

Dialogue by Clare Lauren Kelly

Not all movies and television shows are good. It doesn't matter how many famous actors are in the movie, how good the writer is, the director, or any other one thing, what matters, at least in my opinion, is a combination of it all. And one of the more important things in that combination is the dialogue. It needs to feel real, it needs to be relatable, memorable, and it also needs to be delivered well by the actors with the proper feeling, emotion, facial expressions, body movement and more. But it is possible for a bad show or film to have good bits of dialogue and actors who do a very good job at bringing their character to life in a way that sticks with you, in a way that feels real.

There are some actors that I enjoy who I think are always very good at bringing their characters to life, and who are always able to say their dialogue in a way that just feels right in the moment or for the character. And for those actors it does not matter if the movie or show is one that I feel is good or not, a lot of the time for me I watch things simply because of an actor who I have enjoyed in other things and they are the one who keeps my attention. I'll watch genres that I'm not normally a fan of, simply because there is an actor I enjoy in it, and if that isn't something other people do, oh well.

For this essay, mainly I wanted to share a few examples of dialogue that really has stuck with me long after watching whatever it was in, and to also explain quickly why I think it may have stuck with me so much. Going into what about the words, situation or the delivery from the actor made it catch my attention in the first place and stay in my head after for so long. Now I am someone who enjoys watching shows and films regardless of the language it is in, I do not mind using subtitles. Any dialogue I use that is not originally in English will be written here in English, but I will note somewhere what the original language was. And I will try to limit myself to five examples and not go into it too much, it would be good to have some of the random personal essays that I am writing be on the shorter side, since I am aware that not everyone has the time or patience to be reading ten page papers no matter how interested in the topic they happen to be.

For the first example, it is from the television show *Shooter*. A character I enjoyed who appeared in the second season, though he was mentioned in the first season, was the sniper Solotov, played by actor Josh Stewart. There were actually a few lines that Solotov had in the show that stuck with me for some time after first hearing them, but there are certain ones from those that stand out to me even more. I have actually used the main one in some poetry of mine, and also as inspiration for some other writing or characters, and it is as follows. "It is funny is it not? Comedy for one man, tragedy for another."

One man's luck is another's misfortune, there is always going to be a winner and a loser in nearly every situation whether or not the two people or groups are actually connected, whether or not there was a direct competition. What ends up working out for one person could cause another person to lose something, the outcome of any situation is never going to be good and positive for every person that is involved, no matter how directly or indirectly they are involved in it. There is always a winner and a loser in every situation, and that is not something that can be changed, for every person that gets hired for a job, there is a person that applied for that job who did not get it. And what is funny to one, is not to another. That is just how things are, and to hear it said so plainly in a show really stuck for me for a reason I still can't fully explain even after a bit over five years of me first hearing it.

My second example is from the show *Teen Wolf* and was said by one of the few characters that made the show enjoyable for me, Deucalion played by the wonderful Gideon Emery. He has some good lines, but one of my favorites is one that is also a bit of a play on words which made it stick in my head even more, a lot easier for me to remember. "Worry less about being a liability, and more about your ability, to lie."

Like I said, a big part of why this one has stuck with me for so long is the wordplay, but another factor is the actor and his delivery of the line. Gideon Emery is an English actor and for the character Deucalion, he uses his natural accent which added to the character and made him more distinct and intimidating at some times. There are others who have seen the show who noted that his refined, eloquent delivery adds to Deucalion's status as the menacing and widely feared "Demon Wolf," and I wholeheartedly agree with that. Gideon is also an actor who is good at using his tone of voice to add to the moment and the character, putting emotion, intention and more into his tone of voice, and at times his lilting delivery sounds teasing and musical in a way that stays with me and makes the character feel so real.

One thing about me, is that I don't just remember the words that the character says, I remember the tone of voice, the delivery, the rhythm and more, and if I'm saying that line to someone else then I often will mimic the way that the actor says it. The dialogue often won't feel the same to me unless it is delivered in the same way the actor delivered it, and when I read a bit of dialogue I've written down, in my head I'm reading it the same way the actor said it. And as for the actual words in this bit of dialogue, it doesn't feel like the best advice that can be given to someone, but for those who know the show and know the moment this line is said, it feels very fitting for that moment and for Deucalion to be the one saying it.

