

DONE TO A DEAD END and the DEAD OR ALIVE SALE

A play in one act by Giles Bailey and Martijn in't Veld

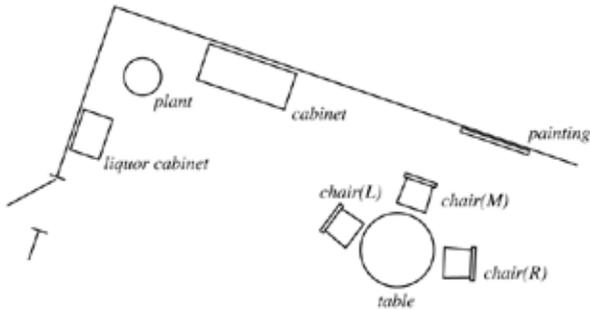
The characters:

RONALD: A Dutch man.

JOSEPH: A British man.

The time: The present.

The scene:



On stage:

Table: Set with two filled glasses decorated with images of people in their national dress.

Cabinet: With record player, pile of records, opened letters, documents and some passport photographs of RONALD. Liquor cabinet: Stocked with various bottles of hard liquor. The plant is a big, tropical palm, the painting is a replica of a Jackson Pollock.

SCENE: RONALD's home on a dark evening. The Room is lit by a single lamp that hangs above the table. The room is minimally furnished, a bare wooden floor, white walls. A human-sized palm tree in a big tub is prominent to the left of the room, a replica of a painting by Jackson Pollock hangs on the wall to the right. To the centre right of the stage there is a round formica table with three chairs around it, all of light colour. On the left a liquor cabinet which is well stocked. Against the back wall is a cabinet with a record player, some documents and records. The door to the room is half open.

RONALD and JOSEPH are seated at the table, RONALD in chair(R), JOSEPH in chair(L). RONALD is reading a red-bound book.

JOSEPH rises and ranges about the room listlessly. He picks up a photograph of RONALD that is lying on the cabinet. He stares at it.

RONALD (without looking up, remaining focused on his book): What do I look like?

JOSEPH: You look like a scholar.

Scrutinizing it closely

Smoldering into the camera.

RONALD (Still not looking up): Do I wear glasses?

JOSEPH: Indeed.

RONALD: Am I waving at you?

JOSEPH: Yes.

RONALD: Does smoldering mean smile?

JOSEPH: It means to burn slowly with no flame.

RONALD (*finally looking up*): That is not a very nice thing to say.

JOSEPH (*hurriedly, to appease him*): No, this is a compliment, burning like the embers of the campfire...

He pauses as if summoning up the words.

The hot cherry of a rope set aflame... the coals of a sauna.

RONALD: Wow, you are making an effort to get me back in the comfort zone

He closes his book and places it on the table.

OK, I am back in front of the fireplace. Now tell me a story.

JOSEPH: Sure.

RONALD: feel free to dismiss the request if you feel like.

JOSEPH: No, it's fine.

He joins RONALD at the table.

Are you ready?

RONALD: I heard somebody say the other day “i was born ready.” but apparently he still had to learn the words a little after that before he could say it. But yes.

JOSEPH: So, in the delirium of a drunken stumble through the Dublin night town the protagonists swam in the fearsome phantasmagoria of a warm, hallucinatory world.

JOSEPH's telephone rings. He answers it and walking to the corner of the room conducts a conversation that is barely audible. Idly RONALD echos JOSEPH' half of the conversation while he toys with his glass and leans back on his chair.

RONALD: Your keys... that is unfortunate... yes last time we came back from the meeting with alexis... you were there already... oh shit... yes i guess... what did they look like?... hmm... yeah... that is weird no?... you can't...?... ah shit... so... so but the but but... the door is open to the studio right?... no yes... yeah... hmm... is there anything i can do to help you? (*losing track he looks over his shoulder at JOSEPH, straining to hear what he is saying*) At this moment actual life is living faster than the protagonist can speak.

Concluding his conversation JOSEPH returns to the table placing his telephone back in to his pocket.

JOSEPH (*taking a seat*): We return to the dublin night town. A man,

RONALD (*interrupting*): Yes please.

