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AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL IN THE BILL DOUGLAS TRILOGY

GUY BAREFOOT

Bill Douglas's death in 1991 was followed by a book of essays, scripts, and biographical accounts: *Bill Douglas: A Lanternist's Approach*. There has been some, but limited, subsequent critical interest. Where he is known, it is mostly likely to be through the Bill Douglas Centre for the History of Cinema and Popular Culture at Exeter University, or for the three films—*My Childhood* (1972), *My Ain Folk* (1973) and *My Way Home* (1978)—commonly referred to as the Trilogy. It is common also to describe these as autobiographical: following a discussion of the films of Terence Davies, Sarah Street noted that “Bill Douglas's major work was similarly autobiographical”; the biographical note accompanying the Connoisseur Video release of the films refers to the “autobiographical Trilogy”; and for the initial London release of *My Childhood*, Douglas himself was quoted as saying that the “autobiographical factor is the main component. The childhood of the title is literally my childhood and the incidents that I recount are with a few variations things that actually happened to me.”¹

The films are not documentaries. The first draft of *My Childhood* had initially been titled *Jamie*, and the name of Jamie was retained for the central character, played in each of the three films by Stephen Archibald in a cast of professional and non-professional actors. The draft was apparently shown to the film director Lindsay Anderson, who, “to Douglas's great consternation, immediately intuited that it was autobiographical,” suggested dropping “its evasive title and calling it simply *My Childhood*,” and who when interviewed on the BBC Radio 4 arts program *Kaleidoscope* at the time of the release of *My Ain Folk*, described that film as having “the quality of really superb autobiographical writing.”²

However, queries have been raised about such descriptions. Anderson's interviewer, Paul Vaughan, was apologetic when he went on ask about Douglas, “Do you think, I mean can you see him stepping beyond this, oh I

shouldn't say beyond it, that implies a criticism in a way, but stepping away from this kind of autobiographical picture, into something less personal?" Adrian Noble expressed stronger reservations in his writings on the Trilogy. While Noble noted Anderson's intuition in recognizing the autobiographical nature of Douglas's initial script, he also argued that Douglas "was a visionary storyteller, not a factualist," and wrote that "although the Trilogy is often seen as autobiography, this is too simplistic a response" ("Bill Douglas" 13, 24).

Noble was here raising slightly different questions, since leaving aside the question of whether the autobiographer needs to be a "factualist," the autobiographical and autobiography are not necessarily the same. One approach to discussing film as autobiography has been to make a distinction between autobiography and autobiographical fiction—hence P. Adam Sitney's argument that specific examples of avant-garde cinema, such as Stan Brakhage's *Scenes from Under Childhood* (1967–1970), function as autobiography, but need to be distinguished from the autobiographical fiction of a film such as François Truffaut's *Les Quatres Cents Coups* (1959) (60–61). Elizabeth Bruss does discuss the Truffaut film in her article on "autobiography in film," identifying it as "close to autobiography," but in her argument, film is seen as upsetting "each of the parameters—'truth-value,' 'act-value' and 'identity-value'—that we commonly associate with the autobiographical act to such an extent that even deliberate attempts to re-create the genre in cinematic terms are subtly subverted" (301).

It is not argued here that Bill Douglas's Trilogy belongs to a genre of film autobiography. The films do have affinities with other groups of films which follow a central character from boyhood to manhood: Truffaut's Antoine Doinel series, Satyajit Ray's Apu Trilogy, and the three Mark Donskoi films based on Maxim Gorky's autobiography are probably the most obvious examples. However, the gap between the director's life and the films he made is narrower in the case of Douglas. While Noble's insistence on Douglas as a "visionary storyteller, not a factualist" suggests that to understand the films simply as autobiography is to limit them, this discussion is an attempt to examine some of the complexities in the autobiographical nature of *My Childhood*, *My Ain Folk*, and *My Way Home*, and how differences between film and the written word can be illuminating. My concern is not simply the films themselves, but also the production process, their reception, and the ways in which they have been framed. Using the parameters that Bruss identifies (truth-value, act-value, and identity-value) as a starting point, I will examine the issue of the films' fidelity to Douglas's life, and the extent to which they can be understood in terms of personal performance, before focusing in particular on the second film of the Trilogy: *My Ain Folk*. Here the relationship

between film and written language will be explored through an examination of the relationship between the opening sequence of *My Ain Folk*, the script which in its published form was described as the “final draft which was the basis of that film’s production,” and a brief written account that Douglas gave of his childhood, which has been given the title “The Palace of Dreams: The Making of a Film-Maker.”³ Thus the aim is to examine the relationship between literary autobiography and the autobiographical film, the particular way in which Bill Douglas’s Trilogy is autobiographical rather than an autobiography, and the practice as well as the theory of the autobiographical film.

