

**"THE WIDENING GYRE"**

by

**NANCY RUTHVEN**

**A new play in two Acts**

c 1986 Nancy Ruthven

Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.

W B Yeats

## THE WIDENING GYRE

### CHARACTERS

MARY GORDON.....  
SEAMUS GORDON..... MARY'S ELDER SON  
NEIL GORDON..... HER YOUNGER SON

THE SET FOR THIS PLAY SHOULD BE MULTI-PURPOSE. DOWN STAGE RIGHT IS A DESK. THIS IS A GOOD PIECE OF FURNITURE, COULD BE A GEORGIAN SOFA TABLE: THERE ARE FLOWERS ON IT, WRITING THINGS AND A TELEPHONE. IT IS VERY UNTIDY. THERE IS A CHAIR SET BEHIND THE TABLE AND IT IS OBVIOUSLY IN FRONT OF A WINDOW AS THE LIGHTING EFFECTS GIVE US THE SQUARE PANES OF A LARGE GEORGIAN WINDOW SLANTING ACROSS. ON SUNLIT OCCASIONS THERE SHOULD BE A DAPPLING OF BRANCHES ALSO IN THE LIGHT.

FURTHER UP STAGE LEFT IS A CLUSTER OF FURNITURE WHICH DEFINES THE DRAWING-ROOM AREA OF MARY GORDON'S HOME. A FIRE-PLACE WITH A SIMPLE ELEGANT MANTLE, SOFA, ARMCHAIR, PROBABLY A STANDARD LAMP, A TV SET AND AN OCCASIONAL TABLE. OVER THE MANTLEPIECE HANGS THE PORTRAIT OF A DARK-HAIRED MAN IN A BLACK WATCH KILT. IT IS A RELAXED PORTRAIT. THE MAN, WHO IS MARY GORDON'S LATE HUSBAND, HAS HIS HAND ON THE HEAD OF A BLACK LABRADOR DOG.

UP STAGE IN A DIFFERENT LEVEL IS A BEDROOM AREA. IN ACT I THERE ARE TWO BEDS IN IT, AND THE BRIC-A-BRAC OF A BOY'S ROOM.

ALSO SOMEWHERE ON THIS SET MUST BE ANOTHER SMALL AREA THAT CAN BE PICKED OUT BY LIGHTS, WHICH HAS A PAY-PHONE AND CHAIR FROM WHICH NEIL WRITES LETTERS.

THE TIME OF THE PLAY IS THE PRESENT.

## THE WIDENING GYRE

THE PLAY OPENS UP WITH THE LIGHTS COMING UP ON MARY GORDON SITTING AT HER DESK DOWN STAGE RIGHT. MARY IS BETWEEN 48 AND 52 YEARS OF AGE. SHE IS A GOOD-LOOKING WOMAN WITH FINE BONE STRUCTURES AND UNTIDY BROWN HAIR. HER CLOTHES ARE CASUAL BUT GOOD. SHE IS GAZING OUT OF THE WINDOW, PEN IN HAND, IT IS RAINING OUTSIDE.

MARY

Summer rain ... will it never stop, white and ceaseless against the dark trees ... it's as bad as Castlekilgo when I was a child, that grey drift over the Wicklow hills and the trout going plop among the raindrops on the Liffey. They say that the rainfall's less here than in Ireland but I don't believe it ... at least the weeds come out more easily if that's any comfort. "My darling Neil ... I think of you all the time ..." No I can't say that ... makes him feel so claustrophobic ... never out of Mummy's thoughts ... yet it's true, every time he does a term over there I live with this mental sub-strata of fear. "Darling Neil ..." Why do I keep writing to my sons? I must be a relic of a bygone age when people wrote letters to each other ... I could just as easily 'phone, but I dread that beastly Mess Sergeant (SCOTS ACCENT) "You want to speak to Captain Gordon? Well, madam, I'll just ascertain if he's available. Captain Gordon, it's your mother on the line from England." So I write. Loneliness really, I suppose ... the worst of being alone is having no one to talk to. The best thing about marriage was just being together ...

MARY

"And walk among long and dappled grass  
And pluck till time and tides are done  
The silver apples of the moon,  
The golden apples of the sun."