Third example is from the show *Boardwalk Empire* while I highly recommend it to anyone who has not seen it, and this line is delivered early on in the show by one of the

characters who plays a larger role in the story, James “Jimmy” Darmody, played by actor Michael Pitt. “I’m what time and circumstance have made me.”

Now I feel like most people might be able to interpret this one in a way that makes it memorable to them, and for me I like it because of how simple yet meaningful it is, especially given which character says it. The character Jimmy is a gangster, but before that he was a soldier in the first World War and fought in the trenches, so he has been through a lot in his short life leading up to when he drops this line. This quote is something that, to some degree, I believe is absolutely true, there are things that are out of our control that play a very big part in shaping the sort of person we are. Circumstances we are not able to predict, change, or avoid that will have a lasting impact on who we are, and as I said, there is nothing we can do about it. The only thing we are able to do, is work to accept it and how we have been changed because of it, instead of letting it hold us back.

For the line itself though I feel like it might not have been as memorable to me or as powerful if another character in the show had been the one to say it. With Jimmy being a soldier and having fought in the trenches in the first World War, anyone who has seen the show or knows a bit about history will know that Jimmy has seen and done some horrible things. Jimmy really is, to some degree, what time and circumstance has made him as a result of fighting in the trenches, and that plays a part in the work he does after getting back home. At some point before really getting into the criminal life, Jimmy is having a conversation with the man that is like a father to him, and Jimmy says something along the lines of how he is nothing but a murderer, and that he is going to hell. As a result of all Jimmy did and saw in the war, he has no big moral issue with becoming a criminal and continuing on being a killer, as he already sees himself as nothing but a murderer who is damned to hell. In Jimmy’s mind, it seems like he believes there is nothing that can change what he has become and what his fate will be now, and there is no point in wishing otherwise, as he is what he is.

The fourth example is from a German show called *Pagan Peak*, and the character is Stefan Polt played by the amazing and often terrifying or unsettling August Diehl, and this is one of the longer quotes I’m adding here. Now *Pagan Peak* is a German show like I said, but it is in German so the English translation is what is said in the subtitles of the show, and I’m assuming the quote in English is very close to what it is in German since I’m using the subtitles from the show. Now I personally feel like the emotion is a little different depending on the language it is said in, and I’ll get into that more after the quote when I explain why it stuck in my head. Now for the quote.

Because they got used to lying. Because we’ve all got used to lying. And it makes us sick and stupid...and evil. The children were evil. We all need to be categorized, but not by

God, only by man himself. The church tells us what's right and wrong, good and evil, but they're just templates we've filled in for thousands of years. And if we ever find out that black isn't black and red isn't red, then it hurts, then it hurts!

A big part of why this one has stuck in my head for as long as it has, is the way this little speech is delivered by actor August Diehl, and with it being in German it feels more memorable to me and I can't fully explain why. I know that for me, there are times when the German language sounds prettier than English, there is a decent amount of rhyming that happens in the German language which contributes to the rhythm and can influence the actor's delivery.

This is from a darker police show and the character Stefan Polt is a suspect in some recent murders, and he says this little speech while being interrogated by the two police officers who are the main characters of the show. In this quote as well as in a few other bits of his dialogue, there is a focus on good and evil, as well as fate and fitting in, expectations and society, and lying. This short speech he gave made me think about a lot of things, as did most of his other lines, and that is a big part of what makes dialogue good in my opinion. It needs to get you thinking or connect with you in some way that goes beyond the show, the best characters and dialogue are the ones that can make you forget what you're watching is just a show or a film. Characters that feel like someone you could run into on the street, a speech that someone might actually say depending on the person and the context.

The other thing that made this bit of dialogue so memorable to me is the fantastic delivery of the actor, the way his body language and facial expressions change as he talks and gets more agitated towards the end. How the speed of his delivery picks up, and with how fast he is speaking at the end with his tone of voice, it feels like he is almost spitting out the words, then for the final part of the dialogue his volume has also increased. And all of that together just works so well and has made it one of the most memorable longer bits of dialogue for me, one that I am still able to actually say from memory. Which isn't normal for me, normally the dialogue I like is remembered by being written in a notebook, and I have to read the words again for it to come back unless something else triggers the memory of the dialogue.

The fifth and final example is from a film I watched rather recently called *Transfusion*, and there were two lines said by the same character that really stuck with me for different reasons. The character is simply known as Johnny, played by Australian actor Matt Nable, and the main bit of background to know before reading the quotes are that Johnny and the main character are both former military men who saw combat and served together. Later on in life they turn to crime in order to get by, but to different degrees with Johnny being the more criminal and less moral of the two.

