

Boys from the blackstuff essay sample



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“ Boys From The Blackstuff” was set in the early 1980s and comments on the misery of men struggling to survive (and come to terms with the insecurity of life on the dole) and the devastation caused by the loss of their careers. The play was shown on television in 1982 and Bernard Hill, who played legendary Yosses Hughes, won an award for his excellent portrayal of a man deprived of his dignity and, eventually, of his children. The playwright Alan Bleasdale made Britain aware of the frustration caused by unemployment, the social problems and the desperation of those who were unemployed.

We laugh at Yosses throughout the play yet sympathise with him because he is his own worst enemy. No matter how hard he tries, he cannot do the most simple of things. Whilst Britain was run by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher it was a cruel place. The idea that greed was good was entrenched in the nation’s psyche. The jobless faced constant rejection by employers who had no job vacancies. Men became increasingly depressed as their efforts to get back to gainful employment were crushed. The loss of jobs was causing loss of identity; I think this is why Yosses insists on repeating: “ I’m Yosses Hughes”.

He’s lost everything but yet he still exists and needs to keep reminding himself and everybody else of it. Yosses represents the millions of people who were unemployed, unable to find work and on the brink of a nervous breakdown. His story shows the tension caused by money problems and that losing a job can result in divorce. Yosses was a man pushed too far, who eventually lost everything. Yosses once worked in Saudi. He had money, a family, a home and a life. From this he went to nothing. He says later on in

the play: “ I built sandcastles. And... I sometimes think that’s all I’ve ever done. ” (scene 24).

This is a metaphor for his life. Sandcastles always disappear and, just like everything else he has ever had, they vanish. When he lost his job it tore him apart inside. He started to beat his wife, Maureen, who eventually walked out. “ He hit me. A lot. All the time as a matter of fact. That’s why I went out” (Scene 25) was what Maureen said about him. Yosser always thought he would be somebody but the truth was, he would never really be anything. The play starts with “ Yosser’s Dream”. It wasn’t exactly a dream, more of a nightmare. Yosser’s biggest fear was losing his children and is what the nightmare was about.

The children were disappearing in a lake whilst friends of Yosser’s were coming past him in boats, ignoring him as he called out to them. Yosser was left all alone. He wakes up to find that his children are in fact still sleeping beside him. They all slept in the same room because Yosser was so paranoid about losing them. Yosser never goes anywhere without his children, he will not let them out of his sight. He won’t send them to school because he fears social services will take them for him, which only gets him into more trouble where they are involved.

His efforts to protect his children end up in their own virtual imprisonment. They are very unsociable as they don’t go anywhere or talk to anybody. Some people may argue that Yosser only wanted them because he was in control of them and they were the only possessions that he had left. I do, however, believe that he did love them. He tries to care for them and be a

good father but his efforts are poor. He just about feeds the children and clothes them but does not do a good job. The irony is that the children might not even be his. Maureen admits this in an interview with an unknown source (scene 25).

The play says “ they all look desperately tired and uncared for” (scene 24). Yosser can’t look after himself, let alone his children. His desperation to keep his children leads him to desperate acts. He will not interact with any form of authority even though they could probably help him. Many authorities visit Yosser throughout the play but he shows aggression and suspicion every time. We first see the school attendance officer who is standing outside Yosser’s house. He is there knocking the door when Yosser and his children are on their way back home.

Yosser, carrying a Tesco bag, and apparently in a hurry ignores him, opens the door and goes inside with the children. ” (scene 11). The man says to Yosser: “ Mr Hughes? Mr Hughes? My name’s Watkins, I’m the school’s attendance officer for the area. The headmistress informs me that your children have not been attending of late-” (scene 11) Yosser, by this time, has already shut the door in the man’s face. When an official-looking envelope is pushed through the letter box, it is immediately pushed back out. When an electrician visits, Yosser says to him “ Have y’ got a good dentist? (scene 19) and the man instantly changes his tone and backs off. Yosser’s electricity was then cut off.

When the health visitor comes to inspect the house Yosser is still in bed, “ Oh well, it is only ten to twelve” she says sarcastically to the children who

were not at school. She uses the excuse that her hands needed washing to gain access to the kitchen. " she enters the back kitchen, and as she does so we follow her and see her view of the debris" (scene 16) ' debris' suggests the mess of the kitchen. By this point the eldest child Jason had gone to wake up Yosser who came down the stairs immediately.

I know what you've come for. Wash your hands, my arse". In the following scene Yosser is seen on his hands and knees scrubbing furiously at the floor. It looks a great deal cleaner but the damage was already done. Social services had probably already been contacted at this point, too little - too late. One thing Yosser needs from his children is respect; he wants to impress them and he wants them to be proud of him. In scene 18 Yosser and his children are at a pub. There is a charity ' do' going on and two celebrities Graeme Souness and Sammy Lee are present.

