

DRAMA

MINIATURES: THREE DRAMATIC MONOLOGUES

John McRae

HIS STORY

I don't want to talk about it. Will you listen to me: I AM NOT GOING TO TALK ABOUT IT.

He paces angrily.

Why do you keep harping on about the past? The past is done. It's behind me. I want things in the present. I want to go for a long walk on the South Downs and feel the wind in my hair, the sun on my face, and empty my head of all the city crap that is clogging it up.

It's the future I want to see. To be in./

We've all got a past. Not a history. A past. And we don't need to dwell on it.

If we start telling our memories we get lost down Memory Lane. Can't stand that. //

Settles a bit

So you're interviewing "old people." That even starts out by being patronising. What's "old?" I know thirty-year olds who are "older" than me. I will not be defined by my age.

You hear I'm over 70, and that sets off a train of thoughts in you, doesn't it?

Presuppositions. Well they're cliches, and no old person wants to be a cliché. So don't interview us for our "memories." No bleeding-heart nostalgia, thank you very much.

And attitudes. You have an automatic attitude to go with your presuppositions. /

First off: older doesn't mean wiser. Older doesn't mean weaker. Older doesn't mean one foot in the grave. Older doesn't mean losing your marbles. And no, we are not any more vulnerable than any other age group.

What's an "age group" anyway? More ridiculous terminology. Lies, damned lies, and statistics. So don't ask what it feels like to be "old." I don't ask you what it *feels like* (feels like!) to be your age, do I? You just *are* your age. And you're not the same as everyone else of your age. Except if you succumb to peer pressure and all try to look and dress and speak the same. That's one thing you'll grow out of as you get older.

Sitting by now

So, you get people who lived through the war. They have a history. And have you noticed how many who were actually out there in the midst of all that hell do not talk about it. Ever. Why is that? Because they don't want to dwell on it. They need to move on. Nobody wants to be weighed down, dragged down by the past. /

No. I am not trying to escape my past. Or erase, or any other kind of denial. I am not in denial. The old Egyptian joke "in de Nile." No. There's nothing worth denying.

Well, I might try to deny that my health is not what it used to be. But you live with that. There are kids with cancer, young Mums with diabetes. Why should an older person harp on about their ailments?

And no, our generation's life was not a bed of roses. Throw away your tinted glasses. Bloody miserable a lot of the time. Like a lot of people's lives now are bloody miserable. Who was it said most people live lives of quiet desperation? That's about it. No need to wallow in it. Just move on.

If we start to tell our memories, we are lying with every breath. It changes, don't you see? No two people ever remember the same event in the same way. It's not "oral history." It's just personal rambling.

Nothing wrong with that, I suppose. But don't take it as gospel, don't imagine that that is what it was like. It's remembered, evolved, it's changed, fictionalised, a variable recall of things you maybe saw and felt at the time, or maybe *thought* you should have seen and felt when you recalled it afterwards. All history is fiction. Or becomes so with time.

So don't ask. Ha ha: ask not for whom the bell tolls. *Sardonic laugh* There it is. Either you love or you don't. Don't know who said that. You live. And if you're lucky you go on living. If your dreams and memories take you places you don't want to go, you have to wake up and smell the roses. That's all.

I don't want to talk about it. Got that now?

CURMUDGEON

Richard sometimes speaks directly to the camera. Sometimes he is more in side-shot. When he is in extreme CLOSE-UP we should only see his face, without the mouth, if possible. The words could be spoken, or in VO, somewhat in the style of Beckett's EH JOE.

I don't like parties.

I used to. Life and soul.

But nowadays I prefer my own company. Not unhappy with this social distancing.

Isolation is fine. No man is an island, and I do see people.

But this Zoom nonsense: everybody talking at once, you have to ask to make yourself heard. Permission to speak! Like being back at school.

So when did I change from that outgoing, sparkling smiling cheery type who "exudes warmth", somebody once said?

Don't know. /

CLOSE-UP You're just being a miserable git is all. No wonder people think of you as a curmudgeon. عابيس eabis in Arabic. (*As himself*) How do I know that? / *BACK TO*

CLOSE-UP It's the lines on your face, isn't it? You don't have natural smile lines anymore. Laugh-lines round your eyes. Look at yourself. Droopy features. Has the light gone out of your eyes?

To camera They started me on that Citalopram. Supposed to cheer me up. Then you can't drop it because you would go through withdrawal symptoms. Vicious circle. /

I have plenty to say. Motormouth, used to be. Don't get me going, I would say. Then I would go on and on.

Side shot Not that I have less to say. And there are always people who might listen.