FICTIONAL NARRATIVE AND TRUTH-VALUE

The Trilogy follows Jamie from his poverty-stricken childhood in a Scottish mining village during the Second World War to the relative liberation of National Service in the Middle East in the 1950s. In *My Childhood* we are introduced to Jamie and the boy who initially appears to be his older brother, Tommy, both living with their maternal grandmother. It is a life of material and emotional deprivation, briefly alleviated by moments of affection between Jamie and Tommy, and through Jamie’s temporary friendship with a German prisoner-of-war. In the course of the film, Jamie and the audience gradually discover that Jamie and Tommy have different mothers and fathers, and that Jamie’s mother is in an asylum and that his father lives across the street. The film ends with the death of his maternal grandmother. In *My Ain Folk*, Tommy is taken away to an Edinburgh children’s home, while Jamie moves in with his paternal grandmother, and to an even bleaker existence, before he is also taken to the children’s home. In *My Way Home* he returns temporarily to the mining village, makes his first awkward efforts at earning a living in Edinburgh, is briefly adopted by a foster parent, runs away, and then during his National Service is befriended by Robert, an Englishman from a very different class and educational background. Towards the end of the film there is a brief exchange beneath a poster advertising the Hollywood film *Niagara* (1952), in which Robert, having been asked what he’ll do “when you get back?” says, “What about you?” Jamie replies, “I want to be an artist,” pauses to think, then continues, “Maybe even a film director.”

The broad narrative here conforms to a common pattern within literary autobiography, which is often concerned not just with incidents from the author’s early life, but also with how these incidents lead up to the emergence of a writer, and thus to the process of literary creation itself. Where Douglas departs from this model is in part on points of detail. He admitted himself that the incidents he depicted were “with a few variations things that actually

happened to me.” Slightly more specifically, Noble states that Douglas “either radically changed chronological sequence,” or depicted “key elements that did not happen to him at all. For example, he did not have a German prisoner-of-war friend” (“Bill Douglas” 24). In Bruss’s definition of “truth-value” as a parameter of classical autobiography, “an autobiography purports to be consistent with other evidence; we are conventionally invited to compare it with other documents that describe the same events (to determine its veracity) and with anything the author may have said or written on other occasions (to determine its sincerity)” (299–300). Such a definition and comparison would place the Trilogy outside the parameters of autobiography.

The extent to which consistency with other evidence exists as a necessary—or even possible—feature of autobiography could be debated. However, despite Douglas’s comments about the title being literally his childhood, the extent to which the Trilogy even purports to factual veracity is at best uncertain. John Caughie has noted Douglas’s admiration for the Soviet montage school of directors, and for the films of Mark Donskoi in particular (27). It was Donskoi who filmed Maxim Gorky’s autobiographical trilogy, including the first volume, known in translation as *My Childhood*, the film’s translated title being *The Childhood of Maxim Gorky* (and on occasion, *My Childhood*). In adopting the title *My Childhood* (as opposed to *Jamie*), Douglas was acknowledging the autobiographical nature of the project, and locating the film within a tradition of autobiography, though also referencing the slightly different tradition of film adaptations of literary autobiography. Another, again slightly different, literary reference arises in the moment in *My Way Home* when the resentment of Jamie’s grandmother thaws to the extent that she gives him a present: a copy of *David Copperfield* (before she accuses him of removing her name from the book, prompting him to rip out the pages). In this instance the self-conscious reference to another narrative of childhood suffering invokes autobiographical fiction as opposed to autobiography.

PRODUCTION AND ACT-VALUE

Autobiography is a personal performance, an action that exemplifies the character of the agent responsible for that action and how it is performed.

