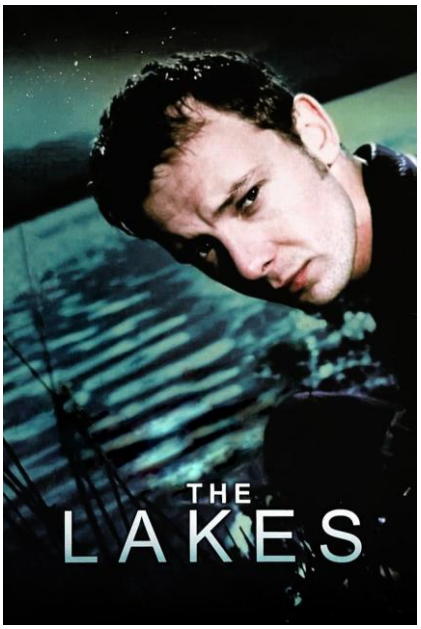
John Simm Episode Commentary for *The Lakes* Episode 1x01



My name is Nigel Algar (?) and I'm talking to John Simm who plays Danny Kavanagh in The Lakes. So John, first of all, if you'd just tell me how you first got involved in the project.

I was sent the scripts. I remember reading the scripts the first time. I remember them coming all in one go. I think there were six scripts. And I remember them because I read them all without taking my coat off.

I came in the door and there they were, with Jim McGovern's name on the front. And I sat there and thought, right, I'll just have a look at the first one. And I was sat there for about three hours, and I read all of them all in one go. And I thought, well, I really have to play this part. It was one of those things where I thought, this is part of a lifetime, really. So I went for it in the audition. I can't really remember much about the audition, but I must have done something right because I got it.

You had been in a couple of episodes of Cracker before then. Had you come across Jimmy McGovern as a person before or not?

Yeah, yeah, the Cracker that I did was actually written by Paul Abbott but he was around Jimmy, I think I'd met him before and I'd always wanted to work with him obviously because he was the best writer on TV and I just thought there's no one better than him and yeah, we got him really well, it was good.

I'm kind of playing him, I think. It's, like, semi-autobiographical, from what I remember him saying to me, what with the gambling and stuff like that. I obviously didn't base it on him as a person, but it helped that he was around, you know, before and during filming to sort of put me right on a few things.

What were the elements of the script that actually got you sitting there to read the whole thing? What were the strengths of it?

I loved the thing about the outsider, you know, the scally on the dole in Liverpool. And the fact that he goes to the Lake District to this really kind of enclosed community. And he does try and do the right thing, you know, but he's genuinely addicted to gambling.

He's kind of an anti-hero in a way. I don't think he's a bad person, you see that later on, you know, he's actually a good person, but I just like the idea that he was put in the middle of this community, this really closed-off weird community who eventually ganged up on him, and he has to hold his own, you know, and stay and do what he thinks is right.

It just appealed to me, the character was so well thought out and rounded, and when I read it, I just thought the character's fabulous. There's so many layers to him.

Yeah, it was that, really. It was the outsider thing. And also, you know, Liverpool's kind of my second accent, really. You know, Manchester is not that far, but I could always do it really well because my dad was born in Manchester but he grew up in Liverpool so it was always an element of Scousers. So I found it very easy to do it, and once I thought I don't have to worry about the accent, the character just came.

Because outwardly certainly initially he's actually could be seen as quite an unattractive, uninteresting person but obviously the way in which the character develops you get wrapped up… Were you at all concerned that actually you were playing somebody whom initially audiences might really not take a shine to?

Yeah, yeah, it was very much in the 90s as well, he was very much a kind of a hero for the 90s. Like I say, he's an anti-hero. He's a cheeky scamp. But I wasn't really worried whether I'd take a shine to him or not. I just needed to get inside his head. As long as I believed in him, then I thought it had come out in the performance.

It was evident in the scripts that he was quite charming as well and not stupid. He reads poetry. I think the place where he is, he's just cloying and it closes in on him and that's why he has to go. He's going nowhere, really, in Liverpool.

Did the character of Danny Kavanagh, did it chime with any elements of your own life? Did you see that this could have been you in another world?

Oh, yeah, yeah, definitely, yeah. I mean, we were at a similar age. I think he was supposed to be 21. I don't know how old I was. I was about 25 or something. So, yeah, every character I play, it's always a bit of myself. I think you've always got to put a bit of yourself into it, so you believe it, you know, and relate whatever experiences he has to similar ones I might have had. And that's all I could do, really.

I mean, obviously, I didn't have exactly the same experiences, especially when the kids go down in the boat and all that, obviously, which was very harrowing, but... Yeah, the way he is wasn't that difficult to find because I was more or less the same age, you know.

Did you have any sense when you took on the role that this might be the one that would really kind of move you into a different league as far as the parts you were offered?

I guess I thought when I read it, yeah, I've got to play it, you know. I thought this is the one. And before this, I did *Cracker* and that at the time was… I thought, "This is the one, this is a great part." But this one was just an absolute gift of a part for a young lad to play.

And I had no idea that, like you say, it'd propel me into a different league or anything like that. But there was certainly something about it when we were filming it that was quite exciting. And, you know, they were coming back with the rushes [= raw, unedited footage of the day] and everybody was very happy.

And it was all there in the script, you know, and David Blair was such a great director that all he had to do was get it down. And he did beautifully, I think. And so I was well pleased with it when we saw it. It's a part that's always been really, really dear to me. I think of all the parts I've played, I'll always remember Danny Kavanagh, you know, more fondly than most.

