

How do alan bennett and the director of talking heads



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In all the Talking Heads, there are recurring themes, such as loneliness (A Cream Cracker under the settee) and exaggerated pride or self-confidence (Her Big Chance). None of the characters are truly happy, although the little happiness can come their way through surprising means. Graham finds happiness when his mother doesn't leave him for Mr Turnbull, although, ironically, in the future he may have been happier if she had.

Each person has a secret, which is hidden, yet perhaps subconsciously known, and isn't revealed, Grahams slightly fragile mental state, Doris wish to die, Susan's alcoholism and loss of faith and Lesley's promiscuity, and lack of talent. Although none of the character aims to be funny, Bennett makes them speak in a way which causes the audience to laugh at the situation (sometimes absurd), that they are in, or their choice of words. For example, Grahams mothers comment about the man at Tesco's, or Susans flower arranging account at the church.

A lot of humour comes from the characters seriousness retelling of stories in a language, which they perceive to be so, yet to us, they aren't. Some of the humour in the Talking Heads is humour, which could be deemed as inappropriate to laugh at, mainly because it deals with serious social issues such as racism. Many of Bennett's characters are pathetic in their own different ways. In "A Cream Cracker under the settee", Bennett creates pathos by making Doris seem so helpless and sad. She lives a very isolated life, and is very lonely.

From her talking about her cleaner, it shows that she is incapable of looking after herself. The reaction to this by the audience is sympathetic, because

she wants to do things by herself, but isn't physically capable of doing so. Doris doesn't want to accept that she is incapable of doing thing for herself, and is told, by Zulema, not to do so, as if she was a small child. From Doris' reaction to Zulemas cleaning, you can tell that Doris doesn't like the standard of Zulemas cleaning. " Well Zulema, I bet you haven't dusted the top of that".

This causes the audience to react with less sympathy because now they see that she is just fussy. In " A Cream Cracker under the settee", Bennett uses humour to change the mood, which at time can be quite bleak. Doris appears to have a well-developed sense of humour. She does make several humorous comments throughout the play, such as when she noticed that she had cracked the photo she remarks, " We're cracked Wilfred". Its these comments that are effective because it keeps the audience interested, and My Big Chance is a somewhat more humorous Talking Head, because the character, Lesley is younger.

She is funnier in a way compared to the other, older characters, who are generally more sombre, and quieter in tone. Lesley alone in all the Talking Heads doesn't have moments where she can see the reality of her life, where she sees herself as a, failed actress, who thinks she is a much bigger star than she is. Lesley, in " My Big Chance" causes people to feel sympathetic towards her, because she is a woman who is seeking to be liked. Lesley tries to appear to be professional, and she does reiterate this throughout her speech, often saying she is a professional, and that she would rather curl up with a book.

However, she is far from this, as she is made to seem not this, " You look an interesting person. I like interesting people". Bennett changes the perception that Lesley is ' professional', when she says " You won't be able to tell my tits from my goose pimples". Bennett is very successful in showing her lack of intelligence, foolishness and how she can't see these traits in herself, and it is at these things, we can laugh at her attempts to appear otherwise. Alan Bennett uses bathos to provide humour in " A Bed among the Lentils". " Godfrey's bad enough but I am glad I wasn't married to Jesus".

It is the link between something that is ordinary, to something that is godly, which provides the humour. This also occurs in " Her Big Chance", the juxtaposition saying she killed someone, then missing it because it was interesting, provides humour because of its ridiculousness. Susan is quite a witty character. Possessed with greater intelligence than her husband, she mocks her husband's ' fan club' in the parish where she lives, which is humorous. She uses detail to also describe characters and their appearances that she has observed; " he was on the young side for a vicar".

She also uses a lot of detail when describing the less obvious aspects of people, when describing Ramesh, " he has lovely teeth". She is also very descriptive when talking about other things and not just people, " a vase like a test tube, half filled with gravel, in which she is throttling a lone carnation". This descriptive writing does provide humour. Susan, unlike the other characters, allows us to laugh with her, and not at her like Lesley in " My Big Chance" and in some respects Graham in " A Chip in the Sugar".

For example, Susan says how she attempted to 'cadge' 'a bit of mouldy old fern' (suggesting the uselessness of it), but is stopped by Mrs Belcher who states, that she needs 'every bit of my spiraea.' The pretentious nature of Mrs Belcher is humorous, and here we can laugh with Susan's amusing observations. She is a figure of pathos, stranded in a marriage, and social role of which she detests and which she can't break away from, yet she lacks the bravery to abandon them and the belief that change is really possible. In "A Chip in the Sugar", Graham and his mother appear to have a role reversal.

This is most likely because of his apparent mental illness, because he attends some kind of day centre, and his mother often tells him to have his 'pill'. Graham appears to worry a lot about his mother, and appears to be the parental figure in the relationship, especially when his mother starts going out with Mr Turnbull. Graham is concerned about this relationship his mother has with Mr Turnbull. This role reversal, does provide humour, and sympathy, because you would expect a 40-something year old man to not be living on his own, and you would expect his mother to be worrying about Graham, and not vice versa.

An example of the humour in this Talking Head is when Graham's mother, Vera, launches a purely enjoyable attack on the vicar. This reveals her lack of understanding and her prejudices. In "A Chip in the Sugar", Graham is the complete opposite of his mother, Vera's love interest, Mr Turnbull. Graham is your so-called typical Guardian reader - avoids deodorant, is environmentally conscious, likes date and walnut bread. When he comes into conflict with Mr

Turnbull, a racist and bigamist, yet well off, and well dressed, this provides humour.

Grahams mother can be seen to have an imbalanced view of life, perhaps because she can't break away from her dominating son. She is annoyed that the money she gave to the poor and needy as gone to waste because, " it would have brought me some Quality Street". This is an example of bathos, which, in some respects, does provide humour to the watcher/reader. When watching the Talking Heads, the director uses cuts, different camera angles and the introduction of music when the speaker is talking to good effect.