

Transcript of the Val McDermid interview

Andrew Marr: Val, can I ask about Jacko Vance, a psychopathic, self-loving, television celebrity. I don't know where you come across these people. Where did the idea for this monstrous, monstrous figure come from?

Val McDermid: Well it started in America oddly enough. I was there doing research for book about women private eyes and while I was there the OJ Simpson case was going on. And I was astounded by the way that the Americans were following this. There was a New York college that was even running a course called OJ101, so that people could follow the crime, the trial on television, and understand what was happening. And people were just absolutely convinced of his guilt or his innocence regardless of whatever was happening in the courtroom. And it seemed to me that there was some kind of shield provided by his celebrity. And I started thinking about this in terms, so I started thinking about this in terms of the kind of novel I could write, the kind of story I could tell, and obviously this was going to have to be set in the UK. And I remembered the stories that I had heard over the years working in newspapers about Jimmy Savile, and I thought that is somebody that I can base a character on. I'd interviewed Savile back in the late 1970s and I thought he was a deeply unpleasant man, that his public face was very different from the face that he showed when it was just the two of us together. And I thought he's a target if you like. We could never tell the story at the time because we could never get enough weight of credible evidence against him. I thought well this is a story I can tell in fiction. And so I think, I mean I thought I sailed very close to the wind.

Andrew Marr: So did I!

Val McDermid: But nobody got it. Nobody said to me that's Jimmy Savile isn't it? Because I made the character charming and handsome. And on that superficial level, people didn't see beyond that to the other things I was saying, that were clear parallels with what Savile did and the kind of public face that he had. So the handsome and charming bit probably saved me from being sued. And it seemed to me that this was a way of writing about things that we couldn't tell in the course of newspapers or any other form of media.