, and having to strike a match to check the time, and more detailed accounts of the aftermath of a bombing raid, as well as writing in general about the films, the theatres and music of that time. My storyline was that Connie would remain in London with George, and I wanted to ensure that this would in fact be possible. This proved to be the case and I was able to continue with my outline, with only minor structural adjustments.

Guernsey Record Office

I contacted the Guernsey Record Office regarding Charles Loseby, who was the barrister who defended Helen Duncan at the Old Bailey case. I spoke first to Dr. Ogier, who informed me that Loseby’s daughter had been a tax exile in Guernsey but not Loseby himself. However when I went back to them to check on these facts I contacted Nathan Coyde, who confirmed that Loseby had indeed been in Guernsey and had lived at 4 Clos Galliotte, in the parish of St Martin. Mr. Coyde was also able to give me details of a box of Captain

Loseby's papers lodged at the Guernsey Record Office. He detailed that there were some books of newspaper cuttings which state that Loseby was MP for East Bradford. According to these cuttings, Captain Loseby stood as a candidate for the National Democratic Party during the elections of 1918 for East Bradford, where he defeated Mr. F.W. Jowett, the Labour nominee, who formerly sat for the old West Division of Bradford. He seems to have swapped parties to the Bradford Coalition-Liberal Organisation in 1921.

On the subject of the trial of Helen Duncan, Nathan was able to reveal that file no. AQ 196/17 contained a number of pages (approx 41) on this trial, including a foreword by C. Loseby, which he ran briefly through with me. Although Loseby played a prominent part in defending Helen Duncan little is known about him. He was reputed to be a broken man after he had lost and the records here gave me further insight into his character and background. This information was particularly relevant to my case history narrative structure, where I follow the trial in some detail.

Hong Kong Record Office

I contacted Mendy Chong, who is administrative secretary at the Hong Kong Bar Association, for information about Charles Loseby, who had gone out to Hong Kong to practice shortly after he had lost the case at the Old Bailey. Unfortunately, the establishment of the Bar in Hong Kong was in 1949 which was after the date of Charles Loseby's arrival in Hong Kong. Therefore she couldn't help with any background of Loseby's life there. This made me review my original plan as to how much to show of Loseby himself in the case history screenplay.

APPENDIX 4

Outline for Surfacing for Air

Flashbacks are shown in italics

Portsmouth 1946

A beautiful woman (Connie Hutton) attempts to commit suicide by drowning. *This sequence is intercut with flashbacks of an unseen runner stumbling through a narrow bombed out alley.*

Dr. Edward Balfour attempts to discover the identity of the young woman saved from drowning who has been brought into his hospital. All he has to go on is her bag with a small, worn out teddy bear in it.

When she stirs he tries to convince her she has so much to live for. She mumbles he wouldn't say that if he knew she were a murderer. Startled, he tries to probe deeper, but she can't, or won't, engage further.

He hears her murmuring the name "Helen." Who is Helen – her child, or a friend?

Connie lies in bed, staring at the ceiling. A trolley rattles past.

Becomes:

The rattle of wind against windows.

Connie meets Helen Duncan who has come to visit Connie's father, who is a doctor. Helen sees Connie and tells her not to worry – that her husband Fergus understands and gives his blessing. Connie, a widow, is in a dilemma about re-marrying and is stunned that Helen sensed her problem. There is an instant feeling of connection between the two women.

The police visit Connie. They have put her picture in the papers to try and help identify who she is. Edward finds Connie is distressed, haunted by images of running feet – though she doesn't understand what they mean.

When he returns from his round, the nurse says she thought Connie wasn't allowed visitors. Hurrying through Edward finds a woman beside Connie's bed. He realises she is the Helen to whom Connie was calling out. He asks her into his office, but first his nurse takes him aside and warns him that she recognises the woman. She is Helen Duncan, who was tried during the war at the Old Bailey under the Witchcraft Act. Found guilty too. Doesn't Edward remember the case? Edward replies drily he was in Burma at the time – newspapers weren't top of their list. The nurse warns Edward to take care. Helen Duncan went to prison – and besides what can she have to do with Connie's case? Edward says that's what he intends to find out.

Helen tells Edward his mystery patient is Connie Hutton. They met first in Scotland but met again in London and became friends. Connie attended many of Helen's séances after that. She was there when Helen pronounced the sinking of *H.M.S. Barham*.

A séance is in full flow. Suddenly Helen says she has a sailor from the other side who wishes to contact his mother. He is from the H.M.S. Barham. There is a sob from some-one in the audience. When the lights go back on there are murmurs from the crowd. No-one has heard anything about the Barham going down. Some-one tells Helen she must take care. The Admiralty don't like news like that being released before it becomes official. Helen says she can only pass on the messages she's given and can't think of the consequences. Connie comes forward. It's clear she wants to talk to Helen. But with the uproar that Helen's announcement has made, it's obvious now is not the time. She tells Connie that she will visit her at home as soon as she can.