—Elizabeth Bruss (300)

Elizabeth Bruss argues that one of the ways in which film disrupts the “act-value” necessary for autobiography is in its reliance on a disparate group of distinct roles and separate stages of production rather than a single source. One model for understanding film has been provided by variations of the

auteur theory, yet Bruss notes that “Authors must exercise their own capacities where *auteurs* are free to delegate; authors actually possess the abilities that *auteurs* need only oversee, and they fabricate what filmmakers may only need to find” (304). This might be questioned on a number of different grounds. The notion of the film director as auteur that emerged in the 1950s and 1960s was not the same as that of the literary author, but this was in part because it was based on a Romantic notion of personal expression that was not ascribed solely on the basis of exclusive responsibility for either writing or directing. Literary authors do not have to work alongside scriptwriters, cameramen, set designers, and light and sound technicians, and the role of the literary editor is rather different from that of film editor, though it does point to how the image of literary production as an entirely solitary occupation needs some correction. Filmmakers both find and fabricate; consider not just Truffaut’s Antoine Doinel films, but the same director’s *La Nuit Americain/Day for Night* (1973), the very title of which refers to the process by which daylight footage can be manipulated to create the impression of night, and thus to the broader way in which, as even André Bazin understood it, “realism in art can only be achieved in one way—through artifice” (26).

Film production on any scale almost inevitably increases the number of different individuals involved, and decreases the space for individual expression. Notwithstanding Peter Wollen’s claim that it remains possible for the voices of individual directors working within the Hollywood studio system to be heard above what he referred to as “noise,” those searching for a cinema of autobiographical authorship have tended to look elsewhere (71). It was within the avant-garde, rather than the commercial mainstream, that Sitney identified examples of film autobiography, while more recently Kathleen McHugh has noted that, “experimental filmic autobiography has been and continues to be confined to nonindustry or artisanal modes of production” (275).

Funded as it was by the British Film Institute, the production context of the Trilogy was some distance from the commercial mainstream, though the situation is complicated by the fact that the films were made during a period when there was pressure from within the BFI to support both a more radical, oppositional, and anti-realist experimentalism, and collective filmmaking rather than the individual auteur.⁴ Relative shelter from box office demands did not, anyway, make for total directorial autonomy. For Douglas, the downside of the critical success of *My Childhood* was that it gave his work a higher profile, and thus made it more liable to interference. In his account of the editing of *My Ain Folk*, he writes that “I felt more and more the film being taken out of my grasp. The good free days of *My Childhood*

were over. Whether I liked it or not I was going to be controlled” (qtd. in Noble, “Making” 141). Douglas’s determination to resist such control led to a particular fraught post-production, culminating in the occasion when the director was forcibly ejected from the BFI’s premises and threatened with police action. The result was his reluctant agreement to leave the film in the hands of Peter West, the project’s editor, who in fact completed the film by returning to the script that Douglas had written, but progressively deviated from, in his suggested changes (Noble, “Making” 147–48).

Asked at one point whether he would have preferred to do everything himself, Douglas protested that he didn’t “want to be a cameraman. I just want to write the script and to make the film. . . . I like ensemble playing, *we* are making the film” (qtd. in Noble, “Making” 117). Yet, according to Mamoun Hassan, then Head of Production at the BFI, Douglas left little room for collaboration. Rather than ensemble playing, Hassan described Douglas’s working method as one of “communicating pain,” a pain that can be traced back to the personal nature of the subject matter, and the fact that most of the filming took place in Newcraighall, the scene of his unhappy childhood (24).

Describing the passage from memory to script to film, Douglas talked to Hassan and another editor, Charles Rees, in terms of both willpower and emotion:

Well when, say, I’m writing a scene with my grandfather sitting at a table or whatever it is, if it’s going to work for me, the scene, the writing, I’m totally within the atmosphere of the room. . . . And when I see the man there who is going to be my grandfather, I will hypnotise him into being that thing. And he sits there, and I come and we look through the camera and I’m looking again for these sensations I felt when I was writing. Maybe I will it in there, I don’t know, but I believe it when I’m looking through the camera at that set-up. . . . So that I’m just recapturing what I truly felt at the time—I laughed here when I was doing it, and when there was crying, I cried here when I was doing it—I really went through it all. I’m all the characters, if you like, and one is really putting that back again. And if I don’t feel it, then I know it’s a lie for me. And when we are in the editing, hopefully one is bringing that back. (qtd. in Noble, “Making” 122–23)