(THE LIGHTS HAVE BEGUN TO SPOT THE PORTRAIT OF JAMES GORDON)

Not that he was a great plucker of silver apples, but you could pull ideas about, climb the ladders of the mind, and he had such good judgement ... mind you he didn't always listen to me. We'd be in bed. I'd be rabbiting on ... all my daily dramas, all my poetic thoughts ... suddenly I'd think "he's very quiet" ... and he'd be asleep, darn him! I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. God I miss him still. Seven years and it still hurts, such a waste of a good man. So, (SHE BECOMES VERY PRACTICAL) ... I write endless screeds to the boys ... (THE LIGHT ON THE PORTRAIT AND SHE BEGINS TO WRITE AGAIN). Has Seamus told you darling, he's going to be in Belfast again in what he insists on calling the Scottish play? The theatre have the most extraordinary superstitions, apparently it's very unlucky to call it 'Macbeth'. He's always loved that play ... ever since he was a boy ... (AS MARY WRITES THE LIGHT COMES UP ON THE BEDROOM PART OF THE SET BEHIND HER. SEAMUS AND NEIL ARE TOSLE-HEADED, PYJAMA-CLAD BOYS IN THEIR EARLY TEENS. SEAMUS IS STANDING ON HIS BED WAVING HIS ARMS OVER AN IMAGINARY WITCHES BREW; NEIL SITS HUGGING HIS KNEES ON HIS BED).

SEAMUS                   Round about the caldron go  
                          In the poisoned entrails throw  
                          Toad, that under cold stone  
                          Days and nights had thirty-one,  
                          Swelter's venom sleeping got.  
                          Boil thou first i'the charmed pot.  
                          Double, double, toil and trouble  
                          Fire burn ... (TO NEIL) ... go on,  
                          your're supposed to join in ...

NEIL                      Fire burn and cauldron bubble

SEAMUS                   By the pricking of my thumbs  
                          Something wicked this way comes.  
                          Open locks  
                          Whoever knocks ... now I'm Macbeth (HE  
                          TRIES TO DEEPEN HIS VOICE AND PRODUCE A SCOTS  
                          ACCENT) How now you secret black and midnight  
                          hags!  
                          What is't you do? (TO NEIL) Go on - your're  
                          the hags now ...

NEIL                      It's stupid ...

SEAMUS                   Oh come on ... alright you can be Macbeth if  
                          you like ... I'll do the rest.

NEIL                      Load of garbage ...

SEAMUS                   I'll be Lady Macbeth, I'd be a brilliant Lady  
                          Macbeth. "Out, out damned spot"...

NEIL                      She's a woman...!

SEAMUS I could play a woman's part ... In Shakespeare's time all the women parts were played by boys ... young chaps before their voices had broken ...

NEIL Well your voice has broken.

SEAMUS You are a flat-footed Philistine ...

NEIL It's just embarrassing ... leaping about pretending to be masses of different people at the same time.

SEAMUS You bore me Neil, you utterly disgust me, you have no imagination ... one day I shall be the most famous actor at the RSC ... people queuing in the streets to get tickets for my 'Hamlet' or 'Lear' ...

NEIL You'll be the one queuing in the streets - for the dole.

SEAMUS And you can bring Mum to see me, I'll get you 'comps', that's what they call free tickets ... and everyone will whisper, "That's his Mother" (NEIL MAKES VERY RUDE NOISES) and after the show you can come round to the stage door and ...

(NEIL FLINGS A PILLOW AT HIM AND TRIES TO THROTTLE HIM AND THEY END UP IN AN ADOLESCENT TUSSLE ROLLING OVER BEDS AND ONTO THE FLOOR: NEIL ENDS UP ON TOP OF SEAMUS WHO SHOUTS "Pax. Pax". THE LIGHT FADES AND COMES BACK ON MARY WHO IS STILL WRITING)