Yosser sit in between them both whilst his children stand watching. The pub manager tells Yosser that there are no children allowed. Yosser " stares at him malignantly" and then the manager speaks again; " Well just this once, hey. Just for a few minutes". Uninvited, Yosser joined the celebrity party as his children look on but no-one asked him to leave because they didn't want to risk upsetting him and him causing a scene. Yosser starts a conversation with Souness, he looks at the children whilst he was talking and they smile back at him, they are impressed.

Yosser likes to please his children. Yosser sometimes gets frustrated and, because he cant control his emotions, he " head bangs". It takes place of talking about things and he covers his emotional pain with physical pain. His

children have got used to it and accept it as normal behaviour. They don't see anything wrong with head butting walls. When Maureen refused to come home Yosser deliberately butts the lamppost. This is one of the few times the children speak and, instead of commenting on Yosser's violence they say "she used to be our mummy".

Yosser didn't even want her really; he just wanted her to be there. He admits this to his psychiatrist. Yosser goes to visit a priest inside a confessional box. He will not leave his children outside so they have to witness their father breaking down in front of the priest. Yosser repeats to him "I'm Yosser Hughes" as if he should know who he is. The priest insists on him calling him Dan so then Yosser says to him "I'm desperate. Dan" and starts head butting the wooden frame inside the box. The crucifix drops down on his head as he does this. Has God really given up hope on him?

At the psychiatrist's unit Yosser is asked to leave his children outside whilst he speaks to the doctor. He refuses for a while at first because he thinks social services will take them. "No. They're staying where I can see them. It's a trick. They won't be there when I come out." Yosser finally gives in and takes the children into the waiting room but keeps the door open between so he can see them. He starts talking about Maureen and how he wants her to be there. The doctor compared this to her three piece suite, saying she just wanted it there.

When Yosser looks outside the door the children have vanished. He thinks the worst straight away; he thinks that his nightmares have become reality and that social services has taken them. He searches the building only to

find that they are playing in the lift. Yosser starts head butting the instrument panel, the children again witness this bizarre behaviour. The doctor talks to the children and can see that “ they appear tired, withdrawn and distant, as well as dirt-stained. Only their eyes, constantly looking around, give any sign of emotion or nervousness”(Scene 32).

Maureen takes all the furniture from the house which the children like because there is more room to kick the football around. Social services visit the house after this has happened. They say to Yosser gently: “ I’m sorry but we do have the authority under the Children’s Act and Young People’s Act of 1969 to remove your children regardless of your permission or not. ” Yosser isn’t prepared for them to be taken; he is determined to fight for them so he says to them “ Don’t come back unless you bring an army”. But of course, they do bring an army; they come back with the police force.

Yosser confronts them with a baseball bat even though three of the policemen have their truncheons drawn. They beat Yosser until he cannot fight anymore, all in front of his children. Social services take the children whilst Yosser lies on the floor badly beaten. The children struggle and scream but it is no use, they are going to be put into care. The children clearly do not want to go, this suggests that no matter what their life is like, they do love their father. The female social worker, Veronica, smiles reassuringly at Anne-Marie, Yosser’s only daughter and tells her “ It’s alright”.

The smile is returned and Anne-Marie then butts her in the face and looks quite pleased with what she did. This is quite upsetting because the little girl

doesn't see anything wrong with doing this. It's all she knows as her father has always done it in front of her. Yosser now has nothing left. He is a man all alone, depressed and suicidal. He goes back to the psychiatrist's unit thinking that they were responsible for his children being taken and he completely breaks down in front of another patient. He says to the doctor "Send me away. Where are they?"

He says to the policeman "Everything I've ever wanted, and all the things that I had, they've all been taken away. I've got to take something, it's my turn" (Scene 43). He makes excuses that he feels sick so that the officers will stop the car. He gets out and says "I'm Yosser Hughes. And I can't stand it anymore" and with that he charges off towards the lake. He is attempting suicide, he doesn't want to be alive anymore and he has nothing worth living for. One police man says "let the bastard die" but the other won't let this happen and charges into the lake after him.

Yosser is already failing his suicide attempt; he couldn't even do this right. The policeman take hold of him and carry him out of the lake. Yosser lost everything he ever had, his job, his family and his home. He failed at everything he ever tried to do, even simple things like cooking fish fingers. If he wasn't so stubborn and proud, local authorities could have helped him and he could still have his children. He refused to co-operate with anyone and this is what lead to his breakdown.

He couldn't even commit suicide without failing; he was a fine example of what a failure was. He was a failure as a father yet I do believe he loves his children. He wasn't a very good father but he did protect his children and he

did care about them. They were the one thing he loved more than anything and risked everything for them. His fear of them taken away was a phobia that played in his mind every minute of every day. If he didn't care about them would he really go through all that trouble just to keep them by his side?

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