But for Douglas, it was the editing that presented the most difficulties. According to West, Douglas

became more and more obsessive about certain aspects of the film that were to do with his own inability to dissociate himself from the actual life that he lived and the artefact he created. This caused him to ask for scenes to be cut or dropped. For example the father he had created on screen so disturbed him that he wanted the role diminished. (qtd. in Noble, “Making” 146)

West's return to Douglas's script may have enabled the restoration of scenes that the director had asked to be dropped, but the Trilogy as a whole needs to be understood as a work of omissions and gaps as well as remembered and recreated scenes.

"THE PALACE OF DREAMS," THE OPENING OF *MY AIN FOLK*, AND IDENTITY-VALUE

Films are commonly promoted with biographical, occasionally autobiographical, information about the filmmakers. Douglas took part in this reluctantly: the beginning of *Bill Douglas: A Lanternist's Approach* features Noble's statement that "Bill Douglas would have been less than happy at the prospect of a biographical introduction to this book" ("Bill Douglas" 13). But as already discussed, to some extent he did talk and write about his childhood, notably in "The Palace of Dreams," which begins

For as long as I can remember I always liked the pictures. As a boy I spent so much time in cinemas, a friend suggested I take my bed with me. I would have had it been possible. That was my real home, my happiest place when I was lucky to be there. Outside, whether in the village or the city, whether I was seven or seventeen, it always seemed to be raining or grey and my heart would sink to despairing depths. I hated reality. Of course I had to go to school—sometimes. And I had to go home and apply myself to the things one has to do. But the next picture, how to get in, was the thing that occupied my mind.

There was never any money to buy a ticket. Still, there were ways. I could get into the Pavilion, or The Flea Pit as we called it, for the price of two jam jars, washed or unwashed. That they were acceptable unwashed was no mean concession as I would sometimes have to ferret through buckets for the sticky objects and make a desperate last minute dash so as not to miss the beginning of the picture.

Douglas goes on to describe how

We sat on hard wooden benches, in the 'cheapies'. The Pavilion interior was a cobwebby place: an ancient curtain hung sadly to one side of the screen, sometimes refusing to be drawn, while mice nibbled at the ankles. But who cared about that when Sabu was riding his elephant? It was paradise sitting there in the cosy dark being hypnotised by the play of light. Up there was the best of all possible worlds. To enter this world, that was the dream.

Only later did I become aware that real human beings actually worked on the films, that behind the stars was a producer, director, writer, cameraman, designer and so on. It was about this time I nourished the idea of working in the industry. . . .

The experience of the cinema features also in *My Way Home* and *My Ain Folk*. In the latter, Jamie momentarily escapes to watch a George Formby film, while at the very beginning of the film we see Tommy watching *Lassie Come Home* (1943). The “final draft script” opens:

A beautiful Scottish landscape full of sun and laughter and lilting music.

But it all happens on a screen in a drab picture house.

Young Tommy is crying in the darkness.

Beyond the cinema foyer we see a heartless place. We enter into its cold deserted streets and the houses and the bleak sky that falls like a sheet behind the pit wheel.

Below at the pit shaft gate we see a group of miners, waiting, static, like images out of a dream. They drift silently away inside the gate mouth.

Beyond the shaft gate we see a square of white sky. Suddenly the lift descends, black earth rushing up to shut out the light. We hear the sound of a long unbroken mountainous whine.

MY AIN FOLK

A Scottish Mining Village. Peacetime 1946.

Black. The whining sound cuts abruptly.

Now we see in the cold light of day an open stairway in the village. At the bottom of the steps there is Jamie's father, Mr Knox, in his pit clothes, agitated, pacing up and down. At the top, on the stair landing, there is a man in black waiting.

Mr Knox kicks a stone to release his anger.

Young Tommy peering through a hole in the foyer curtain. He is eying a cash desk inside which there is a snoozing cashier. Somewhere below her domain there is a 'Today' poster heralding *Lassie Come Home*. And above, a sign reading 'Admission 5d or Two Jam Jars'.