There was really one interview with you where you were discussing with the interviewer then the nature of the roles that you play and the kind of people that you play and the phrase that ended up in that interview was sort of "a bastard with a conscience". Was this perhaps the first one of those roles for you?

I guess it was, yeah. I guess I was thinking of him when I said that. Yeah, because he kind of is. He is a bit of a bastard, but he does have a conscience, yeah. I guess it was him, yeah. And it's difficult as well, I sort of try and get away from him in any of the parts I played. It'd take me quite a while. I tried to do different parts after this. I ended up playing nutters and killers and things for a while and then did that clubbing film. But I guess if I'm remembered for this, I'll be quite happy.

Was there a rehearsal period or how did the production actually get underway?

I remember going to the Lake District with David Blair and I remember this guy, Ryan, he was called. He looked like Noel Gallagher. And Oasis were massive at the time. I literally did a double take when I walked into the bar. And I called him Noel for the whole shoot. I don't know if it really annoyed him or not, but he seems like he's a lovely guy.

But, yeah, we went to the Lake District and just recce'd and you know looked around where we're gonna be staying and stuff like that I think we rehearsed yeah, I'm not it's not too clear. I can't really remember whether we rehearsed. I'm sure we did I'm sure we did some. It's not often you get to on TV jobs, but I think we did yeah, I think so.

This place was such a big part of my life. We were there for about six months, I think, at this hotel. After a while, I was kind of, I'm quite a private person, really, so I was kind of, I got sick of the bar and actors chatting about actors and stuff and ended up staying in my room a lot, sort of withdrawing myself a bit, which was great for the role, you know, but not great for my sanity, because I started to go bonkers after a while.

I was just desperate to see a shop, you know. It's a gorgeous place. Looking back on it now, you think, yeah. A lot of people used to come in for a day's filming and sort of go, wow, you're so lucky, look at it. And I'd be like, Jesus, man, I just want to see a supermarket or something, you know.

Did the fact that you kind of withdrew a bit into yourself, when you say it was fine for the role, but was this in any way an actively thing that you thought you were doing, or was it just the way you were responding as John Simm?

Yeah, it was just the way I was responding as me, yeah. I'm just like that, but at the time I didn't think, oh, this is great for the role, you know. Sometimes things happen on jobs, and you think this is good, you know, because this is going to help me. But I didn't do it on purpose, like, sort of take myself off to my room and try and be weird or anything. And I didn't, you know, it wasn't that bad, but I did kind of sort of, I was crawling the walls for a while actually.

And it was grim stuff when it gets onto the… when it gets into the kids and, you know, it is quite grim. And it was really hard work, I must say as well, you know, more or less every scene, every day. Which was fab, you know, fab to do, cause I was working all the time.

And it was a great cast as well, he got all these people in who were, like, fabulous to work with, so all that was all there, really. You didn't have to worry about anybody. And I was very cocky at the time as well. I was a cocky little mouthy little swine. So I was pretty confident in myself.

[Nicholas Day] was great. He was a hilarious, Nick Day. He used to crack me up. He was so dry that guy. He was unbelievable.

Everybody had a theory about Scousers. He had about four theories on Scousers. I think Jimmy put that in. He loved having that in. And he kind of helped me feel alienated as well, because it was so weird, this place. It's like Salem's Lot sometimes. Just weird locals everywhere. Like I say, it helped with the part. And quite a young cast as well, so we did have a laugh. I wasn't in my room on my own all the time.

I love the fact that [Charles Dale's role] was just called Chef. He had no name throughout the whole thing. Chef. And he was the archetypical bastard. And all these characters as well. He talks like he's reading a book. And then Lee, the one with the stutter as well. All the characters were fab, all the really rounded characters, and then Cockney Albie, him, with the cap on. That's why he's such a great writer, because even the smallest parts were all written really well. It's half your job done for you really as an actor.

One of the things that surprised me about the character of Lucy, played by Kaye Wragg, is that she's a very good actor, but initially I read the part as being somebody who is actually quite older than in fact she is because there's a reference later on she's actually kind of school age and I really didn't get that from the opening scene. She seems kind of quite older than that.

Yeah, she's a bit of a vamp, isn't she? But I think that's to do with the place that she lives in as well you know I think she's just decided to be this sex pop, to piss off her parents. And she does it wonderfully, I think. I mean, she's a real cow, isn't she, from what I remember. I'm watching this now for the first time for years, but she was great, Kaye.

It's really depressing, I look really young… Good God, what happened?

I remember one thing that did bother me as well, he had to be a Liverpool fan. He was either Liverpool or Everton and there was no way that Jimmy was going to have Everton, so I had to make him a Liverpool fan which really hurt me because I am a die-hard Man United and so I was in trouble a few times for the next couple of years every time I went to Old Trafford, like what are you doing here Scouse bastard? Getting accused of being a Scouser at Old Trafford is not much fun. But he proves that I did a good job I suppose if they thought I was a Scouser.

There's Noel.

How closely were you directed by David Blair throughout? How intrusive a director was he for you?

He was absolutely fabulous. I can't praise David Blair enough. He was a wonderful director and still to this day he's one of the best directors I've ever worked with. He did such a fabulous job on this. I am talking about the first series, you know. I have loads of respect for him and we got on really well. I think it's really important that you trust the director, you know, especially... I always find it has to be... it's really important to me because I need to catch his eye after a take and for him to say, "Yeah, that was good," and me to believe him, you know.

So I have to trust him and I totally trusted David Blair, he's such a great guy. And, yeah, we had a great relationship, so that helped a lot. It was very important to me, that.

