

Herald Scotland

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Angry Boys, BBC Three

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I'm laughing at a full stop.

I'm laughing at it because it's the funniest full stop I've ever seen. It may look like other full stops, but because of where it is, it's funny. It is a funny full stop. Period.

The reason this particular full stop is funny is because it has been placed with great precision by the comedian Chris Lilley into the middle of the name S.Mouse, one of the characters in his new mockumentary series, Angry Boys (Tuesday, BBC Three, 10.40pm). S.Mouse has always wanted to be a rapper but the problem is that his real name is Shwayne, which isn't cool. So he starts calling himself S.Mouse instead. "My name is revolutionary," he says, "because it's got punctuation in the middle of it." And there you have it: Lilley showing, with a full stop, how ridiculous rap culture can be, and how funny.

This isn't the first time Lilley has done this with punctuation either. In his last series, Summer Heights High, there was a horrible schoolgirl who hated poor people and minorities and it was her name, Ja'mie – and in particular that apostrophe – that told us everything we needed to know about her and her shallow world. It was a fantastically grotesque creation, and one that established Lilley as a talented impersonator, social commentator and comedian who didn't feel chained to the nuisance of a punch-line.

Angry Boys tries to pull off the same trick, and generally does, particularly with S.Mouse. At one point, we get to see his video, Slap My Elbow. "Slap my el," he sings, "slap my bow, slap my elbow." S.Mouse also takes us to the ghetto where he grew up. Except he actually grew up in a middle-class family and loved nothing more than musicals, particularly Wicked.

And that's what is at the heart of Lilley's comedy. The more we discover about the real Shwayne, the more we realise how good Lilley is at showing us someone who's horrible and nasty and then showing us the reasons, the sensitivity behind the bluster. With Angry Boys, he pulls off the same squirmy, funny trick: these boys may be unpleasant, he's saying, but underneath, there's something that's not quite so nasty and not quite so funny.

The documentary, Poor Kids (BBC One, Tuesday, 10.35pm), touched on a lot of similar territory with its story of children living in poverty in Britain. One of them was Paige, who's 10 and lives in the Gorbals. She took us around her flat and showed us the creeping damp on the walls, the piece of the ceiling that fell in on Christmas Day and pointed out, with a tiny finger painted with pink nail varnish, the little black circles of mould on her blinds.

Eventually, Paige and her family were found a new house in Drumchapel and Paige's friend Courtney imagined what Paige's new life might be like: "She'll be able to have dogs, cats. She could even have an elephant in the back garden."

It was disturbing to hear a child talk like this, but it was the right approach for this documentary. If it had been adults telling the story, they might have been tempted to pile on the sentiment or the mawkishness. But the children didn't. They simply talked and made the most important points without realising they were doing it.

"This is not a good life for kids," said Paige, looking around her flat, and you suddenly realised what that meant: she's almost forgotten she is a kid herself.