A collection of the sticky jam jars isolated.

Tommy's head drawing back the curtain.

Mr Knox is down in the street. He has his back to us. He comes to a halt.

Close, in the distance beyond the man, waits his mother, Mrs Knox.

MRS KNOX Finish!

Mr Knox turns to make a gesture with his hand.

And the man in black disappears from the landing.

We see an old woman's dead face before the coffin lid covers her.

Young Jamie curled up inside a rocking chair with his face buried in his arms.

Back in the street.

MR KNOX You're too late!

Mr Knox and Tommy are facing one another. The boy has a look of defiance on his face.

Mr Knox waits for an excuse. He appears calm.

MR KNOX Well?

The boy echoes the man.

TOMMY Well?

Tommy has his hands inside the jam jars like boxing gloves. He has adopted a couldn't-care-less attitude. He clunks the jars head on to emphasise his point. He makes to by-pass the man on his way upstairs. Mr Knox stops him short. The boy struggles, curses. Mr Knox slaps the boy hard in the face.

The slap exploding about them in the street.

A shower of grit clattering on the coffin. (Douglas, *My Ain Folk* 55–56)

Film and script only diverge to a limited extent. There are slight variations in the dialogue; for instance, Mr Knox tells Jamie “You know you’ve made me late for work” rather than simply saying “You’re late!” More significantly, rather than a title announcing the time and place, following the film title we are given three statements:

Granny died leaving Tommy and me to fend for ourselves

Tommy had no idea where his father was but I knew where to find mine

As things turned out I wasn't sure about anything

Stephen Archibald as Jamie in *My Ain Folk* (1973). (Image © and reproduced by courtesy of the British Film Institute, BFI Stills Sales.)

The editing provides a montage of shots rather than the continuity of Hollywood cinema. Many of the images are still, and apart from a slight movement to follow Tommy as he tries to get past Mr. Knox, the camera is motionless throughout the sequence, and rarely moves in the film as a whole. An austerity is also conveyed through the use of black-and-white photography, which no doubt contributed to the tendency to link the Trilogy to a tradition of British realism, but which Douglas himself justified on the slightly different grounds that “the memories of my life are all without colour.”⁵ The only divergence from this comes in the brief Technicolor extract from *Lassie Come Home*.

In “The Palace of Dreams” the film reference is slightly different: to Sabu (of *Elephant Boy* fame), and therefore to an exotic and overtly foreign world. In contrast, *Lassie Come Home* suggests both another world (Hollywood) and a version of a landscape that is closer to home (the extract is from the section of the film set in Scotland). However, “home” here evokes an absence rather than a presence. The Hollywood film’s Highland setting offers a stark contrast to the literally and metaphorically colorless Scotland presented in the rest of the film. It is significant also that in returning home, Lassie escapes from the Scottish Highlands to go back to Hollywood’s version of an affectionate Yorkshire home, just as in the final film of the Trilogy, *My Way Home*, Jamie apparently returns to England rather than Scotland, while in *My Ain Folk* the

shot of a poster advertising *Lassie Come Home* is almost immediately followed by a sequence of shots which effectively depict the destruction of the more desolate, but still close, Scottish home that Tommy and Jamie had known, and by Tommy being taken away to a children's "home," where Jamie will also eventually be taken. The scene in the cinema draws upon Douglas's own experiences, but is not there simply to record those experiences.

In spatial and temporal terms, the written account covers a wider territory than the film sequence. There are references not just to the cinema, the village, and home, but also to school, the grocers, and wherever it is that jam jars are to be found. The account as a whole is explanatory, and conforms to a chronological pattern: the description of the cinema is followed by an account of Douglas's attempts to translate his fascination for the cinema into a career, his eventual entrance into the London Film School, and to the making of the Trilogy itself. But the initial description of cinema-going is not located in a particular time or even place: Douglas refers to "whether in the village or the city, whether I was seven or seventeen." Such phrases do not have an equivalent in film. We may not be given precise information as to when or where what we are shown is taking place, and we can cross-cut between different locations, and flash back or forward in time, but a shot shows a particular place and moment, rather than alternative points in time.