Matt, he was my mucker, really. We used to hang out a lot. And we were pretty mad, you know. It was pretty... It'd get pretty wild sometimes, I must say. Running around in the lake in the middle of the night and all that kind of stuff. There was a bar in the hotel which was just ruthless. It was an awful thing to have, really, because when you finish the day's filming, you know, the first thing you are is kinda pissed and that's what we did most of the time but like I said I took myself away and sort of got bored after a while but we did have a right laugh.

The hotel where the action takes place, the Ullswater Hotel, was that a working hotel or not?

Yeah, I think it was, yeah. It was a working hotel. I think at the time they had wedding parties staying there.

I always found this quite nice when I was doing this. It said, “smile enigmatically”. And I was like, oh my god.

If only real life was like that. It was such a mad time, this as well. It was '96 or '95, whenever it was. It was such a great time in England, Britpop and… And when we were filming this, I remember at the top of a mountain one day, and Labour won the election. I remember we were up all night, the night before everybody watching it. It was a lovely sunny day, and we were right on the top of a mountain in the Lake District, and the

Conservatives had just been kicked out. It was a really happy time, I remember. There was a really feel-good factor about it all.

And with the music and all that at the time as well, I used to drive around in my car and blasting out the Stone Roses. And they were great with the soundtrack to this. They put some cracking songs on it. So all the music reminds me of this time as well.

Oh, there's a lot of shagging in there. How could I forget?

There's a lot of sex of varying kinds in The Lakes. Was that something that you... Had you done that kind of scene before? What were your feelings about it, how difficult it might be?

I think I'd done bits, yeah. I'd done sex scenes before, but not as many as this. I mean, this is the thing that... I mean, it was just non-stop here. I mean, a lot of it was horrendously embarrassing, to be honest. It looked great in that, but it's not much fun to do.

There a scene in the barn when we're shagging in the barn and like literally we're surrounded by people with reflectors up your arse and like you know it was just like everywhere. There were just people everywhere and it does get quite embarrassing because you don't really know these people, especially girls that came in for like one day, you know, and you sort of had a shagging scene with them. One of the girls we just picked up in the alley then, they had a sex scene with her and it was her first ever sex scene. And it was, you know, I was trying to be really careful and sort of, you know, I was covering her up every time we stopped.

And I remember walking out and her boyfriend was up next door and we walked out of the room, like, in dressing gowns covered in sweat, you know. And I had to go meet her boyfriend, which was quite heavy. “Hello, mate.”

Bit like the scene right now.

Yeah, yeah, it was like that. It wasn't as... it didn't have a violent outcome, though, so... And it was freezing, I've got to tell you that as well. With the night shoots, a lot of it was freezing.

I love this line.

One of the things that is impressive, I think, about the sex scenes is that they have a kind of quality, all of them in their different ways, have a kind of quality of reality about them, which is a rare thing to see in either TV or movies. I don't mean that they're in any sense kind of explicit, but you actually get a sense of, and each time you get a sense of the relationship between the people.

I mean, you know, they weren't just put there for shock effect. I mean, especially the stuff with Emma was, it was quite beautiful the way all that was shot. And, you know, you put them towards one night stands and they're just shagging.

Or Chef.

Or Chef, which is constantly just shagging.

One of the important elements of certainly series one is the amount of social criticism and the class of consciousness there is between the people who are working in The Lakes and the tourists and the resentment and so on and you're obviously staying in the area for a while. Did you recognise or see any of those sort of tensions within the community where you were?

Yeah, I guess so and we didn't really interact with that many people that were around but you did get that sense of it, yeah, the community. And there was outrage, I remember, when it came out with all the sex and, you know, but I think Jimmy loves all that, he loves the controversy and, you know. He was quite happy with it, I think. And it was fine.

A lot of them were just, like, really fuddy-duddy, kind of... It was quite fun to piss them off, to be honest, you know.

I like this one. He puts the music on after the birds. It's about 5 o'clock in the morning.

There's a Liverpool scarf that they draped over my door. I tried like hell to get that off. At one point I'm actually in a Liverpool shirt and I never lived that down because people took pictures of it and sent them me as postcards and things.

Mary, she was fabulous. She was such a brilliant actress. This family was so well written. I thought everybody was wonderful in this. James. And I felt like Grandad sniffs the milk all the time and all that.

Was there any temptation for you to kind of improvise at all, or encouragement to improvise, or did you stick pretty much to the script as well?

I think we stuck to the script. I mean, it wasn't, like, you know, rigid. But, yeah, and we did improvise a little bits, but with Jimmy's writing, it would be a shame to improvise, you know, because he can write better than you. So we kind of stuck to the script. I was quite happy to do that.

Usually in jobs I do kind of sort of, I do come off the page a little bit and sort of do some improvisation. I did little bits in this and they were fine with it, but I didn't, you know, we didn't sort of veer wildly off the script or anything at any point because it was all there on the page. Like I say, it was all done for you.

When one thinks about The Lakes, both serious, sex is usually... I mean, the consequences of sex are almost universally bad. They lead people astray. There's unwanted pregnancy, there's rape, there's the affair with the priest…

Yeah, there's the school teacher not paying attention to the kids because she's out shagging the chef.

Did you see any of Jimmy McGovern's kind of Catholicism or would you think this was just like a dramatic device because it either propels events forward if you have consequences of sex presented as pretty dramatic?

