

Why Ronald McDonald Must Die.

[Sometimes we do things just for the hell of it. The challenge on this occasion was to create an effective script less than ten minutes long. The play was written in a single afternoon, in a frenzy of literary insanity, and much to my surprise was selected for performance at the inaugural Sydney Short & Sweet play competition. The performance was fair, although I had some reservations about the direction.]

Characters:

PERPETRATOR

POLICEMAN

SALES ASSISTANT

CUSTOMER

CUSTOMER'S CHILD

MANAGER

RONALD McDONALD

Setting: Centre stage are two *small tables, each with two chairs of the kind commonly seen in McDonalds restaurants. The table stage right sits beneath a pool of bright light. Both sets of tables and chairs are tilted towards the audience. In shadow behind them is a counter of standard McDonalds design, overhung by an unilluminated McDonalds menu board. Downstage left is an unlit self-standing McDonalds sign atop a high pole. There are lit footlights along the floor front of stage.*

The POLICEMAN is seated in the chair on the nearer side of the lighted table, the PERPETRATOR opposite facing him. The PERPETRATOR abruptly jumps up.

PERPETRATOR: That's the thing, isn't it? That's what you *really* want to know!

POLICEMAN: What?

PERPETRATOR (*agitated, coming quickly to front of the stage*): 'Why'. That's what you really want to know.

POLICEMAN: I suppose it is.

PERPETRATOR (*considering for a moment*): It's a big question, isn't it? An ultimate question, really. Why anything? Why you, why me? I mean, it just goes on and on. Let's think it through. You've got the 'when', the 'how' and the 'who'. That only leaves the 'what' and the 'why'. Like I said, I preferred to start with 'what'. I felt we could manage it.

POLICEMAN: Manage what?

PERPETRATOR: Exactly! Who knows, if we work through that, it might even lead us to the why.

POLICEMAN: Maybe.

Lights come up abruptly on the menu board and counter. The SALES ASSISTANT is standing behind the counter.

SALES ASSISTANT: Would you like any fries with that?

PERPETRATOR: Pardon?

SALES ASSISTANT: Any fries or drinks with that?

PERPETRATOR (*abashed*): Um... yes. Okay, maybe a small coke. And a small chips.

SALES ASSISTANT: So you want the Regular Deluxe Meal Deal?

PERPETRATOR: Ahhh... I guess I do.

SALES ASSISTANT: Would you like to upgrade?

PERPETRATOR: Sorry?

SALES ASSISTANT: Upgrade to a large Coke and fries for fifty cents?

The SALES ASSISTANT freezes.

The PERPETRATOR turns back to the Policeman): You see what I mean? There were too many questions, too many demands! I'm not used to it. It's an American thing, value adding. I've always resented it: the fundamental motive is greed. I like to make my own choices in my own time, and then state them. I don't like them pre-packaged.

POLICEMAN: Is that why you did it?

PERPETRATOR: Aha, there, you see! Didn't I tell you: you went straight back to the why! We almost had a what, but you couldn't wait! That kind of approach isn't going to get us anywhere. It's too global. You've got to pave the way for it, prepare the ground.

Lights up abruptly on the second table. CUSTOMER and CUSTOMER'S CHILD enter with trays of McDonald's food and sit. They begin to eat in silence, the mounting abandon of their gluttony gradually becoming the focus of the action; they devour the food in large and increasingly frequent mouthfuls, spilling much of it onto the table.

PERPETRATOR: I mean, look at them! We might as well be feeding pigs. Is that what we're destined to become, I wonder, just a herd at the trough? They have no redeeming qualities at all, nothing anyone could possibly find attractive: no humanity, barely enough intelligence to make them useful. They're worse than animals, in many ways.

The CUSTOMER, her mouth full of half-chewed food, re-animates violently. She slaps CUSTOMER'S CHILD.

CUSTOMER: Shut your fuckin' mouth when you're talkin' to me!

The CUSTOMER'S CHILD snivels briefly then goes back to his food. They freeze.

PERPETRATOR (*returning to his seat*): I did them a favour, really. At least I might have slowed it down a bit.

POLICEMAN: What?

PERPETRATOR: Their journey to the slaughterhouse.

POLICEMAN: The animals?

PERPETRATOR: The people.

POLICEMAN: They don't seem to want to thank you for it.

PERPETRATOR: I don't expect them to. They wouldn't recognise their salvation if they fell over it, let alone fight for it. Someone had to strike a blow on their behalf.

POLICEMAN: Part of the 'why', then?

PERPETRATOR: Yes, I suppose it is. I felt I a need to do something, to hit back at somebody.