Where "The Palace of Dreams" has a narrower focus is in its concern with the cinema, the always-raining environment beyond the cinema merely providing a background to a description of an obsession with watching films, in the *My Ain Folk* opening, this pleasure is set against what happens outside the cinema, and in particular, the consequences of the death of Tommy and Jamie's grandmother. The Trilogy as a whole is remarkable for the way in which it condenses different experiences and occurrences into a few images. A shot in which Tommy and Mr. Knox are shown confronting each other illustrates the animosity between the man and the boy, and the boy's distress and anger at his grandmother's death, but it also alludes to the worlds of work (Mr. Knox's miner's outfit, his comment about being late) and entertainment (the jam jars covering Tommy's hands).

There is some sense of chronology in the film: the words on the screen announcing that "Granny died" precede the shot of her in the coffin, which is followed by the shot of the grit on the coffin, and in the following sequence by Jamie, now deprived of one grandmother, escaping to the house of his paternal grandmother. But there is little concern with providing a clear sense of duration or explanation. It is unclear what exactly is the temporal relationship between the first shot of Tommy watching *Lassie Come Home*, the subsequent shots of Tommy in the cinema foyer while *Lassie Come Home* is

being screened, and the later shots of Tommy confronting Mr. Knox with the jam jars covering his hands, since these moments seem to be in reverse order. Tommy in the auditorium is followed by Tommy in the cinema foyer seemingly wanting to get into the auditorium, which is followed by Tommy plus jam jars, which suggests that he is about to go to the cinema. The governing principle here is one of evoking the memory of childhood experiences, rather than providing narrative continuity.

In "The Palace of Dreams," the memory of the cinema is clearly established as that of the author. There is some broadening of focus in the occasional use of "we," and the description of "the jam jar system" is used to refer to the behavior of children in general rather than the author alone. But the word that is most frequently used is "I," which appears forty-four times in the essay as a whole, along with twenty uses of "my." Given that the essay was written to accompany screenings of the Trilogy, it points to how the films have been understood, and presented, in autobiographical terms. However, while in "Palace of Dreams" Douglas wrote "For as long as I can remember I always liked the pictures," when he wrote the script for *My Ain Folk* he wrote "Young Tommy is crying in the darkness. . . . Young Tommy is peering through a hole in the foyer curtain. He is eyeing a cash desk inside which there is a snoozing cashier," and "Young Jamie curled up inside a rocking chair with his face buried in his arms." In transforming the script into the film, Douglas adopted the distanced stance of the static camera and deliberate framing. As Caughie has noted, "Aesthetic distance and intense intimacy . . . is the dialectical tension which marks the Trilogy" (27). Or, as Douglas put it at the end of "The Palace of Dreams," "the making of these films . . . could not be a cathartic exercise. There had to be a distance. I had to be objective so that the characters could come to life, so that the work could have shape."

Noble's account notes that at one point it was suggested that the film be broken up in five places, with inter-titles explaining what was happening. He comments that had these been used it "would have been both a confession of narrative failure and wholly against the grain of Douglas's use of the image" ("Making" 141). Yet the intertitle beginning "Granny died leaving Tommy and me to fend for ourselves" does have an explanatory function that relies on words rather than images. It is also, with the exception of the titles of the individual films, the clearest use of the first person in the whole of the Trilogy. Yet it is complicated by the immediate visual context, in that it is Jamie who at this point thinks he knows where to find his father but then discovers that he isn't sure about anything, and it is Jamie who shares the "my" of *My Childhood*, *My Ain Folk*, and *My Way Home* with Bill Douglas, but at this point

it is Tommy whom we see responding to the magic of cinema in a way which clearly draws upon Douglas's description of his own childhood fascination.

