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Abstract

In this essay I review the research-informed short film Rufus Stone. Rufus Stone is the result of a 3-year funded research project led by Kip Jones. The film tells the story of a young man in rural England who, while developing an attraction to another young man, is viciously outed by small-minded village people. He flees to London and returns home 50 years later and is forced confront the people from his past and larger issues of identity and time. This essay considers Rufus Stone as both a film and as a work of arts-based research. I suggest Rufus Stone is not only a terrific film but it also represents the best of arts-based research and public scholarship more broadly.

Keywords

Film, Arts-Based Research, Sexual Identity, Public Scholarship

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A Review of *Rufus Stone*: The Promise of Arts-Based Research

Patricia Leavy

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*In this essay I review the research-informed short film *Rufus Stone*. *Rufus Stone* is the result of a 3-year funded research project led by Kip Jones. The film tells the story of a young man in rural England who, while developing an attraction to another young man, is viciously outed by small-minded village people. He flees to London and returns home 50 years later and is forced to confront the people from his past and larger issues of identity and time. This essay considers *Rufus Stone* as both a film and as a work of arts-based research. I suggest *Rufus Stone* is not only a terrific film but it also represents the best of arts-based research and public scholarship more broadly. Keywords: Film, Arts-Based Research, Sexual Identity, Public Scholarship*

When I sat down to watch the half an hour film *Rufus Stone*, I really didn't know what to expect. I have long enjoyed watching short films and every year I look forward to going to a local independent theater to watch the Oscar nominated shorts and the Sundance shorts. I am also a staunch advocate of arts-based research and I knew that differing from the short films I typically see, *Rufus Stone* is grounded in years of social research. So I viewed *Rufus Stone* with great curiosity but no particular expectations. As it turns out I was in for a real treat. *Rufus Stone* is both an incredible short film and it embodies all that is best about arts-based research.

Rufus Stone was created, written and executive produced by Dr. Kip Jones (Reader at the Media School and HSC at Bournemouth University in the UK). The film tells the story of a young gay man from a rural area in the United Kingdom. Rufus and his love interest, Flip, are outed by a young woman in the village, Abigail, who had made unreciprocated advances at Rufus. The outing scene, which takes place at a lake where the two young men are discovering their feelings for each other, only to be taunted by Abigail and others, is quite powerful. Everyone's reaction to the blossoming attraction is harsh and swift. As a result Rufus flees the town and moves to London. This is all before the opening credits! The bulk of the film then takes place fifty years later when Rufus returns to his village in order to sell his deceased parents' home. He is forced to confront the village people, his lost love, and his own bitter memories. I don't want to give away any further plot points but there are moments of intense beauty, humor and deep tragedy. The film is not only a glaring look at how homophobia and intolerance can shape people's experiences, but it is also a film very much about looking at who we are, how we became who we are, and how we allow our lives to unfold. In this respect, it is a film about identity, time and the importance of introspection.

While the film is at once both a film and a piece of arts-based research, for the purpose of this review I think it is important to, at least initially, separate my discussion of these two dimensions of *Rufus Stone*.

As a film to be viewed for the pleasure of viewing a film, I am absolutely blown over by how good *Rufus Stone* is. The film was directed and scripted by Josh Appignanesi (*The Infidel; Ex Memoria*) and produced by Parkville Pictures, London. The acting is superb, with all primary characters played by two professional actors, representing two ages. The casting could not have been better. The actors are able to convey a wide range of emotions, often just with facial expressions. The filmmaker also uses sound extremely well. The score enhances the tumultuous and tender emotional landscape and additional elements like the tick-tock of a clock, are employed wisely. I was particularly impressed with the cinematography. The landscape shots are stunning and I felt that the landscape—the place—served as another character in the film (I believe intentionally by the filmmaker but either way, it added a very clever and beautiful dimension to the story). In this regard mist was used to represent both fantasy scenes as well to convey a foreboding (which was ever-present). *Rufus Stone* has already taken two awards at the prestigious Rhode Island International Film Festival and has received international media coverage. This film was as good as most Oscar-nominated shorts, and vastly superior to many. In my opinion, it was just about as good as a short film gets. (More information and lists of cast and crew are available on the film's weblog at: <http://microsites.bournemouth.ac.uk/rufus-stone/>.)

This is all true for the film simply as a film; however, *Rufus Stone* is so much more. As a proponent of arts-based research I am thrilled to see an arts-based work of such high quality which so clearly illustrates the potential of ABR and elevates the growing field. *Rufus Stone* is based on a three-year research project titled “Gay and Pleasant Land? An Interdisciplinary Exploration of the Connectivity of Older People in Rural Civic Society” which was funded by *Research Councils UK*. As Jones notes, the film is an innovative way to disseminate the research findings. *Rufus Stone* represents the best of public scholarship. Anyone of any age and background can sit and watch this film, understand it, learn from it and emotionally connect to it. If research is intended to teach, illuminate, shed light on topics of import and challenge our assumptions, *Rufus Stone* is an exemplary piece of research.

The qualitative research community would do well to watch this engaging film. I hope the film will be made available for use in college courses that deal with discrimination, sexual identity or arts-based research. I can only imagine the wonderful class conversations viewing this film would provoke. I also hope the film is distributed to the public more broadly so that the film can be viewed and enjoyed by many, because even watched as a “film” it can't help but to *educate*. Herein is the beauty of arts-based research, so extraordinarily captured in *Rufus Stone*.

Movie's Website

<http://www.rufusstonemovie.com/>

Author Note

Patricia Leavy, Ph.D. is an independent author, researcher and commentator. Among her 11 books she is the author of *Method Meets Art: Arts-Based Research*

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