

Confined to a wheelchair by the motor accident that killed his wife while he was driving, Jim Wheelwright deals with his grief by sarcasm and cynicism. It turns out the theatre he puts on to himself for himself is not enough.

Plastic England

By Thomas Jackson

Cast:

Jim Wheelwright
Mavis Young

Jim Wheelwright is discovered sitting in a wheelchair waving a transistor radio above his head and cuddling and kissing it. Mavis, his carer, is dusting, sweeping and generally tidying up

Jim: My beautiful! My love, my dove! Whisper soft nothings into my ear so that the evening might slip by on swift wings of gossamer. Front Row and Crossing Continents and the Moral Maze and - oh! ecstasy! - Does He Take Sugar and then the World at Ten and then, and then, let me take you to my bed my love and we will lie awake together through the sweet soft hours of the night listening to the World Service, run slowly, run slowly, horses of the night, until - (he slams the radio down despairingly) - well at least you're a human voice in the

condemned cell even if it is only in pre-recorded stuck up BBC RP. And you don't pity me. (well wisher's voice) I can't imagine how I'd cope if I was stuck in a wheelchair like you, Jim, unable to move, you're an inspiration to us all Jim, an inspiration to us all. (Jim replying to a well wisher voice) Thank you for those few kind and patronizing words I hope I've made you feel better. (well wisher's voice) You have, you have, Jim, we able people so need to be made to feel superior to the disabled, worth every penny of your disablement allowance we pay our taxes for, every penny, Jim, every shining penny bless each one. Bless -

Mavis: Can you just shut up a minute while I move your wheel chair so I can sweep underneath

Jim: Yes Mavis. Of course Mavis. You are my treasure. Your wish is my command. My voice will fade away as the nightingale's upon the midnight air

Mavis: That'll be the day

Jim: Will I be on view tomorrow or is the zoo closed on a Tuesday? Just excuse me while I put on my frightened gorilla face. (well wisher's voice) What on earth shall we do when people like you have all been aborted so you don't exist any more, who shall we pity then, oh dear oh dear, I can't bear to think about it. Still, it's marvellous what they keep coming up with isn't it? I heard they're going to genetically modify dogs so they don't have any legs, not even stumps, now you really would be able to pity them and they wouldn't be able to get away would they, and cheaper than you are Jim, no disability allowance you see. (disability campaigner's voice on demo) Increase the disability allowance! Now! (well wisher's voice) Imagine them looking at you with their sad brown eyes. Poor Jimmy. Ooh. Aah. Time for walkies then? Poor Jimmy D't D't D't. So then you'll be absolutely and completely redundant Jim. (own voice) Do you know that's a feeling I'm used to. Will

you just excuse me a minute while I put on my Prince Charles visiting sheltered accommodation face (puts on appropriate face) (well wisher's voice) Don't worry my dear old thing it'll be OK. There'll be euthanasia by then it will be completely painless. Well goodbye Jim, you're an inspiration to us all. An inspiration to us all.

Mavis: Just as well you can't walk as well as talk or you'd have reached Japan by now

Jim: (vicar's voice) Not able to come to church as often as he would have liked in latter years he bore his disability with unflinching courage and unfailing cheerfulness. He was an inspiration to us all. Please rise and we will sing together "Now sing we all with cheerful voice". (own voice) Florence Nightingale and The Bland Comforter and Victoria Falls and all you other applauding and ogling spectators at the slow unlamented exit of Jim Wheelwright, rise up and sing with one voice "He was a poor unlucky sod who couldn't walk poor fellow, But he made us all feel better and he loved his radio".

Mavis: If I was coming to visit you I'd come equipped with one of those CS spray guns

Jim (nurse's voice): Good morningning, Jim. (Jim in voice in which he talks to nurses) Good morningning nurse (nurse voice) Makes you feel good to be alive on a morning like this doesn't it. And how are we today? Breathe in breathe out. Good to be alive. I'll just pull back the curtains. Let the light into your life. Did you hear Book At Bedtime last night Jim? This is going to be an exciting one I think. (Jim) I think you're right, nurse, this one's going to be a humdinger. I love my radio. (nurse's voice) You do don't you Jim. Just turn over shall we? Woopsy woopsy bedsy soresy. Well who's a naughty boy today then? (Jim voice) Yuk nurse I think I'm going to be sick. (nurse's voice). Never mind. Better out than in Said Jenny Jupe to Johnny Gin. Goodbye then, see you tomorrow. Breathe in breathe out. Good to be alive.