"The unity of subjectivity and subject matter—the implied identity of author, narrator, and protagonist on which classical autobiography depends," Elizabeth Bruss argues, "seems to be shattered by film; the autobiographical self decomposes, schisms, into almost mutually exclusive elements of the person filmed (entirely visible; recorded and projected) and the person filming (entirely hidden; behind the camera eye)" (297). Ultimately, a single autobiographical self is elusive in *My Ain Folk* and the other films in the Trilogy. Aside from the broad argument that Bruss makes about the absence of a filmic equivalent to a speech-act where the autobiographical speaker merges with the "I" whose character and adventures are depicted within the literary autobiography, in the particular example of the opening of *My Ain Folk* we are presented with one character (Tommy) who at this stage constitutes the primary protagonist, and who occupies the equivalent place that the film's director has described himself as occupying in his childhood. We are only briefly presented with a second character, Jamie, whom however the film and the Trilogy as a whole identify as the primary protagonist, and who in this sequence is given the role of the narrator, but through the written word rather than the image. As quoted earlier, Douglas described how during the shooting of the film, "I'm all the characters, if you like." This empathy needs to be seen in relation to the way in which filming was also a question of disengagement. Both Tommy and Jamie are referred to in the third person in the script, and also through the seemingly objective distance of the camera.

Yet this distance also marks the images as remembrances. On its own, the shot of isolated jam jars has little about it that is personal. We simply see five slightly grubby but carefully photographed jam jars, accompanied by the faint music from *Lassie Come Home*, which is being screened in off-screen space. The shot is given meaning through a previous shot of Tommy's gaze. What is significant here is precisely what is hidden: in terms of the film's story-world, Tommy, watching from behind the curtain, and the idealized narrative of home and homeless playing out in the auditorium; but also the autobiographical self, for whom the shot functions as a remembered image.

Textual detail is here enmeshed with the extra-textual. The autobiographical status of the Trilogy is signified through material outside the frame and outside the films—indeed, the films are difficult to comprehend without such material. In addition, there is a paradoxical sense in which the very identification of the films in terms of the autobiography of a particular individual enables the audience to understand them in a broader sense: *My Childhood* as *Childhood*.

I want to close by quoting a further autobiographical account, taken from another piece included in *Bill Douglas: A Lanternist's Account*. Andrew O'Hagan begins his article with the words:

I was already biting my nails at the age of five, chewing into them till they bled. My earliest memory is of me crouched below the kitchen sink watching my father, an AA veteran, scoop handfuls of green and yellow capsules into his mouth from a clear plastic tub he hid in the top cupboard. Often, panting milky breath, I'd peer through a button-hole in my mother's maroon raincoat, watching her slapping him over the breakfast table. Like most kids I knew, I spent my formative days under coats, within dens and in among the long grass—hiding from my dad. (205)

The “I” in the above quotation does not belong to any of the characters who feature in the Trilogy, or to the films' director, but rather to another person writing about the director and the films. O'Hagan uses his own autobiography as a way of explaining his recognition of the pains of childhood depicted in the Trilogy. This recognition is not precluded by the existence of a fictional narrative—the sentimental fiction of *Lassie Come Home* provides Tommy with a recognition of his own loss and homelessness in the fiercely unsentimental *My Ain Folk*—but is particularly enabled through the space that the Trilogy gives the viewer. As Hassan notes, Douglas's “style consisted in creating gaps between scenes” (24). The audience is often forced to construct a narrative from a single shot. The burial of Jamie and Tommy's grandmother becomes a shot of grit falling on a coffin. This style, as well as the subject matter, can provide space for the kind of personal autobiographical response given by O'Hagan, reinforcing the point that though it may be problematic to see *My Ain Folk* and the other films in the Trilogy as autobiography, the autobiographical remains central to our understanding of the films.

Bill Douglas holding a publicity leaflet for *My Way Home* (1979). (Photograph by Jane Bown, © and reproduced by courtesy of Camera Press, London.)

NOTES

1. See Street 185; Pulleine; and Academy Cinema.
2. See Noble, "Making" 126; Anderson.
3. Dick et al. 29. This book includes scripts for each film in the Trilogy. "The Palace of Dreams" was written in 1978 following the completion of *My Way Home*, and originally appeared under the title "My Way Home." My thanks to Michelle Allen, of the Bill Douglas Centre, and Peter Jewell (the real-life friend whom Bill Douglas met while doing his National Service) for this information. Within the United Kingdom, extracts from the films themselves can be viewed online at educational and public libraries that have registered with the British Film Institute's Screenonline web site; the extracts include the opening six minutes of *My Ain Folk* (<<http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/514208>>).
4. See Noble, "Making" 151–57 and Hassan 24.
5. "Biographical Note." For an example of a discussion of the films in terms of "documentary realism," see Maley 91–92.

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