The MANAGER steps forward from the shadows. He takes the PERPETRATOR by the elbow and raises him gently but firmly from his chair.

MANAGER: Can I help you, sir?

PERPETRATOR: I'm... a bit upset, that's all.

MANAGER (*as if not having heard the response*): You seem a bit upset. What seems to be the problem?

PERPETRATOR: I feel like I want to kill somebody.

MANAGER (*Brightly*): Why don't we sit down and talk about it. I'm sure we'll be able to sort something out.

He freezes.

PERPETRATOR: I couldn't do it to him. He was too nice. It would've been like killing a friendly calf.

POLICEMAN: So what *did* you do?

PERPETRATOR: He offered me a Happy Meal, and I took it.

POLICEMAN: And then what?

PERPETRATOR: Aha, you're getting the hang of it! I really don't know how it happened - I just turned around and there he was, Ronald McDonald in the flesh! It seemed pre-ordained. I knew I had to act quickly - he was at the counter when I saw him, and you know how quick the service is there. So I grabbed the nearest thing I could and used that.

POLICEMAN: A quarter pounder. You choked him to death with a quarter pounder.

PERPETRATOR: Yes. Like I said, it was the first thing I could lay my hands on.

POLICEMAN: His last supper.

PERPETRATOR: I hadn't thought of it like that; but yes, I suppose it was.

POLICEMAN (*after a pause*): People hate you for it, you know. They want to kill you; the central switchboard's been jammed with death threats. I can't say I blame them, in a way. The poor bastard was collecting for Ronald McDonald House, for Christ's sake. He'd just stopped in for lunch. Whatever you might think of the company, Ronald McDonald was one of the good guys.

PERPETRATOR: He was created to give the company an aura of social responsibility, that's all. They got their money's worth out of him. He was just another victim, in a way.

POLICEMAN: So you decided to put him out of his misery?

PERPETRATOR: Not at all – at least, not at first. All I could see then was the symbol; he represented everything I despised. I was striking against the principle of the thing. I mean, I suppose I could have targeted Kentucky Fried or Burger King, but they don't have a living embodiment, do they?

POLICEMAN: He was a *clown*, for Christ's sake!

PERPETRATOR: The fact that he was a clown only made it worse! Clowns have always had a negative effect on me; there's always something spooky about them – something phoney, a false projection of happiness. You can see it in their eyes. It might be sadness or resentment or even malice, but there's always something there.

POLICEMAN: What about Ronald McDonald's eyes? What did you see in them?

PERPETRATOR: That's what struck me about him! There was nothing except sincerity, genuine goodwill and trust! It was like looking into the eyes of a child. Even when he knew that his life was about to end, all I could see in his eyes was forgiveness, and a vision of the place he was going to - a McDonalds World of endless joy and happy meals. That was when I realised that he was innocent: that it was possible to truly believe!

POLICEMAN: But you killed him anyway.

PERPETRATOR: It was too late by then. The bun had lodged in his glottis. But even if I could've saved him, I don't think I would have. I believe that deep down he wanted me to do it. He was at the gates of paradise, and he wanted to go through.

The McDonalds sign lights up. Beneath it is the costumed body of RONALD McDONALD. The PERPETRATOR and POLICEMAN walk over to the body and study it.

PERPETRATOR: I thought about tying him to the sign, like Jesus on the cross, as a bit of a gesture, but I ran out of time. I guess it doesn't matter. I know he's happy. And who knows - if there really is a McDonald's World, maybe he'll rise again.

POLICEMAN: It could be a while.

PERPETRATOR: Oh, that's okay. I'm happy to wait.

POLICEMAN (*Taking the PERPETRATOR into light custody*): We have to go.

They begin to leave the stage.

PERPETRATOR: So you got the why, then?

POLICEMAN: Maybe. I'm not sure.

At the edge of the stage, the POLICEMAN hesitates in front of the menu board. He feels in his pocket for some change. All characters except Ronald McDonald abruptly re-animate. The MANAGER, CUSTOMER and CUSTOMER'S CHILD leave the stage. The PERPETRATOR waits, watches the scene. The SALES ASSISTANT smiles brightly as the POLICEMAN approaches the counter.

SALES ASSISTANT: Hi. How can I help you, sir?

POLICEMAN: Um... a Double Cheese and Bacon, thanks.

SALES ASSISTANT: Sure. Would like some fries with that?

POLICEMAN: Um... sure.

(He extracts some change from his pocket and examines it) Um.. How much is that?
(He)

SALES ASSISTANT: That'll be seven fifty.

The POLICEMAN counts out the correct change, stands beside the PERPETRATOR, waiting. Blackout.

CURTAIN