I think it's probably a bit of both, you know. The Catholicism, especially with the priest and Emma's mum, that was pretty outrageous, you know, if you think about that. And in the second series, he really comes into his own with that, because he literally has, I think it's an archbishop telling her to get an abortion or something.

So he really plays with that, I think, Jimmy. And there was this thing, he gave Danny a lot of speeches about Catholicism. You know, I think one of them said something like, they fill their boots full of sin for a week and then they go to say ten Hail Marys and they're absolved and they're off and they do it again.

You know, I think the absurdity of that, he was kind of attacking that. That was a great thing about playing the part, he had so many great speeches, because he was so sharp, Danny. Great with the put-down, you know, and also really intelligent. And so some of the lines he had were just fab, you know. Some of the speeches that he'd written for me were just wonderful to do.

I thought [Danny and Emma's story] was good. I thought, you know, essentially it's a love story. And this was also well written as well. You know, it wasn't tacky or... I thought it was handled really well, this.

[Danny and Emma having sex on the side of the mountain] was a really embarrassing scene to do, this was. Literally surrounded by, like, twenty men. Holding microphones and that, it's unbelievable. And this was the heaviest one of all, this was. On top of a bloody mountain. Freezing your arse off. It was all going— It was very embarrassing because I knew Emma's boyfriend as well at the time. It was quite embarrassing, really. But we got through it.

Still got that t-shirt.

He's got all these images as well. God. God, he's looming in every scene in this. And it moves at a hell of a pace. I was surprised how fast we got out of Liverpool into the Lake District.

Would you watch the rushes daily or how did that work?

No, I didn't watch them. I think maybe he'd show me little bits, or if I was worried about a scene or whatever, he'd say, come and have a look. I think I went to David's room a couple of times and watched the bits, yeah, saw bits and bobs, but like I said, I trusted him so much I didn't really need to.

And I'm not one of those actors that gets put off by watching rushes and changes your performance. And that can be dangerous because if you start changing it halfway through because you're embarrassed about what you've done, it's going to look ridiculous, but I've never been one of them. I don't really mind it because I look at the shot, really.

And he shot it so well. And Daf Hobson as well, the DOP, was fabulous. Absolutely fabulous. He's one of the best in the business. And because we were so... It was so intense

and we were close-knit for such a long time all together, you know. Everybody… it was very important that people got on very well, the crew and everybody, and that was the case on this.

At the time, you know, I thought it was quite heavy because I was in this hotel in the middle of nowhere for, like, six months and I'm sure I lost my girlfriend and everything suffered, you know, it's all like... But, um... It sounds a horrible thing to say, it was kind of worth it.

When you'd done your first feature film, Boston Kickout, just before The Lakes, did you have any idea in your head about the difference between acting for TV and acting for movies? Did you have any kind of theory about that, or how you approached the part?

No, I didn't. No, because to me it's all the same. Camera shots, they're either right in your face or halfway down your body or you see your whole body, you know, so I always find out where the shot's going to be before we do a take and usually just look at Daf behind the camera and sort of, you know, say, is it here or is it here, you know, and he'd tell me and kind of adjust the performance accordingly, and it's the same for film and TV, and this was shot on film as well, so I treated it like a movie. I don't treat them any different. If I do TV, I make sure it's good stuff, you know, and I treat it like a film, because I think everybody else does, I think. You know, the director, the camera crew and everybody, so...

And working with people like Bob, you know, Mary, who were just fabulous actors, and so I was constantly learning because I was surrounded by such quality, you know. I took a lot from all these people. I was still learning loads at the time.

Can you think of particular things that you did learn? Anything kind of specific? One of the things that I notice a lot in this is that a lot is expressed by looks and the movement of eyes and so on, not just the script.

Yeah, that's all it is, I mean, that's down to you as an actor. Sort of, you know, get the character and get his walk and the way he looks and the way, you know, he wants, and his silences say a lot as well. Because he's quite, he's quite an intense guy. So a lot of it is done with looks and stuff, you know.

[Re: a scene with Danny's parents] There's me dad. Well, he's not me dad, is he? He's her dad. The father-in-law. He was great. He's a great actor. I ended up working with Paul Copley, who plays Emma's dad, Peter. I worked with him quite a few times. I think I worked with him before as well, and a couple of times since.

And Bob Pugh, he was like the joker. He's got such a dirty mouth. When he's dressed up as a priest, you know, before takes, it was quite funny, the things he'll say. But we had quite a few nights in the bar, big Welsh drinker. It was just funny he was playing a priest because he just cracked me up, he did.

Do you find when you are in a community, cast and crew, in a small place for a long time, that people assume sort of a specific role? I don't mean roles, obviously, within the film, but somebody who can be relied upon to be the wisecracking guy, the other person is, I don't know, the mournful one or whatever. What was the kind of esprit de corps like?

Yeah, no, people did fall into those characters. There were the quiet ones and there were funny ones and there were ones that moaned. It was like every long shoot, you know. It was it was tough, you know, at the time. It was it was hard work and, you know, there's no doubt about that but looking back on it now it was a lot of fun, you know.

How can you not enjoy doing these scenes? I mean, every scene that I was called upon to act it was just... There was always something great about it. I love that as well, get that off. There's little tiny things that he puts in. There's a thing about a sheep's head in a fridge or something at some point as well.

He was really up for this thing about scousers getting vilified you know, every opportunity he gets it in there, doesn't he?

What do you think was the most difficult scene for you in the first series of The Lakes to shoot? To get into?

I forgot about this. His signature, Danny Kavanagh's signature, when he fought it was a headbutt, he always went for the Scouse kiss and tried to get in every time.