JOSEPH (*ignoring him*): The world,

RONALD: But perhaps you can pour me a drink.
Before we start.

JOSEPH: OK, OK

He walks over to the liquor cabinet and hurriedly mixes a drink. He returns to the table with it and places it down before RONALD.

Right.

RONALD: Great. Thanks.

JOSEPH: A man,

RONALD (*raising his glass*): Cheers to the dead homies.

He drinks.

JOSEPH (*aggravated by the interruption*): Yes, yes.
Right.

He pauses, trying to regain the focus of his story.

(with a big sigh) A man, the world and a gramophone.
The gramophone croaks incomprehensibly.

RONALD: Why are the man and the gramophone
separate from the world?

JOSEPH, agitated by being interrupted, glares at him.

RONALD (*hurriedly*): You can answer that later.
Sorry to interrupt.

RONALD's phone rings. He answers it and walks out of the room.

JOSEPH roles his eyes in exasperation. With clearly escalating rage he rises, takes the two glasses and book lying on the table and places them on the seat of the middle chair (M) . As if to remove the obstacle it presents he begins heaving the heavy dining table from between their chairs.

JOSEPH (*struggling with the table*): What the fuck?

The unacustomed weight causes him to wince and the table topples over, crashing upside down.

Motherfucker! What the fuck?

He hauls it to the back of the room by the legs and drags RONALD's chair over to close the gap left by the table.

What the fuck?! S.O.B!

He takes his glass from the chair(M) and shaking his head walks to the liquor cabinet to make himself a drink. He sips in silence, a pained expression on his face.

RONALD reenters and sits back down on his chair seemingly unaware that the room has been reconfigured.

(*accusatively*) I've lost the thread of my story.

RONALD: What does S.O.B mean?

JOSEPH: Son of a... well, maybe you can guess.

RONALD: I can.

JOSEPH (*with sarcasm*): Great.

Returning to his chair he sits and stares at the ground.

RONALD: But you were in the world with a gramophone or something?

JOSEPH (*looking up*): True.

Silence.

(having reflected and gathered himself) I remembered this: Though Twemlow is introduced to the reader as being like the table at the Veneerings' dinner party, he comes to reflect a wise way of thinking.

RONALD: What is being like the table?

JOSEPH: It's a description of a character from 'Our Mutual Friend' by Charles Dickens. Actually, in the book he is described as being the table.

RONALD: Nice.

JOSEPH: Or specifically the leaf of a dining table.

RONALD: I think Raimundus Malasauskas once posed the question if a table could curate an exhibition.

JOSEPH: Did he conclude anything?

RONALD: He only posed the question. It was an interview. I can't remember the answer.

JOSEPH: Was it in a specific context?

RONALD: A magazine, but i like to think they were probably sitting opposite of each other at a table.

JOSEPH: I see.

RONALD: The table being in the middle as a posed problem or theme perhaps... which directs a course for the dialogue.

A long pause.

RONALD (*suddenly*): Jeweettoch

JOSEPH: I'm sorry?

RONALD: You know the dilly.

JOSEPH: Um, I'm a little lost here.

RONALD: It's some slang common in Rotterdam. Jeweettoch. Jay dilla, je weet.

JOSEPH: Care to translate?

RONALD: Je-weet-toch: you-know-right... what the deal is. (*Abruptly changing the subject*) What are you having to drink?

JOSEPH: Vodka and apple juice. And you?

RONALD (*Admiring the illustration of people in Czechoslovakian national dress that decorate the side of his glass*): I don't know but I do know that Czechoslovakian woman is in it up to her waist.

JOSEPH (*In incomprehension*): My word! Care to elaborate?

RONALD (*Ignoring his question*): please, what do you mean with "my word"?

JOSEPH: My word is an exclamation. Like "my word!"

He mimes shock, his hands upraised.

Good heavens! Etcetera.

RONALD: Holy moly?

JOSEPH: Exactly. "My word" is a bit archaic. Nice though, right?

RONALD (*bewildered*): You want me to guess your word? pyramid!

JOSEPH: Good try.

RONALD: Shit.

He pauses.

It is probably the most archaic of all words. (*After some thought and with enthusiasm*) Chair! I say your word is chair.