Helen tells Edward that she knew that Connie wanted reassurance that she had done the right thing in marrying George. She knew that George had a temper and could be controlling, but she hadn't realised to what extent until she visited Connie later that week.

Helen describes coming to see Connie at her house in London. She tries to reassure Connie that things will settle down. Just then George arrives. He sees Helen, who is rather coarse and working class, and is horrified that Connie has invited this woman into their house. Even more so, when he finds out she is a medium and that they have been trying to contact Fergus. He accuses Helen of involving Connie in sheer mumbo jumbo and orders her from the house. He makes Connie promise never to see her again.

Edward mentions Connie's confession to murder. Helen says she thinks it could be that Connie still blames herself for the death of her son, Andrew. That was why Connie returned to see her. She wanted to make sure Andrew was all right. Helen knew she shouldn't let her in but how could she turn her away in the state she was in?

Helen tries to make contact with Andrew but fails. She says she feels he has something important to tell Connie. Helen asks Connie to come back the following day. Connie agrees but says it might be difficult as George is acting strangely. Helen feels that something serious is about to happen to them all – though she isn't sure what. Henry, Helen's husband, warns her that it has to do with Connie.

Edward asks Helen to return the next day but she is due up north. She's not sure she can come. The nurse again warns Edward about Helen, saying she was a fraud who preyed on distraught relatives taking their money. She'd seen it for herself here in Portsmouth during the war. Did Edward know Helen was making £400 a week at the height of her popularity? Edward still thinks he needs Helen to unravel the puzzle.

He tries to get Connie to remember details of her past. She's still getting flashes of running feet. Then she has a flashback of a small boy's body lying in a crater, almost

entirely covered by rubble. She starts to sob, telling Edward it was all her fault. Edward tries to comfort her that it was an accident. She tells Edward that he's wrong, she was to blame. She should have been there. All she wanted to know was that Andrew forgave her for letting him down. Edward asks if that was why she went back to see Helen. She says she didn't think George would find out. But he did.

Connie comes home to find George waiting. He goes ballistic, telling her that Helen is a charlatan only after her money. Connie defends Helen, saying she correctly told of the sinking of the Barham, and also the Prince of Wales. This stops George in his track. He wants to know more. Thinking she's helping Connie relates the Barham incident. George then declares that Helen is a security risk and must be stopped. For the good of the country. He rings his colleagues at the MoD. Connie tries to stop him, but he tells her Helen is a dangerous woman.

Police storm Helen Duncan's séance in Portsmouth.

Helen was arrested soon after, says Connie. And then put on trial for Witchcraft at the Old Bailey. It was pitiful. Helen looked stunned, helpless. She didn't really know what was happening, what the prosecution were capable of doing to her.

The Old Bailey trial. Connie is looking down at Helen as she sits in the dock. Montage of scenes of Elam cross-examining witnesses and the effect on the jury. The judge's refusal to allow Helen's séance, Maude's conjuring trick with his handkerchief. Helen becoming more and more agitated as it becomes clear she has been stitched up.

Connie sitting at home with the papers spread out in front of her. Guilty! Says the headline with a picture of Helen.

Connie says it wasn't a surprise. It was clear that Helen has been set up.

When Edward gets back to his office, George is there. He surprises Edward by being charming and caring. Connie has run away from another hospital where she had been admitted for depression. He wants to take her back there. It's closer to London and he can visit her more easily. While they talk George puts forward an entirely different version of events to Connie – one of a lonely woman conned by Helen Duncan – and Edward for the first time has doubts about what really happened. George also denies being responsible for Helen's arrest. The authorities already knew about Helen's activities and had planned the raid to stop her spreading more military rumours. But he admits he did think she was dangerous, especially at a time when D Day was about to be launched. Was it any surprise the authorities thought it was safer to have her locked away rather than risk her blurting out gossip she'd heard about military movements?

He thanks Edward for his help with Connie and says he will arrange for a private ambulance to take Connie back to the other hospital in the morning. In the meantime can Edward make sure that Helen Duncan is not allowed to see his wife again?

When Edward sees Connie she says that George is trying to have her locked away and to stop her having access to her daughter, Rosie. She tells Edward that she now

knows this was why she ran away from the last hospital and came down to Portsmouth. She'd needed to try and find Helen Duncan to see if she could help her. When she'd failed to do so, she'd felt she had nothing more to live for. This was why she'd tried to take her own life.

Flashback to original scene of Connie standing on the beach. She slowly walks out into the sea.

Connie then tells Edward that all is not lost: Helen has been to see her. But the nurse indicates that she's mistaken: no-one has been in. Edward now isn't sure how reliable Connie is. Connie says that Helen has made contact with Andrew. Edward says Helen isn't going to be allowed in again. It's for Connie's own good.