I think the most difficult scene for me definitely was... was pulling the kids out of the lake, without a doubt. I remember that. I mean, it was like a hypothermia. We had to go back and reshoot it as well, it was like August, but again, fab. And we had to reshoot it and it was freezing, honestly. And it was grim, it was so grim. And it was, you know, like David kept it light on set and stuff, but it was pretty heavy stuff to do.

I remember I called it, I think we did it on a Sunday, it was called Black Sunday because Eric Cantona retired from football that day as well, I'll never forget that. I'm there blue in the back of an ambulance, getting injected with stuff to stop me going blue. I sat in the car on the way back and I got a text message saying Eric Cantona, it was just a horrible day. And then I think I had an argument with Jimmy McGovern in the bar about football. Get drunk, you know. So, no, that was the... Yeah, I do remember that day very well.

[Re: another scene with Danny's parents] There's my parents. Arthur, the guy that played my dad, was... I know every Scouser says this, but he was really good friends with George Harrison. And he was telling me all this stuff, you know, at one point he was... They asked him to join the Beatles, you know, and his mum wouldn't let him go on tour with him in Hamburg, so his mum said no, and so if he'd had gone with him, he probably wouldn't have been to the Beatles.

And I was like, yeah, yeah, yeah. And it was true, he brought all this stuff in and, you know, and he photocopied it off because I'm a massive Beatles fan and I was just blown away by this. Arthur the Fifth Beatle. And it was absolutely true.

And now you read about George Harrison and, you know, when they asked him what he calls his haircut and he says, Arthur. It's all down to him, he was his best friend and he told me loads of stories about that and he brought loads of stuff in and I was well made up with that. I couldn't believe, you know, I was working with one of the Beatles. He was telling the truth.

I love this shot with all the black eyes. I love the fact that the organist goes off key as well.

[Re: Danny and Emma move to Liverpool] I love this as well. We go back to Liverpool, and it's just contrasted with all the greyness. Coming over the hill. Back to the grimness of Liverpool. But like I say, he does try and do the right thing. He tries to provide for 'em, you know, he's not a bad person. He's just young and he's weak-willed, I think, sometimes. And it was weird for me because the gambling thing, I've never gambled. It's not an issue in my life, so I had to sort of substitute it for something else, you know, that I was compulsive about.

Which was?

I can't remember now. I can't remember. But I sort of got into it. I did sort of hang around betting shops and I did see the thrill of it, definitely. But it never made me gain fancy. In fact, it sort of turned me off it for good.

Was that the limit of your research into the role or did you do other stuff?

I'm trying to think now. I think I hung out with Scousers for a while and sort of hang out. It was great to be in Liverpool, you know. I just took it all in. There were a lot of people I took character traits from. A lot of… like Ian McCulloch, lead singer of Echo & the Bunnymen, who's now a mate of mine because of this, because he saw this and we met at a gig and he was going on about this, you know. And I kind of based a bit of him on him, sort of the cool bit, you know, kind of dry, the way he talks. And I told him that later and he didn't believe me.

You've never heard me speak, you've only heard me sing. I went, well, no, I did, I've seen interviews. So I based it on a few people, but... I can't think of any specific research I did. I mean, I probably did, but... I'm not telling you.

And they were up in arms about this, because everywhere you look, there's people shagging behind bushes, you know. And they did the usual thing of freeze-framing sex shots and putting them in the tabloids and ridiculous things like that.

That's very much the two occupations that are available for recreation within that kind of community, drink and sex, that's something that somebody says later on.

Yeah, that's the only thing there. Like I say, there's no shops. Like, it's temptation.

[Re: scene with horse race betting that refers to a horse called Don't Tell The Wife] Don't Tell The Wife. I love that when the horses are called, Don't Tell The Wife. I love that one. The horses. It's called Don't Tell the Wife.

And presumably Jimmy McGovern gave you the speeches, and other characters' speeches about the truth about Scousers, or they're all like this, or they're all like that, presumably to sort of undercut those notions, but to a degree, do you think the character of Danny Kavanagh, at least initially, actually plays towards those clichés?

Yeah, I think so. Yeah, he's given him all that, hasn't he? He's the archetypical Scouser, I think. You know, in Jimmy's head, I guess. But everybody's got a theory, but, you know, they're all comedians, or they're all, you know, "Yeah, mate, do you want to buy a bin bag?" And they don't help themselves. When you go to places like Glastonbury, they *are* like that, you know, "Do you want to buy some fresh air, mate?"

There are loads of scallies, but there are loads of scallies from Manchester as well. It's all relative, but I think there's a romantic idea about the Scousers. They're kind of like, they'll stick together, you know, and they're very passionate people and they're very funny people. I love Liverpool now. I mean, after doing this. It's not a usual thing for a Man United fan to say but I do love it. They were really lovely to me.

[Re: Emma giving birth sequence] I always thought this was great. It was really well filmed. Intercut with the dogs, you know.

For your character, for Danny Kavanagh, what do you think is the thrill of gambling? What does he actually kind of get out of it? Because actually, you know, he's, surprise, surprise, pretty much a loser at gambling most of the time.

Yeah.

So what, I mean, when you were playing those parts where he's anxious about the outcome of a race or putting money on, what were you thinking that he was getting out of it?

It's a thrill, isn't it? It's a thrill. I mean, he says, he has a speech, I think it's in the second series now to the priest, but he tries to explain it to him. And I can't remember the speech, but he says, you know, you lose it and then you put another one down, you lose that and you put another one down. But one day at some point you're going to win.