Well what shall I do today then? How today to while away the luxurious hours? Perhaps I'll at last make a start on my autobiography. Memoirs Of A Supernobody. Enter on cue: The Bland Comforter! (vicar's voice) Despair not. Ye losers and ye cripples. Everybody has equal value in the eyes of God, Jim. (voice in which Jim talks to vicars) Thank you vicar, for that thought. Most encouraging and inspiring. (vicar's voice). Every sparrow, Jim. Everybody, no matter how great a sinner, is loved by God, Jim. Even the bishop. Ha ha ha ha ha ha. Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha. Ha ha ha ha ha ha. (wiping his eyes) Ooh vicar your visits do cheer me up. (vicar's voice) We must be cheerful in the service of the Lord. See you next week Jim. You're an inspiration to us all. An inspiration to us all. Goodbye Jim. (Jim) Goodbye Vicar. By the way, just before you go. Great Thought For The Day this morning. (vicar) Oh yes Jim so glad you were able to catch it. An oasis of wisdom and sanity in the mad whirlpool of the Today programme Jim. (Jim) And Thanks vicar. Not at all Jim. It has been a privilege. Goodbye Goodbye. Goodbye. Bless you. Bless you.

(normal voice) But worst of all is The Victoria Falls. Ah! you're at home Jim. Just popped in to see how you were. You're sure you're still alive Jim? Oh good. Good. Living flesh. Living flesh that can't get away. Ooooh! Delicious! That's what I like to see. Ooh I'm going to enjoy this. You're in for three hours today Jim. Lovely! Lovely! Right here we go. I've got this pain. Ooh it's frightful I went to the doctor's but they only give you pills don't they not that I hold with all these pills and the drugs the drugs these teenagers are all at it I read about it in The Daily Mail they're all at it (own voice) - don't they teach the SAS to withstand torture by imagining they're building a house brick by brick? -

Mavis: Withstanding torture? She'd be lucky to get a word in edgeways

(Victoria Falls voice) I don't know what we pay our taxes for it said one at Nuneaton collapsed in class it was a class in good citizenship as it happened funny that wasn't it a nice place like Nuneaton too - SHUT UP. Blessed silence she has faded into

thin air, shimmering blessed silence - oh no she hasn't, help, help - the weather it's getting hotter every year nowadays they say I was reading about in the Daily Mail but I can't see what's wrong with a bit more sunshine it's funny how - how does she do it? She must breathe through her skin - funny how you only remember the sunny days when you were young I mean it can't have been sunny all the time can it though I do think it really was sunny when we used to go to Skegness it was for the air the air you know very good for the ozone they say I was reading about the ozone layer in the Daily Mail apparently it's got a hole in it so clever these scientists these days aren't they I was - SHUT UP. The silence at the beginning of the world. Deep snow in Alpine valleys. Midnight in the Gobi desert. On tiptoe! Shhhh! I may have got away. Shhhh! (whispering in David Attenborough voice) I'm having to whisper in case I frighten them. These humans may look big and powerful but they're really very gentle timid souls

Mavis: I'm going to have to get away now, David Attenborough.

Jim: To return to my autobiography. Yes. Ye-e-es. Today I shall start writing my autobiography! Cripple! The Memoirs Of A Supernobody! How to start? "I was born at Flaxton, a small northern town on the slopes of the Pennines on a day of low louring clouds during a thunderstorm, a meteorological accident which was to uncannily presage the dramatic events of my later life".

Mavis: Spare us.

Jim: O.K. then, what about the physical geography approach? "Flaxton is a small stone northern town nestling beneath the rolling foothills of the Pennines on the edge of an alluvial plain, a combination of factors which is responsible for its history as a thriving spa town famous for its healing waters". Or maybe not my autobiography today. Perhaps -

Mavis (cupping her hands and shouting): Hello Radio Jim. Are you receiving me? Anybody in there? I'll see you

tomorrow

Jim (normal voice): Are you going already? Mavis, don't go. You're my treasure, Mavis. You know that

Mavis (tenderly): Sorry Jim. I have to move on to the next chair-bound treasure island

Jim: Come early tomorrow, Mavis.

Mavis: I'll try. Goodbye for today ,
Jim. Tomorrow. Goodbye, my chuck. As we say back in England (exit)

(pause)

Jim: This is it then. Now once more for the long lonely hours before Mavis comes again. The sour undiluted taste of self in the silences of the night Oh let me not fear the night. I must get over my fear. I must. I must. Night, night I welcome you. Come, come dreadful and transforming night. Throw your spangled vestment over dull and dusty day. Enchant me with your dreams. Jacobus Fantasticus. Take me back, back, before there was a wheelchair and disillusion and despair. When I was eight years old. When there were still corner shops. Footballers earned twenty pounds a week. Kentish orchards on fire with cherry blossom P.B.H. May and M.C. Cowdrey scoring endless centuries through glowing summer afternoons, well hit sir, a most glorious stroke, well hit, electricity will soon be too cheap to meter, sir, sir, the future is bright, slums all cleared away and replaced with brave new cities in the sky, this isn't the dark ages, my friend, this is the nineteen eighties. This is booming London and perambulating Jim swings with it. This is Britain on the move. Step out briskly, sir. Chest out. Left leg forward,

one two three, one two three.(sings) Earth hath no fairer flower to show Than a two-legged Englishman. (talks again) Jim Wheelwright and Margaret Thatcher's Basildon Britain, bold and brash both, stepping out bright as new pennies into the beckoning world. The body may be chair-bound but let the spirit soar!

