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I'm loving phantoms instead

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[Kate Kellaway](#)

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Robbie Williams and Jon Ronson Journey to the Other Side R4

On the Ropes R4

Afternoon play: Landscape R4

Jon Ronson's entertaining programme about Robbie Williams and the paranormal left a question unanswered. Why does Robbie need to believe in UFOs? I don't think he is mad. He seems, instead, to be world-weary. My hunch is he would rather be abducted by a friendly alien than continue life as a terrestrial celebrity. He asked Ronson to arrange for him to spend nights in haunted houses. Owners of country piles were keen to have him. 'They started flinging their ghosts at me,' Ronson reports, 'like debutante daughters.' I love the image and its surreal potential - a phantom marriage.

Ronson and Williams visit a UFO conference in the Nevada desert. What follows is predictably insane. The best vignette involves Doctor Lear, reputed to have removed 'unearthly metal' from his patients and to be the keeper of a sample of alien blood. Williams and Ronson visit his hotel room and solemnly peer at some Kleenex with an unidentified blob on it. It could have been anything - chocolate, alien matter, snot. I admired Ronson's control of tone throughout, a mix of seriousness, scepticism and humour.

There is no future in looking back. But with would-be sympathy (he is, actually, unflinchingly systematic), John Humphrys puts his interviewees in the dock in **On the Ropes**, and asks to what extent they feel authors of their own destinies. Louise Campbell was not having it. Asked whether she thought that marrying a Muslim when she was 16 and converting to Islam, a religion she knew nothing about, led to her tragic fate (the abduction of her child, Misbah, to Pakistan), she neither convicted nor defended herself. Her deep and continuing pain about the loss of her children (two older ones were already with their father in Pakistan) rendered Humphrys' questioning about the past irrelevant. She spoke slowly, as if her words were being drawn out of the centre of her being. I felt desperately sorry for her but sorrier still for her children, asked to choose between parents, as if it were a reasonable choice. I wonder whether they will ever return from Pakistan and seek her out. I imagine Louise Campbell would feel there is no future in looking ahead either.

Listening to Harold Pinter act in his own plays (as he sometimes does in the theatre), one cannot shed the illusion that he might be about to reveal an insider insight, turn the key into secret rooms. In **Landscape**, a new production by Peter Kavanagh, Pinter was in comic contrast to his play's other half, Penelope Wilton. Her voice was wistful, cultivated, silky; his was cockney, the equivalent of scratchy tweed, and he sounded grumpy, as if mildly put out at finding himself in his own play. But the contrast worked perfectly, enhancing the distance between man and woman, as each remembered the past separately, like two ships that pass in the day.

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