

Murmuring judges: public and the police

[Sociology](#), [Racism](#)



In *Murmuring Judges*, the second play in Hare's trilogy which examines institutions, Hare presents the relationship between the police and the public as one of mutual dislike. Interestingly, Hare never openly shows the public to dislike the lawyers, who act as the antagonist throughout the play due to their uncaring attitude towards client, but it is omnipresent towards the police, who are shown to be more in touch with people. Here, Hare is perhaps consciously suggesting that the people dislike the police as they are the 'face of justice' and thus perceived by the public to be the 'enemy'.

Although Hare does present the police to hold some racist and prejudiced views, showing they clearly aren't perfect, he does largely present the police in both *Murmuring Judges* and his research book *Asking Around* as trying to do a hard job in difficult times. From our first introduction to the police, we see they are instantly disliked by the public. In Act 1 Scene 3, the first to involve the police, Keith states "you're all bloody bastards" which immediately creates sympathy from the audience for the police.

This sympathy is increased throughout the novel, where Hare generally presents the police as good people, an example of which is Sandra, who is shown as trying to enforce justice fairly in a corrupt system. The public dislike for the police is shown to be mutual though, "I'm not sure I care for the public that much", which highlights the police frustration at the difficulty of their job, which is shown to be exacerbated by non-cooperative suspects, as shown through Keith's repetition of "I'm not saying anything".

This furthers sympathy towards the police, as the public perception and the audience's perception seem to be very different, as at this point in the play

the police are presented as entirely honest. Dislike for the police is also shown later in the play, “ I bloody hate the sodding police”, but here the police are shown to have grown more tired of the public and are more irritated, “ do you have any idea, you stupid arsehole, how bloody boring it is for us? However, the public only further underlying frustration, as the Criminal Evidence Act of 1981 made policing more about paperwork, which created frustration amongst the police as for them it lowered their ability to do their jobs. In Asking Around, Hare states “[the police] are used to doing a great deal of good for the community and they’re used to having it thrown back in their face”. This could explain the police’s frustration at the public and also their seeming lack of interest in their jobs, as they no longer have the incentive to help those who hate them.

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The police are shown to become more frustrated as the play progress, although the time period is unknown, could suggest that more and more acts were continually introduced. However, Hare continues to present the police as ‘ the good guys’, as he shows Lester to be “ only interested in protecting the public”, which reinforces the idea that police frustration largely stems from the public. Despite the public perception of the police as “ tossers”, the police are wholly presented as the most in touch with people and the most realistic, “ what we’re talking about here is reality”.

This is best shown in the juxtaposition of the lawyers and the police’s view of public interest. Whereas Sir Peter believes “ everyone listens to Desert Island Disks”, which the is obviously untrue, as this is a largely middle class radio

station and shows the lawyers to be completely out of touch with the public, Lester states " I'd rather be in bed with Michelle Pfeiffer. " This is a much more relatable statement for the public, as it is likely that there is a larger proportion of people who would rather be in bed with Michelle than there is who listen to Desert Island Disks.

Through this direct contrast, Hare shows the lawyers to be dated whereas the police are presented as realistic, and with the same manner and feelings as the public, which can be exemplified by the sarcastic tone from Lester towards the clients, " go and stand up there next to him, it makes no difference to me". The extent of the police's involvement with the public is shown starkly when Barry confronts Irina and asks " when was the last time anyone was sick on your wig? The mocking tone suggests is frustration at the public and the image of the public vomiting on the police shows them to be obviously more in touch with the public than the lawyers. Contextually, however, the public distrust of the police is understandable, as cases like the Guilford four and the Birmingham Six highlighted police corruption and showed the police to be immoral, as Barry is shown to be here. Perhaps the worst relationships presented between the police and the public are those which highlight the racist and generally prejudiced attitudes of the police at the time.

Barry suggests that Gerard is more likely to be guilty as " he was kind of Irish", which shows an innate prejudice, as he assumes that his nationality makes him more likely to commit crime. Significantly, Hare presents the public as aware of this racism through Jason, who is black, as he states " if

you go through with this...I'm going to get a bobble hat and grow bloody dreadlocks. " Here, it is suggested that the police are inherently racist, as Jason implies that he was arrested simply because he was black, showing he too believes the police are racist.

Although here it is a matter of justice, rather than racism, in the focus scene Hare does present the police as prejudiced. Through Lester's statement, " I hate immigration...and bloody women", Hare presents the police as prejudiced, which could arguably suggest why they are so disliked by the public as this shows them to be unjust. Just as the public are shown to be aware of racism within the police, sexism is also obvious as Sandra says " just ask the boys, all women are niggers".

However, I believe this may have been inherent and gone unnoticed by the police, as perfectly summed up in the line " they don't know they're prejudiced", as the play was written in 1991, when racism and sexism were seen as everyday occurrences. Hare describes the police as " the people trying to keep their sense of humour in the face of massive contradictions". This is evident in the relationship between the police and the public, as the police generally use a light tone and humorous phrases, which suggests the police would like to get along with the public, but they make this impossible.

This is strengthened by Hare's presentation of the public, as they are shown to be non-cooperative or " grovelling". In contrast, Hare occasionally presents the police as prejudiced and disinterested in their jobs, which undermines the police-public relationship, but it is largely obvious that Hare blames the public for the poor public relations as the police are largely just

attempting to do their job in difficult circumstances, which is only worsened by the public perception of them as unjust and prejudiced.