(He leaps from the wheel chair and begins cavorting about, skipping and dancing and singing to the tune of the sugar plum fairy. As if he is a ballet dancer. (Returning to wheelchair) Oh well. It was a nice idea .

(There is a blinding flash of magnesium light, smoke and roar of thunder and Mavis re-appears, arrayed as Britannia, with helmet, shield, breastplate painted with a union jack, trident.

Jim: Jim! Jim! At last you've come.

Mavis: Greetings Jim. I come. I come to free you.

Jim (leaping out of wheelchair again. They both sing): Rule Britannia. Britannia rules the waves. Britons never never never shall be slaves. (Jim sits in chair again)

Mavis: Arise adventurer. Go forward son of Albion. All will be well, Jim. Just keep calm. Lie back and think of England

Jim: Engerland! (clap clap clap) Engerland! (clap clap clap) Engerland! (clap clap clap) (He leaps up again and they both cavort about the stage singing to Match of the Day music 'A two legged English hero is going to score a goal' (They break off abruptly and both together go into the quite different tune of 'Earth hath no flower to show so fair/ Than a two-legged Englishman'. Jim resumes seat).

Mavis: My hero for today is a nobody who is eaten up by remorse. He has had a completely insignificant life and has achieved nothing. Brought up in a council house on an inner city estate by parents who never noticed he was there, in adolescence he discovered he had a soul. Reduced to extremities of joy by the beauty of animals and flowers he received an even more astonishing revelation when he fell in love with Julie. He then lived in a state of moribund torpor for twenty years with the most wonderful of women, though funnily enough he didn't realise it at the time and thought she was just ordinary. He thought the reason she had been put on earth was to be his wife. Imagine that. Death by marriage was, unfortunately at the time, the full extent of his aperture of understanding.

Jim: Mortgage, two cats, dog, annual holiday to look forward to, mow lawn every two weeks in summer, wash car Sunday mornings while watching old maids biking to church, very nice.

Mavis: He then had his accident which left him paralyzed, and turned out to be the end of the world when Julie after struggling for her life for two weeks in intensive care died. It was at this point that he realised he had never seen who she was. He had been living a half life only, decaying very slowly like radio carbon.

(Jim and Mavis together taking it in turn to say the lines): Good morning Julie. Good morning Jim. Kiss kiss. Kiss kiss. Slept well? Yes thanks. You slept well? Yes thanks. Always do. Good good. Well I'll be getting off then. See you this evening. Have a good day. Had a good day? Yes not at all bad. You had a good day? Yes not at all bad. What's for supper? I've cooked your favourite, shepherd's pie. Excellent, excellent. H'm very tasty this shepherd. Good that was. Sex tonight then? OK. Slip zip. Slap flap. Bam wam. How was it for you? Great thanks. Always think the cigarette's the best part don't you? Good night then dear. Good night. See you tomorrow. (Mavis in vicar's voice) Sex is good, Jim. (Jim in Jim voice) Oh no it isn't, vicar. It was Eve wot gave Adam the apple. You duplicitous cow. It's a bloody Golden Delicious. (Mavis in vicar voice). Ah yes Jim. I think you'll find the Church quite accommodating to the modern mind. Today's churchman does not necessarily take all the Bible literally. We understand nowadays that the inconvenient bits are, of course, still true but true in another sense. Is the account of the creation in Genesis

true? Yes, but in an important sense no. You needn't believe the bit about the apple, Jim. (Jim in Jim voice). The apple is just the bit, vicar, I do bloody believe. Whole barrellfulls of them.

Mavis: My hero is now living in a half-world after the end of time. Little Brown and Harper Collins are in a bidding war to publish his autobiography, the story of a complete nobody who has probably had just about the usual amount of suffering but, unlike most people, has done it in a wheel chair. He is of course Jim Wheelwright

(pause

Jim: So this is the day

Mavis: Yes this is the day. You can do it

Jim: I can't. I can't. Not today

Mavis: Yes you can you can do it today. No time like the present.

Jim: Said Snotty Snob to Peter Peasant.

Mavis: Come on. Come on. You can do it. Let's take it slowly. Let's start at the beginning.

Tell them about your life Jim. What about your earliest memories?

Jim (toff voice): Well, Jim, I was very blessed.. I always say a happy childhood is the most precious gift. I had a really super nanny and Mummy almost never forgot to put in an appearance for at least two minutes a day to kiss me and my sister goodnight. I had a Teddy - (Mavis) called Teddy - (Jim) I remember.