MARY

I think he's playing Malcolm, I get rather muddled with all the Scottish Lords in Macbeth, but isn't that Duncan's son? The one who has that rather complicated crisis of conscience and inherits it all in the end? (SHE IS GETTING INTO TROUBLE WITH HER BIRO PEN ... SHAKES IT ... ANOTHER SCRIBBLE TO TRY AND MAKE IT WORK) ... blast ... beastly things ... (RUMMAGES ROUND IN A DRAWER ... FINDS ANOTHER, TRIES IT, IT'S DRY TOO) Useless rubbish ... why do I never have a pen that works ... those green Japanese things are rather good ... make even my writing look respectable but ... I know I had one the other day (SHE IS TRYING HER HANDBAG NOW. IT IS AN APPALLING JUMBLE OF STUFF BUT NO PEN) ... I must have one pen in this house that works (RUMMAGING IN ANOTHER DRAWER, PAPERS AND THINGS GET PULLED OUT) Oh for the pen and ink days of my youth ... ah! (SHE HAS FOUND ONE THAT WORKS) ... pity it is red ... but I don't suppose that Neil will mind (SHE IS SHOVING EVERYTHING BACK INTO DRAWERS) Go on in! Paper is such unco-operative stuff ... Actually, I'm never sure they read my letters "Yet another epistle from ye old Mother" ... Where was I? Oh yes Seamus' new job, I'm glad he's over on your side, he loves playing in Ireland, even if it's not the Abbey ... I wish he'd got in that time tough, even if he was very young ...

(LIGHT COMES UP ON SEAMUS, YOUNG, DISCONSOLATE AND POLO-NECKED SWEATERED. HE IS STANDING BY THE FIRE KICKING THE GRATE)



SEAMUS                    They were very polite.            (BECOMES IRISH  
DIRECTOR, CLIPBOARD IN HAND)      Thank  
you..er..Seamus.      Thank you for coming all  
this way to audition for us, but we don't  
think we can use you in the Company at the  
present ... I'm sorry ... will you be catching  
the ferry straight back?      Oh, you've got  
relatives in Kildare?      Isn't that fine now ...  
Goodbye".

MARY                    Darling ... I'm sorry too ...

SEAMUS                    It was because I'm not bona Irish.

MARY                    You don't know that.      You may not have been  
right for the parts they had in mind.

SEAMUS                    They couldn't have an actor called Gordon  
could they!      You have to be called O'Fatharta  
or MacReamoinn or O'Haodha ... or ...

MARY                    Your're talking rubbish.

SEAMUS                    I could have done all that accent stuff.      I've  
been brought up on it, whenever you want to  
wheedle anything you go all Dublin.

MARY                    You'd have to work at it ... your Irish accent  
is very odd at the moment, and there's nothing  
people in Ireland dislike more than phoney  
stage Irish full of Begorras and Top of the  
mornins ...

SEAMUS                    Oh Mum .. I don't ...

MARY                   ... and all the parts of the Country are different ... Cork's different from Kerry, Dublin's different from Donegal ... and I really don't think you can blame them for wanting to recruit local talent, it is the Country's National Theatre.

SEAMUS                I'm much more Irish than British ...

MARY                   You're just out of Drama School. Honestly, Seamus, did you really expect to get taken on by the first company you auditioned for?

SEAMUS                I wanted to get into the Abbey.

MARY                   Why so much the Abbey? Many of the best Irish actors end up coming over here, there's more scope.

SEAMUS                God! Mum, you shouldn't have to ask me that! I've been brought up on the Abbey ... you've never stopped talking about it, how it was part of your youth. How you were taken there every time on your way to and from school ...

MARY                   Oh, the lingering pretensions of the Ascendancy that had to send their offspring to school in England ...

SEAMUS                And how it was founded by Yeats and Lady Gregory, and how it was the heart of the Irish renaissance ...

MARY

(OFF INTO HER OWN DREAMS NOW)

"Deirdre" that was the first play I saw there - "Bend and kiss me now, for it may be the last before our death. And when that's over we'll be different. Imperishable things, a cloud or fire". Mind you I didn't have a clue what it was all about, still don't. Yeat's plays are double dutch to me, but oh the poetry ... the poetry ...

SEAMUS

Did you know him Mum, did you ever meet him?

MARY

Yeats? No, I was about eight I think when he died. When I was a girl I used to day-dream about meeting him, I was madly in love with him ... And I was always scripting these beautiful encounters in my mind. Some romantic spot on the Kerry Coast, me standing with the wind in my hair ... Arthur Rackham, I had one of Arthur Rackham's pictures in my mind ... slender Undines or Rhine maidens with shining limbs and shining hair ... not a bit like me really of course! ... and he would see me ... I would turn and we'd gaze into each other's eyes and he'd forget all about that cruel Maud Gonne ... and together we would do great things for Ireland ... alas for the illusions of one's youth!

SEAMUS

What happened to all the brave things you were going to do for Ireland?

MARY

Seamus, don't get too involved in this Ireland thing. It's much simpler to be British even if they are a perfidious lot.