And when you win, you win big time, you know, and it sort of makes all of it worth it, and, you know, and because of the way he is, he's cocky and he's confident, you know, he thinks his luck is going to change all the time, and strangely enough, it does change, because he wins when he puts down the bet in the Lake District, and it kind of gets him off, because it proves that he was on the phone or something.

And so at a really important time in his life, it kind of helps him out in a very strange way. But he gets into so much trouble over it, you know. He is addicted to it, and it's a compulsive thing. There's a great scene outside of betting shop, where he walks past and

he can't walk past. He ends up going in and that encapsulates, I think, the whole gambling addiction.

He thinks everything's a gamble, you know. He puts it towards everything in life. He says, well, this is a gamble, that's a gamble, that's a gamble, you know. So he tries to justify it to himself. And he really does try hard to stop, you know.

I love all this sequence, this song and you know, this was a lot of fun to do.

This is a good shot of the guy rolling a round table past. And there's a great shot in here with mirrors, if I remember rightly. It took a while to get right.

How many minutes of material each day are you generally trying to get, can you remember?

I can't really remember, no. It wasn't banged out. I mean, you took time over every shot, which you can see. I don't know how much we'd do a day. I don't think we ever got terribly behind or anything like that. Once we started filming and everybody got to know each other, it kind of became quite smooth, you know.

As long as you do your work, I think, and prepare as an actor, then you shouldn't really have to worry about it, you know. You know, as long as you learn your lines and know what you're doing and where you're coming from and blah, blah, blah. You just do it, it's easy and you just trust everybody else to sort of to do their job as well and everybody did wonderfully.

I forgot how much a chain smoker [Danny] was as well. Roll ups, I think I was smoking roll ups at the time in real life, so I certainly was after this.

So he does lie, you know, he's a little white lies, but... He's a scally. And he does try and do the right thing, you know, he had to get some money and he got some money somehow and I'm sure he says to himself I'll never do that again and he ends up having to do it again and obviously getting caught.

The solemn brother.

Yeah. James [Thornton], and he came… in the second series, he really came into his own. He had a lot of heavy scenes in the second one. I think this was one of James's first jobs, actually. He was fab.

When was the idea of a second series… Did you sign on initially with the idea of a second series or…?

So, well, to be honest with you, I can't really remember. I don't know when they mentioned it or... I mean, it must have done well and they just commissioned it. I think they... I think... I might be wrong, but I think they sort of wanted three series, I think.

But with the second one, I was kind of... It was a different ball game, the second one. Because there were lots of different directors and there were lots of different writers. And even though, you know a lot of them were great I was I was a little bit pissed off that it

wasn't Jimmy writing all of it, you know, because I did sign up to do Jimmy McGovern's *The Lakes* and I guess I kind of was a bit on autopilot in the second series because I'd already done the work I knew the character inside out and it was a lot easier. But I always think the first one holds up better.

Although there were a lot of great things in the second one, and it was mainly the same cast. I would have been fine if they'd just left it at this, but it was, again, it was worth doing. I certainly didn't want to do a third. I don't like sort of flogging things into the ground, you know.

Was that a possibility?

I think so, yeah. I'm not sure. I'm sure that it was mentioned.

I've still got that leather jacket. Knackered leather jacket. That was his signature, that, was Danny Kavanagh's leather jacket. I've got it hanging in my wardrobe now, in case anybody wants to auction it. It's never happened yet.

There's a shot in the Liverpool shirt stood in a doorway. This is kind of based on a picture I've got of John Lennon in Hamburg.

One of the interesting kind of little sidelines in Danny Kavanagh's character is his sort of pleasure in words, which exemplified there, and also the poetry thing, which comes a bit out of left field, it's something you don't really expect from that character. Did you ever ask Jimmy McGovern, why is he quoting Gerard Manley Hopkins, why is he carrying around T.S. Eliot?

Well, like I say, it's kind of autobiographical and I'm sure Jimmy did, which is weird because Danny's not a writer or anything like that, but I think he's sort of confounding the whole idea of Scousers being, you know, not thick, but people don't generally think of him like that when it's just a generalisation, it's as being, you know, it's absolute nonsense, you know.

I love that about the character, the fact that he was... He wanted out, you know, he wanted more than he had, and he taught himself, you know. He had no means to go to college or anything like that, but he's generally interested in words, you know, and he reads, which is, again, he kind of confounds everybody's ideas about Scousers, and I think he's done that on purpose.

When the second series aired, there were apparently 154 complaints made to the Broadcasting Standards Commission, which were more than 138 complaints about Queer As Folk. And when they made their ruling, the Broadcasting Standards Commission said, "The amount of sexual conflict, nudity and strong language had been no more than necessary to the drama's depiction of a nightmarish world dominated by lust, self-interest and vengeance. Such portrayal of a deeply fallen humanity had not been inappropriate for transmission on a Sunday."

I didn't know I had more complaints than *Queer As Folk*. That's fantastic.

But in a way, do you think that kind of like thumbnail description of the world as seen in The Lakes, a nightmarish world dominated by a lost self-interest in vengeance, I mean, to what extent do you think there is, without being too ambitious about this. I mean, a world view of Jimmy McGovern, does he actually see characters as we're all in a fallen world in terms of Catholicism anyway?

Yeah, yeah. Nothing's perfect, is it? And the situation that he finds himself in when he goes back to the Lake District is a nightmarish situation. You know, fate happens and you can't do anything about it. Suddenly when they're plunged into this nightmare, he has to sort of draw on every ounce of honesty and goodness in him to try and get himself out of it. And he's like really backed against a wall, you know, and all these people really gang up on him.