Mavis: I believe your nanny was a very important influence on you?

Jim: She was Jim she was. Nanny Halliday. Ah yes! I can hear her now

(Mavis in nanny voice) Now James Fitzroy St John Fitzherbert Entwistle Wheelright King of England time for the potty. Up with you onto the throne. King of all you survey! God save our gracious queen. (Jim in own voice) Funny how the wheel has come full circle, Jim. Now it's Florence Nightingale. Bright professional manner. Crisp uniform smelling of pine forests. (Mavis in nurse's voice brightly) Good morning Mr Wheelright and how are we today (Jim brightly) Good morning nurse, Bloody awful. (Mavis in nurse voice) That's the ticket,. Never say die must we. What have we here? A little bit of incontinence in both moieties. Naughty, naughty Mr Wheelright. Woopsy woopsy never mind. Don't mind that do we Mr Wheelwright ha ha ha? (Jim in own voice) Oh no nurse ha ha ha. Beware of the chimp he throws pooh ha ha ha! (Mavis) you're in deep shit Mr Wheelwright ha ha ha!. (Jim) So I am nurse ha ha ha! (Mavis in nurse's voice) Up with you onto the commode. (Jim sits on commode as if administering a blessing and holding a sceptre) King of all you survey. God save our gracious king. Except we've got a queen now ha ha ha ha ha! (Jim) Good lord nurse so we have ha ha ha ha ha ha. Oh nurse it's the laffs. It's the laffs that make it all worthwhile. Ah Jim. The innocence of childhood! The piping voices of the little ones.

(both singing and prancing round the stage)

(Jim) All things bright and beautiful
Genetically modified
Anything that's marketable
They are our joy and prid

(Mavis) Everything that's wonderful
Pigs with luminous snouts
Salmon six times their proper size
Fluorescent brussels sprouts

(Together) All things bright and beautiful
Aubergines ten feet tall
Welks that taste like coffee beans

The market loves them all

Mavis: And then you had this glittering career at your public school. Tell me about that.

Jim (toff voice): The happiest days of my life, Jim.

Mavis: And you won every prize in sight I believe in both work and games

Jim: Well not quite every one. Let's not exaggerate. Ha ha ha ha.

Mavis: What was your greatest achievement at school would you say?

Jim: Oh without doubt running the school tuck shop. I created an artificial shortage of doughnuts and then trickled them out gradually charging double. It taught me a most important lesson for life. (Mavis) Never underestimate the gullibility of the general public. (Jim in solemn voice) But that's not the point, Jim. What is the point of education? The point of education, Jim, is values. The kind of person you turn into. That's why I'm so grateful to my old economics teacher Slasher Forbes-Watson. I can hear him chanting in the sixth form economics room now. (chanting) What does the rational consumer do? (Mavis) The rational consumer shows some gumption. (Jim) He always maximizes consumption. But it wasn't just economics Slasher taught us. He taught us how to be men, Jim. How to trample over the other fellow and look him straight in the eye and say "Awfully sorry old chap". (Mavis) No man is an island but some islands are bigger than others. (pause. Then Jim) Ah the island! Burning burning! I'm walking with Julie on the beach. The bright wind and the shining light. The ripples in the ponds left by the tide! Look, Julie, look at the ripples, look at the perfection of the patterns. Look at the order in the universe Julie. Ah Julie! Julie! The island! Oh yes Jim where was I?

Jim: Your time at school

Jim: Ah yes Jim. Happy days. Harry Wharton. Bob Cherry. I say Jampot Singh shall we suspend Bunter upside down in the toilet till he shares his tuck with us? Yaroo! Lego! Leggo you chaps! My postal order is on the way. Happy days. The long lost voices of old England, Jim.

Mavis: As you seem to want to go in for the singing cure sing me something else then

Jim (still in toff voice):: For my second number I've chosen Blake's Jerusalem. We used to sing it in the school chapel of course. Taking the words of a great anarchist and turning them into a paean of praise to the establishment seems to me to sum up the very essence of the English genius, Jim

(He rises from chair and strikes various patrician attitudes. Singing):

(Jim) And did those feet in ancient time
Walk upon China's mountains green
And did the holy lamb of God
Run a business really lean and mean?

(Mavis) And was he raised in a million pound home

Set amidst green and pleasant hills
And did he inherit a load of cash
Made in dark satanic mills

(Jim) Bring me my Porsche that I may go
To seek the riches I desire
My investment portfolio
And dividends going ever higher

(Mavis) I shall not rest from selfish strife
 (Jim) Till on a hill of money I stand
 (Together) And we have sold Jerusalem
 In England's concrete plastic land

Mavis: Jerusalem, sung by Jim Wheelwright of Bunter College. And then you became a town councillor in your native town of Flaxton at the surprisingly young age of thirty I believe?