SEAMUS

Don't you ever wonder which you are?

MARY

(VERY PRACTICAL) All this modern obsession with what we are ... who we are (GOING IRISH) I'm your old Irish Mum who came over here and married your Scottish Dad and loved him till his dying day, God rest his soul.

SEAMUS

And you never feel divided in your loyalties?

MARY

No. (BECOMING ENGLISH AGAIN) What is there to be divided about? Ireland's free now ... the Anglo-Irish are part of the Nation. The old divisions are gone ... or almost gone.

(SEAMUS PICKS UP HIS JACKET OFF A CHAIR AND GOES TO THE DOOR)

SEAMUS

What about the North?

MARY

Ah, the North! (HE LEAVES HER, SHE GOES OVER AND LOOKS OUT OF THE WINDOW) I don't think about the North ... I do hope he's not going to get netted into that web of sorrows ... Generation after generation, it goes on. Oh my dear boy ... don't get too close to it.

(THE LIGHTS HAVE ISOLATED MARY IN HER POSITION BY THE WINDOW. NOW, BEHIND HER, THE LIGHTS PICK UP SEAMUS, ALONE IN A GLOWING SPOT)

SEAMUS

"Know that I would accounted be  
true brother of a company  
That sang, to sweeten Ireland's wrong,  
Ballad and story, rann and song;  
Nor be I any less of them.  
Because the red-rose-bordered hem  
Of her, whose history began  
Before God made the angelic clan,  
Trails all about the written page.  
When time began to rant and rage  
The measure of her flying feet  
Made Ireland's heart begin to beat ...."

MARY

"I cast my heart into my rhymes,  
That you in the dim coming times  
May know how my heart went with them  
After the red-rose-bordered hem."

(THE SPOT FADES FROM SEAMUS AND COMES UP ON  
THE BEDROOM AREA WHERE NEIL IS PACKING A  
SUITCASE WHICH IS ON HIS BED ... HE SHOUTS ..)

NEIL

Mum ... my shirts. Are they dry yet?

MARY

What ...? Shirts ... yes, of course ... Oh  
Lord! (SHE BOLTS OFF STAGE ... CALLS FROM  
OFF) Oh merciful hour ... I forgot to take  
them out ... the whole load ... 'tis an idiot  
that I am ... Imbecile ... a madawhn of an old  
woman (RETURNS WITH ARMFUL OF DAMP SHIRTS)  
brains more senile with every day that goes by  
(SHE IS GETTING MORE STAGE IRISH EVERY MOMENT)  
What will I do to get me soldier boy his  
shirts ... (NEIL, WHO HATES ALL THIS BLARNEY,

MARY  
(contd) MUTTERS "Hell's teeth".) You are going to have your old Ma certified, and that's the truth of it, she's not quite the full bob ... my hair dryer now ... could I be blow-dryin' 'dem do you think?

NEIL WITH RESIGNATION, HE HAS BEEN THROUGH THIS KIND OF DRAMA BEFORE) Oh never mind Mum....

MARY Me darlin' boy ... 'tis sorry I am ... 'tis going to be in uniform most of the time for the next six months!

MARY I'll send them on to you.

NEIL Put them in a plastic bag ... I'll take them as they are.

MARY (ALL THE BLARNEY GONE) Darling I'm sorry. I am a very scatty Mum and you're so good to me (SHE PUTS DOWN THE SHIRTS AND LOOKS AT HIM) Neil, I'm glad you're going into the Regiment ... your Father would have been proud of you. (SHE KISSES HIM) You never had any doubts did you? Thank God for a few people in this world who don't doubt everything ... I've made you some sandwiches and I'll get the shirts off to you tomorrow, egg and tomato, some cold chicken and some carrot sticks ...

NEIL Thanks Mum, you're a lousy laundress but your sandwiches are Cordon Bleu.

(HE IS NOW MOVING CASES AND GEAR OUT OF THE DOOR)

MARY                   You've got everything? Tennis racquet?  
Fishing tackle? When are you going to work at  
Sandhurst? I've been imagining that you'd be  
spending all your time swinging yourself over  
gorges on ropes or computerising anti-missile  
missiles ... are you going to be warm enough  
... have you got enough jerseys? ... (HE HAS  
NOW GOT ALL HIS GEAR OUT AND COMES BACK TO SAY  
GOODBYE) Goodbye my darling (HUGS HIM) God  
bless ...