JOSEPH (*mysteriously*): It could well be.

Pause.

Actually, the exclamation “my word” comes from “upon my word” so that would be wholly fitting.

RONALD: Yes... Comfortably

JOSEPH: Upon my words. though, I doubt that there is just one word... coming from beneath me.

RONALD: Now I still haven't heard your story. Or have I?

JOSEPH: Oh right. My story was an adaptation of a fragment of another, A bit borrowed and perverted.

He stands and paces wagging a finger.

(*with great self-importance*) I will parcel with the following: There is a diagram. Thus:

He indicates a point in the air.

The man,

He indicates another.

The world,

And a third.

and a gramophone. A handsome triangle.

He draws a triangle in the air with his index finger.

RONALD (*playing along*): A very handsome one I must say.

JOSEPH: I'm not so sure, (*and then reflecting*) I'm not so happy with the man. he is a bit defined.

RONALD (*helpfully*): A person? A dog? A table? A discussion?

JOSEPH (*not listening*): Perhaps a reader?

RONALD: Another world?

JOSEPH: A reader, the world, and the gramophone.

He redraws the triangle experimentally.

RONALD: OK it is your story.

JOSEPH: That is very gallant of you.

RONALD: What are they doing?

JOSEPH: Well... information flows between them I suppose. Really, the reader just uses them to locate herself.

RONALD: Who is turning the gramophone around?

JOSEPH: Well, the gramophone is just croaking back some history.

RONALD: Is the reader both spinning the gramophone and the world to find his own position?

JOSEPH (*with uncertainty*): It's hard to know. I don't think she can spin the world. What do you think?

RONALD: I think he can give it some good can of whoop ass. To make it loose its mind.

JOSEPH (*irritably*): Don't you think that might be a little futile? The world looks huge from here.

RONALD (*picking up his book again*): Depends on which scale you look at it.

JOSEPH: That's true, but I can only talk about the view from here.

RONALD (*opening his book*): Sure but I don't want to be sitting in the corner where the punches are falling, water spilling all around you know. Shit gets apocalyptic.

Pause.

(*putting down his book*) There is record behind you. It is called 'The War of the Worlds.'

JOSEPH: Oh, yes?

He walks over to the record player, locates the LP and puts it on. They listen for a while.

My step-grandmother has a record player that is a huge piece of furniture

RONALD: And the only record she plays on it is War of the Worlds?

JOSEPH: I used to pay it a great deal of heed because it had all the VHS tapes stacked upon it. I suspect it hasn't been used for 15 years. Minimum.

RONALD: Nice. Where is it now?

JOSEPH (*ignoring the question*): And I doubt she owns 'War of the Worlds'. Have you ever heard the Orson Welles' 'War of the Worlds'?

RONALD: That is not the radioplay or?

JOSEPH: Yes.

RONALD: Unfortunately I have never.

JOSEPH: It's meant to be great. Did you hear that when the Welles' 'War of the Worlds' was broadcast people thought it was real and it provoked genuine panic.

RONALD: Yes. Great. A great example to show the influence of media on people... or basically how you become totally familiar with a surrounding which then can totally mislead you

JOSEPH: But I don't think these surroundings were that familiar, because it was a time where radio was still potent in this way

RONALD: I don't know, is it happening now? It is a known unknown.

JOSEPH: Totally uncertain.

RONALD opens his mouth as if to interject.

JOSEPH: Shh, I'm waiting.

He listens intently to the record.

I'm pretty sure it's just a record.

RONALD (*with sarcasm*): Thank God. OK now you need to do it on a bigger scale, but still to mislead some leading press agencies can get you quite far. I think... Even it just shifts your world for a tiny bit.

JOSEPH (*looking at the table, hand on chin and with great seriousness*): Maybe you could do it with Twitter somehow.

Pause.

Did you hear this thing about Rage Against the Machine getting to number one?

RONALD: No, but now I don't know if you tell me trues or lies.

JOSEPH: No, one hundred percent true. Christmas number one in the UK. 'Killing in the Name of'. All because of Twitter and Facebook apparently

RONALD: Wow... Hmm.

He returns to his book and they sit together in silence.

Curtain.