Jim (northern voice): A' did Jim a' did though I say it misself. A' said to Councillor Hebblethwaite I didn't mince mi words I said, Councillor, Flaxton's a coming town wi' a great future and if you don't take advantage it's your own fault. (Mavis also in northern voice) I'm telling you the way forward in this town is to knock the whole thing down and built t' biggest supermarket in England wi' a car par on t' site. (Jim) We want to get rid of that old Victorian opera house and Pavilion Gardens and parish church wi' carved choir stalls. Get rid. What about peoples' houses he said. (Mavis) Where are they going to live? (Jim) Councillor, a' said, nothing's to stand in way o' progress. Is this business or is it not? That's their problem. It's only when whole thing's knocked down it will be to my satisfaction.

Mavis: Are you a person who easily finds satisfaction?

Jim (solemn toff voice) The one thing I have learnt, Jim, is that money doesn't buy satisfaction. It's doing the decent thing by other people that does that. We must mobilize our moral resources. (They both leap up and strut about the stage Mick Jagger wise singing). I can't get no mobilization. Though I try And I try And I try. But I can't get no –

(suddenly stops) Julie, Julie, where are you Julie?

(Jim) Woman much missed, how you call to me, call to me

Saying that now you are not as you were
 When you had changed from the one who was all to
 me
 But as at first, when our day was fair.

(Mavis) Can it be you that I hear? Let me view you, then,
 Standing as when I drew near to the town
 Where you would wait for me; yes, as I knew you
 then
 Even to the original air-blue gown!

(Jim) Or is it only the breeze in its listlessness
 Travelling across the wet mead to me here?
 (Mavis) You being dissolved to wan wistlessness,
 Heard no more again far or near?

(Jim) Thus I; faltering forward,
 Leaves around me falling,
 Wind oozing through the thorn from norward,
 (Mavis) And the woman calling.

(both resume strutting): I can't get no mobilization. Though I
 try. And I try (etc)

Mavis (encouraging, affectionate): You can do it. You can do
 it

Jim: I can't. I can't. Not today. Not yet. (Councillor voice) Wi'
 my quarrying and haulage business and your public relations
 firm we'll do great in Flaxton (Mavis in public school voice) By
 jove yes councillor a pile of money to be made here. First we
 can make money knocking it down. (Jim in councillor voice)
 And then some more building it up. Come to Flaxton, the
 beating heart of plastic England. (Mavis in toff voice) A town
 with a future. (Jim councillor) Pure water. Pure
 Flaxton. (Mavis toff) Going places? Go Flaxton

Jim: Come to Flaxton. Amidst today's busy life style you can

live the gracious life of another age - but still have all modern conveniences

Mavis: Nestling in the lee of the Pennines

Jim: Historic market town

Mavis: The town that time forgot (Jim) You haven't lived if you haven't had the Flaxton experience!

Mavis: Great Flaxton! Great Shopping!

Jim: With all modern conveniences (They resume strutting about and singing I Can't Get No Mobilization. Sudden stop.. Pause. Jim) The moors Julie. The skylarks on the moors. Deafened by skylarks, Julie! Why didn't I value you while you were here? Julie. Julie. And now you are nothing. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. Gone, Gone.

Mavis (taking his hand affectionately: You can do it You can do it. Jim Wheelright, son of Albion. What do you want, Jim?

Jim: Ah yes, Jim. Give the people what they want. And what do they want? (coarse shouting tabloid voice) THEY WANT, in many cases, to be treated like idiots and have their sensibilities coarsened and their bigotry confirmed. (Mavis) THEY WANT, in many cases, the ambiguities of reality reduced to clear and facile prejudices. THEY WANT, in many cases, to wallow in other peoples' agonies. (Jim) THEY WANT, in many cases, to hate sex perverts. I DON'T WANT to be myself, (together) I WANNA be a CELEB. (Mavis) The great British people are no prudes. (Jim) THEY WANT, in many cases, the beauty of womanhood reduced either, if they're female, to celebrity scandals or, if they're male, to fresh meat - tits and - (Mavis) because THE GREAT BRITISH PEOPLE HAS GOT STANDARDS - (Jim) not quite nude bums. (Together) GIVE THE PEOPLE WHAT THEY WANT.

(pause. Jim) Jim, Jim, listen to the silence, listen to the earth
 (pause. As much as appropriate of the adagio of Schubert's
 Quintet in A Major is played. He is greatly moved. Mavis
 comforts him).

Julie, Julie. Julie Why did I never realise who you
 were?

Mavis: I'm muddled. What decade are we in now?

Jim: Modern times Jim, modern times. Not still stuck in the
 fifties. Ah Jim, the fifties! The fifties. Come on Jim. You
 remember the
 fifties

Mavis: Of course I do.