But I think the nightmare... It's just real life, isn't it? And even this, you know, he's trying, he's got a job. But he's a flawed human being, you know, which most people are. He does his best, that's all I can say, and when he's backed up against a wall, you know, his qualities come out, you know, he's a good person and he's got a lot of morals which you don't really think about before that happens, you know, he's...

He has got morals and he's very clear with them, you know.

His circumstances, isn't it? You know, it was never going to be easy for him. And he takes her away from this idyllic place and takes her home. And he just genuinely, genuinely tries to do the right thing. But he fucks up, you know, he's human.

[Re: Scene with Emma's mother and the priest kissing] Now *that's* controversial. I'm sure they started sending their complaints in about here. If the sex scenes hadn't done it before. But it's a human thing, isn't it? Him and his fight against, you know, trying to justify himself to God.

And even he faults us, you know. That's what I like about his writing. He writes human emotions really well. I don't care who you are. All these people are flawed.

And he writes very, very strong female characters as well.

Yeah, he does, yeah.

Everybody's given their full weight.

Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely.

[Re: scene with Emma's mother in the kitchen with a lot of ruckus and the smoke alarm going off] This is all very clever, because it's all cloying and beep, beep, beep all the time, you know. It really shows the state that she's in, the guilt.

I like how this goes into the horses. There he is, at it again. And the thing is he's awful at it, he never wins.

And there's the battle of, does he do it again? Try and get away with nicking some money. Which he swore he wouldn't, you know, but he constantly forces himself into a corner. And obviously this time it doesn't go according to plan.

It does seem like quite a good scam, though.

Yeah, no, it's ingenious, isn't it?

Sheer invention on McGovern's part?

Yeah, yeah, I don't know whether this actually happened or not, but...

Here comes another headbutt. This really puts him in this shit.

Somewhere along the line you said that your kind of acting heroes or models are Dean and De Niro and David Thewlis…

Oh, yeah.

I mean, the first two, I don't know so much about David Thewlis, if he's associated with a method and all of that stuff. Are they just people you admire or people from whom you've learned sort of acting techniques?

It's people that have inspired me at different times, you know, when before I became an actor. The reason I became an actor is I saw *Rebel Without a Cause* and was just, just fell in love with the whole romance of his red jacket, you know, so that's the thing that first brought it to my attention, so that's the reason for James Dean. With Robert De Niro I went to a method acting school, Stanislavski kind of thing, and it was like a classical theatre school.

I just loved what he did, you know, the method he used. I think every young actor sort of looks up to him. But as far as David Thewlis goes, it was his performance in *Naked* that did it for me. I left college because I got so pissed off with it and I thought I was a bit impatient and I wanted to get on with it, you know. And I remember leaving and telling him I was leaving, walking out of the college, walking to Camden Town and going to see *Naked* because it was on, it was just about to start and it was, you know, and I went and sat and watched his performance and it inspired me to go back. And I thought, no, I've got to finish this, I want to do that. And his performance in that really inspired me to go back. So I'll always be grateful for him for that.

And later on, I played Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment* and I kind of based it on his look, Johnny Boy's look. And so years later, it came in handy as well.

Another bastard with a conscience, Raskolnikov.

Yeah, the ultimate bastard with a conscience, yeah, the ultimate bastards with a conscience well with no conscience. Yeah, after I played him I thought well I can't do them anymore now because it's just about the lowest you can get.

Do you think the prejudice that some actors have had in the past about working for television as opposed to working in movies or indeed on the stage for that matter, do you think that's kind of largely broken down now that people like yourself kind of commute easily between both worlds?

Yeah, I guess so. The state of the British film industry is such that you can't rely on movies. I certainly didn't want to go to America and start doing rubbish for loads of money. The money would have been nice, but I didn't really want to do rubbish. And so, I mean, I say a lot, I'm not going to do any more TV, I've got to just keep on with the films, but when it gets scripts like this, you know, that land on your doorstep and...

Like *State of Play*, which is the last thing I did with Paul Abbott, you know, you just think, well, this is as good, if not better, than most scripts I've read that are going to be made into films for the last year or so.

And a lot of them that get made are rubbish, you know. And I think, well, if the director's good and the cast is good and the writing's good, a lot of British TV can be easily as good as film, you know. And so I've never been snobby like that.

Because drama series like this obviously offer in the hands of a good writer, the opportunity for a character to be really fully developed, unlike a hundred minute feature film.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. It gives you time and space, you know.

[Re: Danny going back to the Lake District] So he didn't need to go back. Like I say, he's trying to do the right thing again. He's constantly trying to make up for his shortcomings, I think.

Apparently the levels of autobiography extend to the fact that, not autobiography, but there was in fact at some point a headmaster of a local school whose wife was having an affair with a chef. Was that something that was known to you at the time?

That came out afterwards, I think, and he had killed his wife, this guy, and they found her in the lake. And his name was, I think it was something like, I think it was like the same name or something, John Parr, or it was like John Carr or something, it was a very similar name, but it was totally by chance. And then the second name, in the second series, they actually changed his name because of that, because there was a bit of an uproar about it.

I think it came out after we'd finished filming and they found this body in the lake, which was just totally, totally, you know, by chance, it just happened to have the same name and it was the same scenario. So, you know, life imitating art, or art imitating life. And they changed his name, and I can't remember what they changed it to, but it was very subtle, and nobody ever mentioned why but that was the reason.