Edward tells Connie she is being moved back to her old hospital. It will allow George to visit her more easily. Connie says George never came to see her anyway. Again Edward begins to wonder how dependable Connie's memory is.

Helen tries to visit Connie but the nurse sends her away. She calls Helen a charlatan and a witch. Helen says she's used to people doubting her, especially since the trial. The nurse then tells her to stop preying on the vulnerable.

Edward decides to ring the other hospital. There he finds out that George didn't visit Connie and when they talk about long-term commitment for Connie, Edward begins to suspect Connie is right in her fear that George wants her locked away.

When he gets back to Connie's room he finds that Helen has managed to get back in again. He asks her to leave but she tells him that Andrew has come through to her. She begs Edward to let her stay just this one last time. That she can prove she isn't a fraud. Edward reluctantly agrees.

Helen goes into a trance.

Flashback shows Andrew playing with George's precious chess set when the door suddenly opens and George arrives. Andrew from his hiding place can see he has another woman with him. They kiss. Suddenly they see Andrew and George flies into a rage.

Andrew runs and hides in the downstairs cupboard. He suddenly realises he has the knight from the chess board still in his hand and presses into a small hole in the wood in the beam above him. The next moment the door opens and George pulls him violently out. He tells Andrew he must never repeat what he's just seen. Andrew manages to disentangle himself and runs out of the house, George close behind.

The sound of frantic breathing and a repeat of the running feet in the previous flashbacks. It is Andrew who is running, not Connie. George is gaining on him. He grabs Andrew but he trips, falling into what seems to be a deep dark hole. A bomb crater. Andrew lands against the rubble with a terrible smack as his head hits the bricks and mortar. Darkness.

They now know it was George who was responsible for Andrew's death, not Connie. Edward can see this is his chance to stop George taking Connie back to the other hospital for long-term commitment. He also suspects that George's dislike of Helen was based on fear that she might just reveal the truth about Andrew. He now suspects he had more to do with Helen's arrest than he admitted. He realises that neither Helen nor Connie can confront George. He must do so.

Edward goes up to see George. George is there with another woman, Gladys. George tells Gladys to leave them and go into the sitting room. Edward confronts George but he denies everything. George is very convincing.

Edward is about to leave, when he sees the downstairs cupboard. He pulls open the door and searches quickly inside. There he finds the knight still wedged in its place. Now he knows Helen was telling the truth. He pulls out the knight and shows it to George. It matches the rest of George's precious chess set (the knight has been replaced with a newer version). They start to row and Gladys comes out. Edward accuses her of knowing the truth and doing nothing to help Andrew. Why hadn't she tried to stop George going after the little boy? Gladys falters. George hadn't hurt Andrew, she insists. He had only gone after him to try and talk to him. George couldn't find him. Then they'd discovered that the boy had had an accident. No-one was to blame.

Edward accuses him of leaving Andrew there to die. George denies everything, but it's clear that Gladys suspects him now of lying. George tells Edward that he can prove nothing. But Edward says that now Gladys knows the truth and she won't hide behind a lie. Edward tells George that he might not have intended to kill Andrew, but he caused his death – however indirectly – and does George want people to know about that? It's clear Edward has struck home.

Edward then lays down his terms. He wants Connie to stay in his care until she gets well again. And once she is better she is to be reunited with her daughter, Rosie. She will be allowed custody of her – although George will be allowed visiting rights. Reluctantly George agrees.

Edward returns to the hospital and tells Connie what has happened. She says she always believed in Helen but since the trial Helen has been much maligned by the authorities who did everything they could to destroy her. Helen had even begun to doubt her own powers. Now Helen knows that she was the lynch pin in helping Connie she can feel vindicated.

Later Connie, Edward and Rosie go to Andrew's grave. Standing by the grave, Connie sees a figure is standing in the distance by the trees. She thinks it's Helen Duncan but when she looks again the figure has gone... Connie places fresh flowers on Andrew's grave.

It's clear that she has learnt to forgive herself. The worst part is now over.

She's going to get her life back together. For both Connie and Helen the weak have finally conquered the strong.

Notes on Outline

This is not the final outline for *Surfacing for Air*. As can be seen, in this draft it is Helen who unlocks the mystery of Andrew's death. However, as discussed in the thesis, my doubts about Helen's authenticity grew as my research developed and, in an attempt to resolve this, in my final outlines it is not Helen who uncovers the truth about Andrew, but Connie herself. Thus, the ambiguity about Helen's genuineness still remains. However, this ending presented other problems which had to be overcome, most importantly the issues surrounding point-of-view and the obvious drawback of removing the focus from Helen in the final part of Act 3. Details of my decision making in the development of the outlines for *Surfacing for Air* can be seen in more detail in Chapter Two.