(singing): What on earth did we do in the fifties?
 Jim (singing); How unreal must life then have been
 Mavis: Before TV reality shows
 Jim: And Hello Magazine

(chorus together)

How sad was life in the fifties
 No computers nor mobile phones
 No supermarkets or sat navs

- (spoken) But no terrorists or traffic jams or cold telephone
 calls or climate change or globalization or yobs or obscene
 bankers' bonuses or lonely old people cowering behind
 deadlocked doors in high rise flats or celebs -

(sung again) No second homes or unpayable loans
 Hurrah then for middle England
 Oh to be rich in the land of the free
 Thank you Maggie and Tony
 And is there money still for tea?

Second chorus (to a solemn, moving, lyrical tune, deeply felt)

This royal throne of kings, this sceptr'd isle
 This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars
 This other Eden, demi-paradise
 This land of such dear souls, this dear dear land
 This precious stone set in the silver sea
 This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England

Jim: When footballers earned twenty pounds a week
 Mavis: It must have all been a bad dream
 Jim: I wore brothel creepers, buff waistcoats
 Mavis: Cavalry twill and brylcreem:

(Chorus together): How sad was life in the fifties
 No computers nor mobile phones
 No supermarkets or sat navs

- (spoken) But no terrorists or traffic jams or cold telephone
 calls or climate change or globalization or yobs or bankers'
 bonuses or lonely old people cowering behind deadlocked
 doors in high rise flats or celebs -

No second homes or unpayable loans
 Hurrah then for middle England
 Oh to be rich in the land of the free
 Thank you Maggie and Tony
 And is there still money for tea?

(Second Chorus)

This royal throne of kings, this sceptr'd isle
 This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars
 This other Eden, demi-paradise
 This land of such dear souls, this dear dear land
 This precious stone set in the silver sea
 This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England

Mavis: And then you threw that up and were elected a Labour MP in 1997. What led you to that?

Jim: Well Jim when I realised Tony Blair MP is an anagram of I'm Tory Plan B I knew which way to jump and I joined the Labour Party. Tony son of Maggie. Tony's England. What a vision Jim. Hurrah for Maggie, Tony south east England and St George! One single concrete platform from Ilford to Basingstoke. Look, Jim, look at this splendid new precinct in Anywheretown. No butchers and bakers cluttering up the High Street here! Get rid! Get rid! Just banks totally dedicated to kindness and love. (Mavis) Charity shops. (Jim) Nonsense and trivia shops. (Mavis) Cobbled pedestrianized arcades. (Jim) All the antique charm of yesteryear. Lovely. (Mavis) Well, Jim, at least you might as well be stuck in a wheel chair as in a traffic jam. That's what I always say. (Jim in Queen's voice) I appoint as a Member of the British Empire, now defunct, Jim Wheelwright for his services as a symbol of modern Britain. Arise Sir Jim. (Victoria Falls voice) Oh good you're in. Sir Jim! Well I never! I just felt I had to rush round immediately as soon as I heard that you had been made Sir Jim I read all about it in the Daily Mail just like Sir Paul McCartney do you think that they'll make him a lord now he's got to sixty four he could be Lord McCartney (Mavis butting in) of Penny Lane (Jim) now that you're Sir Jim I could maybe manage to squeeze in four hours verbal torture a day instead of just three SHUT UP. The silence at the bottom of an abandoned colmine. On Howarth Moor after a snowfall. Shhh. (whisper) She's gone. You can come out now Sir Jim. (Knock Knock.) No! She's back again. GO AWAY.

Mavis (Christian Aid collector's voice as speaking through letter box): It's Christian Aid.

Jim (own voice): Oh, it's Christian Aid.

Mavis (collector's voice): We're collecting for poor countries to help them pay their debts to the IMF.

Jim (own voice): Go away. There's nobody here. The cat ate the envelope. I'm dog sitting for somebody else. Jim Jim, where has England gone? I know a bank where the wild thyme blows. Now taken over by HSBC. Where are the hedgerows and the primrose lanes and the family farms? Where are the sparrows? And the orchards in Kent? O Grimethorpe, where art thou? (Mavis) Where have they gone? What are those blue remembered hills/ What spires, what farms are those? (Jim) Well A.E. Housman I can tell you. Churches are empty. Marginal farms abandoned. And lowland farms bought up by banks and agribusinesses. This is the land of lost content/ I see it shining plain/ The happy highways where I went/ And cannot come again. (sings in Peter Dawson voice) Ye motorways of England!. (Mavis in Paul McCartney voice) The long and winding M 62.

Mavis: Come to plastic England! Buy now, pay later!

Jim: Great shopping! Great sex!

Mavis: Next number on your journey to make peace with sorrow?

Jim: I've chosen the Prisoners' Chorus from

Fidelio.

(He leaps up and hums the tune in time with the record and then breaks into the chorus, they both imitate the prisoners feeling the light and air on their faces as they are led out of their dungeons. Weeping, they shout 'The air! The light!')