I love this. Kevin, you see such a sad character, you really feel for him here. A man slowly losing his marbles, which you would. I think he's a wonderful actor, Kevin. He really comes into the fore in the second series. That was one of the great things about the second

series, because it was based around him a lot, and he was absolutely fabulous, I thought. Just his walk and everything, just says everything about his character.

[Re: scene with Danny being told locals are being paid higher wages than him] That says a lot about the community. He's constantly on the back foot, he's constantly the outsider there.

It's a nice slow birdie joke when she finally does crack.

Yeah, it is. It finally gets a better end, doesn't it? And this is all, in light of what happens, this is all kind of pretty tragic with the kids.

I like the way the whole series starts as what you think is possibly going to be a rather conventional drama about a boy and his girlfriend, unplanned pregnancy and so on. And then, certainly by the end of this first episode, it's expanded to include the whole community.

Yeah. Yeah, yeah, it's not what you first see, is it? It turns into something totally different. And it's an impending sense of tragedy, you know, that you don't really quite… You're never quite ready for it until it hits you. I like this scene.

With such a long shoot and obviously kind of quite intense emotions, did you ever feel not necessarily deliberately but find yourself kind of keeping in character or was that not ever something that you would want to do?

This character stayed with me for years. Every time I'm with Ian or anybody that's a Scouser, I start talking Scouse. I can't help it. I can't help it, and I know loads of Scousers now. And every time, I slip into it. Because it was such a long time, and I'm sure I was speaking it off-set as well. It just became the way I spoke, and it took a while to get rid of it, actually. So it stayed with me a bit, yeah.

But did the character stay with you off scene during the during the shoot? I mean did you find you were Danny when you were off 11 o'clock at night?

Not really, no. I'm quite… I can leave it there. I can leave it at the door. You know, not really, no. When I'm on my own, you know, I don't need to. And after a while of doing it all day, every day, I know he's there and I can just grab him, you know.

And I could tell you his reaction to any situation after a while because you kind of become him, you know. But I've always found it easy to leave it at the door, you know. I mean, this was quite extreme for me, because after a while I was literally crawling the walls, you know, in this hotel. Like I say, that kind of helped me, but you've got to be able to leave things alone when you finish work, especially in case of someone like Raskolnikov. You just go insane, you know, can't stay in their head for 24 hours.

All these shots are wonderful, of the confessions. Such a repressed community.

I think one of the strengths of the series is that, yes, there are a lot of sex scenes, but because you actually understand the nature of the relationship, and in particular the relationship

between the priest and the mother there, that when there is some kind of consummation you know you have all the reality of the characters behind it. It's not just sort of an arbitrary coupling, I mean. You know you feel the passion, as it were, that the people feel for each other each time it comes round.

Yeah, I think it's incredibly well handled, all that. This was always good. I always remember the kids in red. There's such a vivid image of them rowing out onto the boat. And the fact that you've seen them going to school about four times on the same journey, you know, and I think this is the last time that it happens.

[Re: scene with opera singer in the boat on the lake] This was such a surreal scene, this was. I think they were going to cut this, but I love this scene.

[Re: scene with Danny on the phone with the bookie] And that is eventually… He puts the money on that horse there. And it's the thing that gets him off in the end.

[Re: scene with head teacher demonstrating a physics experiment] And this is great. He says something like, you know, if you tip it, I'm going to put it over your head and drown you or something.

Presumably some of the underwater scenes were not shot actually on location, they were shot in a studio?

The ones, yeah, when you see the camera underwater, yeah, it's a big tank that they film that in. But the stuff on the lake is on the lake, believe me. I still shiver when I think about it. And it was exhausting as well, having to sort of go under and under and under and try and get these kids. It was really harrowing, actually. It was a very harrowing thing to do that day.

[Re: scene with Chef shagging the teacher's wife] That's horrible, isn't it? Such a wonderful character, such a weak man.

The music there. Just that slight note, maybe coincidental, of 2001, where the ape raises the bone.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, I didn't realise that. Yeah, that's true, isn't it? Yeah, that's great, yeah, yeah.

I love the fact that he caught it with his wedding ring. His reaction to it, that's great.

After the success of the first series and obviously the prominence of your leading role, how soon did you find any kind of change in what you were being offered. Did your career immediately take off or move into a different area from there?

I guess it did, yeah. I mean, it brought me to a wider audience, this. And like I say, it's such a gift of a part. If I didn't make the most of it, then I'd have been mad. But I think it was this, and I can't remember what I did straight after this.

I can't remember, but it was this and *Human Traffic* that actually did it. Two very very different parts but…

The Locksmith, maybe?

The Locksmith, yeah, that was, yeah, I was playing something like a drug addict in there. It was like a three-part series. But I guess, yeah… and then we did the second series the year after, so… And then maybe *Human Traffic*.

I love all this about the jets as well, because they're constantly going over. But this wasn't fun.

[Re: scene with the head teacher telling the kids they are in trouble] Serious trouble.

This is great, this is the dream he had at the very beginning.

Can you recall in terms of your production schedule when you actually shot this scene? Was the series shot roughly in chronological order?

No, it was all shot out of sequence, I think. We did the Liverpool stuff all in one go and then we camped in the Lake District for ages. So you don't get that very often, so it's quite difficult. But as long as you're on top of it as an actor, you know where you've just been and what you're doing. It's easy to do.

Great first episode, man. I enjoyed watching that.

And a great closing song.

Yeah, yeah. “I wish I could swim. We could be heroes.” I'm gonna go home now and watch the rest of it.

Great, thank you very much.

You're welcome, it's a pleasure.