Now for the quotes, here is the first one. "It's what we're good at, Corporal. And I haven't got enough room in my brain to learn other things."

Out of the two I picked from this film, this is the one that hit me the hardest because honestly, to some degree I really relate to this one in my personal life and it might be the bit of dialogue that struck me the most out of all the ones on my list here. When you find something you are good at, especially when it relates to a type of work, I believe that a lot of time it is what becomes your focus, a deciding factor in what you decide on. I'm a fairly organized and detail oriented person, there are certain things I am skilled at, and to a degree I can learn how to do almost any task given the time and a demonstration. So the jobs I look for are ones that are more focused on that. I have read different accounts of people having trouble finding work after getting out of the military because a good portion of the skills they learn, the things they become really good at, are not things that are normally useful in a non military setting. And their time in the military has changed them in a way that those who are not military can't fully understand, and unfortunately there are those out there who are not willing to try and take the time to understand those they don't understand.

Then for the second part of the quote, I know for me there are times when I feel like my brain is at capacity, like there is so much taking up space and brain power, that there is no room for anything else. All of the information and skills I have stuffed inside my head are there forever, and while I may not consciously remember something, it is still there and can be brought back to the surface with the right trigger. A friend of mine once compared it to being like a sleeper agent, but for the skills, ability and knowledge that you have. I know there are times I'll be in a situation and some ability or bit of knowledge will just come back to me now that I am in that situation once more and it is relevant once more. There is too much in my brain to be there all the time, so some of it is off in storage and only accessed when certain conditions are met, but I don't access it consciously. So that quote really stuck with me.

And the second quote is the following, and it is the slightly longer of the two.

Well what do you want me to say? Because it's dirty money? 'Cause you're drug dealers? I don't give a fuck about any of that. See I don't have a moral compass left. Like I said...I did it, because I could. Because I am very capable. Because it was fun. (Chuckles) And 'cause you're both fucking useless.

Now this quote didn't stand out to me because I could relate to it or something like that, one of the main reasons this one stuck with me was a combination of the delivery by the actor and how fitting it felt for the character, how much I felt it told me about the character as a person. And since I felt like it told me more about the character as a person, it made the character feel more

real to me, which in turn made the movie feel like a bit more than something I knew was made up, even if some parts might be based a little on real life.

Johnny is a character who served in the military and killed people for his country, he lost men that were under his command, and at some point he ended up getting wounded which resulted in blindness in his left eye as well as burn scars on the left side of his face and on his upper left arm. With all he has seen and done during his time in the military and with all he has done since leaving the military, it feels very clear that Johnny is not necessarily a good guy even if he does seem to care about the main character and want to help him. Now he is being helped in return, but one thing Johnny does well is make the main character feel at ease, makes him feel like all of the skills he earned in the military are not useless, like he is someone that deserves to be respected, something that is important to the main character. And for Johnny, the criminal activity that he does is not something he is embarrassed or unnerved by, as he says in his little speech, he doesn't have a moral compass left. He robs the drug dealers that he works for, simply because he has the skills to do so, and because it was fun. So he is not a good man, but he felt more real to me than most characters in a lot of the movies I have seen, including the really big budget ones with a lot of famous actors, writers, directors and so on.

To close out this little essay, dialogue is one of the parts of a movie or TV show that stands out to me the most and will often stick in my head for some time after watching it. For me there are times when I watch a movie or show and think that it isn't really the best, not well done or maybe has some areas that felt rushed or not well put together, but that doesn't mean there won't be any good dialogue in there. There are times when the plot may be a bit hard to follow or too easy to follow, too silly or something like that, but the dialogue and interactions between the characters just feels right, feels real, and that is something that matters to me a little more than the plot does. Now that could very well just be me, but I'm pretty sure everyone has at least one quote from a movie or show that stuck with them long after watching because it was something they could relate to, found to be touching, or maybe just funny. Whatever the reason, it stuck with you and that matters.

The dialogue that stays with me won't always strike other people the same way since to a degree, everyone interprets things differently so one quote that means a lot to me might not mean anything to someone else. That is just how it is. I recommend that whoever reads this back through one or two of their favorite shows and try to pay a little more attention to the dialogue for part of it to see if there are any lines that stand out to you more than others then try to figure out why that is. I think it can be a lot of fun, so enjoy it.