Mavis: And then you were appointed to the House of Lords. And you became Lord Wheelwright of What the cat brought in. Why did you choose that title?

Jim (humble patrician voice): Well, Jim, you know the way cats bring you in voles and things and leave them on the front door step as a kind of gift? Well, Jim, it was my way of saying thank you to this great nation of ours which has made me so rich. Thank you Britain. Thank you Tony. Thank you everybody. Entry to my stately home is five pounds concessions for pensioners free entry for wheelchair users (Mavis: oh thank thank you my lord) closed on Thursday afternoons. (Mavis) After you've fed the pheasants you can take the rest of the afternoon off, Willis.

Mavis: And now you're one of England's great landowners. You own your own ex-council house I believe.

Jim (humble patrician voice). It makes you feel very humble, Jim. To have the privilege and the responsibility of owning part of this great land of ours This smiling land, Jim. There'll always be an England. (Mavis) While there's a country lane. (Jim in hushed moral tone) What we've got to do, Jim, is to look after our countryside. (Mavis utters contented moos and clucks and quacks) While of course squeezing even more profit out of it using the most up to date modern methods. (Comforting Yorkshire voice) Beautiful British food. Guaranteed cheap and tasteless. Chickens just stuffed wi' hormones. (Mavis) They just love their intensive concentrated diet. So fat the' don't have to move around all the time y'see, they don't have to waste time walkin', so the' can happily peck away in their own excrement. (Jim) Cluckin' away, t' little beggars. This is a real farm. Farmer knee deep in debt. No pigs suffering from agrophobia on this farm. Eeh, food 'ere must be

good. And the taste! (Mavis) Remember when you were a kid how your mam used to mix up enzyme reactions and tissue cultures in't lab and then serve it up pipin' hot wi' french fries? You can't beat good wholesome traditional British food. (Jim) Cluck cluck. Moo moo.

Mavis:: You can do it. You can do it. Today. Now.

Jim: Jim Jim, not today, not yet . I'm too busy.

(toff voice): Sorry Jim. Just been down on my estates looking at one of my farms. (normal voice) Or maybe not. I love my dear country so much perhaps I'll go and live in France. France! France! O for a muse of fire that could ascend the highest heaven of invention. On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth the vasty fields of France! Or may we cram within this wooden O the very casques that did affright the air at Agincourt! Let us upon your imagination work. Suppose, within the girdle of these walls, the Volvo ready purring on the gravel drive. (Mavis) Even now the estate agents paw the ground, lawyers lick their lips, already the sticker is stuck in the rear window, West Bromwich Albion Supporters' Club, (Jim) the phrase book open at Je suis anglais, comment allez-vous? Second home on the market! The mortgage in the bag! (Mavis) Passport obtained! Euros changed and in the pocket! To France! To France!

(Jim) For Maggie, Tony, south-east England and St George! Charge! Charge!

(Mavis in commentator's voice). The English middle classes are charging down the hill the French are trying to hold them. They're giving way! They're giving way! (jim) They're retreating! Their armour is too heavy. They keep toppling off their horses and lying on their backs on the ground, helplessly waving their cuirassed legs in the air like frogs. (Mavis slapping him on the wrist: Not like frogs. PC at all times.) Not like frogs. Absolutely not like frogs. I've always thought that their armour was too heavy, what do you think Blowers? (Mavis) I quite agree Aggers. My dear old thing. Larwood and Fred Trueman would have been straight through them. (Jim) There's an English archer

standing over one of them. He's waving his cheque book. The French knight is surrendering. My goodness me this is exciting. Picture it Jim. (Mavis) The lingering warm evenings on the terrace, the glass of wine, the old soleil couchant sinking in the west. (Jim) Cli'ck cli'ck go the cicadas. (Mavis) Listening to le cricket on le long wave. Having the neighbours from Walsall over for drinks

(Jim in Brummie accent): I think we've got more money than you 'ave

(Mavis) The boulangerie! The patisserie! Excusez-moi, paysan typiquement local et naturel, est-ce que un magasin that sells le fish et chips dans cet environ ? (Jim) Feesh and cheeps? Savvez? Understand? Non? Oh well. Je will have un pain rustique s'il vous plait. Merci. (Mavis) Je suis anglais. Comment allez-vous? What's that? Did you say you've got warble fly in your carrots? Comment terrible. (Jim) Je suis tres sympathetique. I will telephoner – oui? Telephoner? – my brother Brian in Wolverhampton and let him know (pretends to speak into telephone)

(Mavis makes the ring noises)

Jim: Hello. Brian? This is Colin ringing you from Profound France.

How are you doing? They've got warble fly here in their carrots. (Mavis). Colin? Is that you? Great to hear you mate. They've got warble fly in their carrots you say? That's terrible. Hey Stella, Colin says that they've got warble fly in their carrots

(Jim): Are carrots those red things you see in cellophane packets in supermarkets?