Just/

maybe I prefer listening nowadays? /

No, I don't. Fed up of people rattling on and on. Telling the same stories - "my father in the war....." Get over yourself! //

Front So, what turned you into a grumpy old man?

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To camera “The shudder of the dying day in every blade of grass.” Remember that?

That’s what it is. “Brings the eternal note of sadness in.”

CLOSE-UP And who has to get over themselves now?? Fancy quotes won’t justify you being a miserable old git. *Drinks* And drinking on your own won’t help either. /

Do you never do that “count your blessings” thing? Didn’t your mother tell you to do that?

To camera for a game of soldiers! “Count your blessings!” Where do you get this tosh from?

Side shot Yes, yes, OK. Think positive. Plenty to be glad about. Health, that’s the main one. No need to go all Leonard Cohen. Food and warmth and shelter.

EXTREME CLOSE-UP *Pause* You’re not Leonard Cohen and you are never going to be. “Not Prince Hamlet”, remember? Live with it. *Pause*

To camera Cliches, cliches. “No fool like an old fool.” /

Would love to fall in love again. But would probably make a complete idiot of myself.

People get scammed out of all their money all the time.

In Arabic there are apparently more than forty words for fart. The fart in Arabic.

Doesn’t that give you something to smile about? *ضريبة قديمة* *durtat qadima*. Old fart.

There you are. They’ve even got a word for you. /

You used to make people laugh.

Side shot Don’t tell me you don’t find things funny anymore. Lose your sense of humour and you might as well be dead.

Absurdity always made you laugh. Standing on the edge of the abyss what are you going to do if you don’t laugh? Ha ha. Gallows humour.

CLOSE-UP *He laughs, heartily.*

(VO) and the world laughs with you?

STOP AND SEARCH
for Freddie Adamson

“No, mate, I ain’t got nothing on me.”

But they’ve got you up against the wall whatever. Frisking, turning out your pockets. Lost count of the number of times it’s happened. And no use trying to pretend it doesn’t happen mainly to guys that are black.

Not talking about institutionalised racism here. Well, maybe I am. How many white guys get stopped and searched on a regular basis, tell me that? And they never find anything on me. Of course they don’t. I’d be stupid to be carrying stuff, knowing it’s gonna happen.

Like my mate Benjamin, he’s a poet. (Doesn’t like to be called Ben, but guess what, that’s what they always call him when they stop him and find out his name.)

Well, he gets invited all over the world to do gigs and readings and stuff. And he’s told me, at every single airport in every single country he’s gone to, to do these gigs, same thing’s happened: bang.

It’s when they see the dreads. Rasta. “Drugs is part of the culture” sort of thing. That’s the automatic thought. How dumb would he have to be to be carrying stuff on state-sponsored cultural tours? But there you have it: it’s “the culture.” /

They never stop people carrying duty-free bottles of whisky and vodka and all that, do they? Much more “dangerous” drugs in these bottles. But hey, governments can tax them. That’s why people get them duty-free, obviously.//

There’s been enough enquiries and what have you about the Metropolitan Police. Even the current boss, Commissioner isn’t it, Dick van Dyke. She’s been there. She authorised the shooting of that Brazilian guy in Stockwell. Thing is, he turned and ran. Mistake. When they’re going to stop you, you have to just act passive. Humiliating, but it’s what you got to do. If you run they think you’ve got something. There’s got to be a reason you’re running. So they have all the excuse they need. Put your hands near your pocket; they immediately think you have a gun. /

Do they stop and search white guys as much? No. They. Don’t. Simple as that. Even statistically.

Ask Doreen Lawrence. Respect! She knows, she can tell you all about it. Good thing that Labour has her on board now. Voice of reason, because she's been through it and out the other end.

And what about these parents who need the oil for their horrendously sick kids, and then they get arrested and the stuff confiscated, no matter how much it's needed to save the actual LIFE of the kid. Not to mention how much it has cost them to go to Amsterdam or wherever to get it.

And that's another sign of the double standards. Places like Colorado (a state that votes Republican!), California, Amsterdam, where it's legal. There's a huge hypocrisy going on. How many middle-class white people are smoking stuff, snorting stuff, putting money into the vicious circle of the drugs industry? Cocaine even in the residues they find in sewage works.

And the guys they get for it are the lowest on the ladder, of course. //

I've never understood why they waste their energy stopping and searching guys like me. It happens to you one time, maybe they find something on you even, "for your own personal use." They let you off with "a warning," or a caution.

But that's you marked. Next time they stop you, you'll be a regular offender.

Yes, it makes me angry. Who wouldn't be angry? Comes with the turf. That's all.//

And don't even ask. Yes, I know where to get stuff.

Get it yourself.