Mavis You know what carrots are, Stella . You've seen Delia Smith talking about them on television

(Jim): Oh, they've been on television

Mavis (very tender and taking Jim by the hand): Now. Now for it. Tell me about the accident. You can do it. Jim. Hero. Son of Albion. You can do it.

Jim (small voice): Jim, I think that perhaps I can. I'll try. How can I describe it? It was like being born except it was the other way round. Is trauma the word? Instead of Julie bringing me to birth and introducing me to life I introduced her to death. I was driving you see. Jim. Jim,, I've been over it a million million times. The wet road, the dazzling headlights. Did I have a momentary lapse of attention? Or go to sleep? Anyway, Jim, we swerved out of the way of an oncoming car and left the road and hit a tree. I woke up in hospital. They said Your wife's in intensive care. A fortnight later they came and said, bad news I'm afraid Mr Wheelwright your wife's dead. My problem Jim is that I can't forgive myself. (Mavis in vicar's voice) We all have to forgive ourselves Jim. Of course you feel you're to blame. It's an important part of the grieving process. But life must go on. We've all done things we regret. Even the bishop. Ha ha ha ha ha ha. Ha ha ha ha ha. (Jim) Oh vicar. You have to be cheerful don't you. Look on the bright side. (Mavis) That's the spirit Jim. May God bless you and keep you. See you next week. Goodbye. (Jim) Goodbye vicar. (Mavis) Goodbye. Goodbye. (Jim in own voice) Your wife's dead Mr Wheelwright. You see that was the origin of the trouble, Jim. She was unlucky enough to be my wife. The thing about marriage is that you create or kill each other. And I'd killed her a long time before the tree did. My original sin, Jim, I now realise, was that I wouldn't let her have a dog. Her love you see was like an enormous big circus top. All the animals were there. Dogs, frogs, cats, newts, toads, slugs, ducks, sheep, goats. All there Jim. It was her particular specialness. God, if there is a God, must love the animals like that. Why didn't I see it? I can see it so clearly now. Why didn't I see it then? Everything that was alive was in the big top. She loved them all absolutely, unreservedly. They were all in it. Except the one person she really wanted in it. But I (Mavis) Lord Wheelwright of what the cat brought in (Jim) insisted on staying outside. Get those animals out of there. They smell. They're scratching the furniture. The terrible thing Jim is that God died in her while I watched it. She stopped being God and turned into me. She looked in the mirror and saw me and became as dead as I was. Pity we never had a dog. (Mavis in well wisher's voice) Oh well never mind. If you can't

look after them properly you shouldn't have them. A dog isn't just for Christmas you know. (Jim in own voice) It wasn't just the dog, Jim, I hope you see that. You see, Jim, the awful and terrible thing is that the accident really was the end of life for Julie. But for me it was the beginning. The amazing thing that I didn't expect was that in a wheelchair I began to live. I began to live a real life instead of a polystyrene replica one.

Mavis: And what now?

Jim (own voice). I feel as if I'm in a totally darkened room. But I can hear her voice. I can hear her voice. Calling to me. Calling to me. Is it an illusion? Am I making her up in death as I made her up in life? Could there be another dimension of reality where she is waiting for me? Could there be? I can hear her. Calling. Calling. Could there be, Jim? I'm a modern man living in a scientific age. I can't believe in the resurrection of the body. But could I be wrong? This is what I hang on to. I might just be wrong. Calling. Calling. There's this huge lump of remorse stuck in my throat. My heart is petrified with guilt and has turned to stone. Could there be another dimension of reality in which these great adamantine weights, these mountains of guilt and disappointment and grief, might be dissolved? Blessed and forgiven and dissipated into the shimmering air? Where Julie and I might meet again? Vicar, vicar help me. I can't believe in the resurrection of the body. (Mavis in vicar's voice) No need to worry. Modern scripture scholars have established that the resurrection narrative is a myth, a kind of literary form. It wasn't a kind of conjuring trick with bones you know. Ha ha ha ha ha. Did the resurrection happen? Yes. But in an important sense no. Nowadays if you feel it's just a fairy story that's no reason why that should stop you coming to church. If the church is to survive in today's world it has to adapt itself to the realities of a scientific age. (Jim) SHUT UP YOU BLOODY FOOL. I WANT to believe in the resurrection. Don't take away my last shreds of belief you bastard. At least leave me my illusion that I might be having an illusion that I'm not having an illusion. I'm coming, Julie. I'm coming. The island Julie! The island! The skylarks on the moors. The blossom in Kent. The primroses in the lanes. The blue remembered hills, Julie! I'm coming. I'm coming. (leaps up from chair)

Mavis (shouting): What about some music?

Jim (shouting back over his shoulder? Elgar Land Of Hope and Glory (He leaps about the stage to the chords of the music as the lights fade.