NEIL                   Mum, you'll be alright won't you?

MARY                   Yes, of course I'll be alright ...

NEIL                   Well ... I just wondered ...

MARY                   Wondered what ....

NEIL                   Well ... whether you'd be alright

MARY                   Course I will ... what do you mean?

NEIL                   Well ... the house will seem very empty ...  
both of us gone.

MARY                   I've got the village ... and the garden ...  
and the telephone ...

NEIL                   Well ...

MARY                   Well what?

NEIL                   (FINDING THIS CONVERSATION VERY DIFFICULT)  
Well ... I wondered if you wouldn't like to  
have someone come and live with you ...?

MARY                   The best years of my life were spent here ...  
when your Father ... (SHE IS NOW ON DANGEROUS  
GROUND EMOTIONALLY SO SHE CHANGES TACK) ...  
darling you must go, have you got everything  
... a plastic bag for those damp shirts ...  
wait I'll get you one ... (SHE RUSHES OFF,  
NEIL STANDS UNDECIDED ... SHE COMES BACK WITH  
A BAG ...) Here we are ... hang them out when  
you get there ... 'bye again darling ...

NEIL                   'Bye Mum ... look after yourself ...

MARY                   Yes ... yes ...

NEIL                   I'll ring you at the weekend ...

(HE HUGS HER AND LEAVES; WE HEAR A CAR DRIVE  
OFF. MARY COMES BACK INTO THE ROOM SLOWLY)

MARY                   ... so unexpected ... you gear yourself to  
cope ... not to be lonely, to think for their  
needs ... and then suddenly a word of sympathy  
and you could howl to the moon ...  
(CONTROLLING HER TEARS) ... stop it, you  
stupid woman. Why did I lie? Of course I'm  
lonely ... (TO PORTRAIT) ... leukemia at forty  
... such a sad way for a soldier to die ...  
for days it's alright, you don't think of it,  
and then suddenly pain comes at you ... wraps  
itself around your throat and you could cry  
... howl - "God ... why have you done this to  
me ...?" Still the last think I want is some  
woman to come and live with me! Dear Neil ...  
I never know what he's thinking. So seldom  
lets on ..... Why should he? It's only a  
form of possessiveness, I think, wanting to



MARY

(contd)

know what's on one's children's minds ... but Seamus is different. Everything comes pouring out. Neil's more like you James, we talked didn't we? But I seldom knew what you were really thinking. Women are different from men, adore having great long heart to hearts ... go off to lunch with a girl friend and come back feeling ever so much better. Still, I'd love to know what makes my dear Neil tick ... that was such an unselfish thought ... and I barely listened! I wonder if articulate people are more selfish than inarticulate? Why do I lie? I didn't really want him to join the army because inevitably he'll get sent to Ireland.

UNDER HER LAST LINES THE SOUND OF A PIPE BAND HAS COME UP PLAYING "SOLDIERS OF THE QUEEN" ... SOFTLY AT FIRST ... THEN UP UNTIL THE SOUND FILLS THE AUDITORIUM ... THEN DOWN AGAIN. NOW WE HEAR THE SOUND OF A LIVE PIPER CARRYING THE TUNE ... RATHER BADLY. A LIGHT COMES UP ON THE BEDROOM AREA. ONE OF THE BEDS IS OCCUPIED AND AS THE PIPE MUSIC CONTINUES THE BODY UNDER THE EIDERDOWN HEAVES AND CURSES, TRYING TO ESCAPE THE TERRIBLE SQUEAL OF THE PIPES. LIGHT COMES UP ON THE DOWNSTAGE AREA REVEALING NEIL MARCHING UP AND DOWN PRACTISING HIS BAGPIPE PLAYING. SEAMUS SITS UP AND YELLS ...

SEAMUS

Shut up ... (MUSIC CONTINUES) ... for Christ's sake ... It's bloody awful ... pack it in Neil ...

(SEAMUS CRAWLS OUT OF BED, SHOVES HIS FEET INTO SLIPPERS AND BRINGING HIS EIDERDOWN WITH HIM APPEARS IN THE DOWNSTAIRS ROOM)

SEAMUS                    Bloody hell ... can't you practise outside ...?

(NEIL STOPS PLAYING WITH THAT TERRIBLE SQUEALING NOISE THAT HAPPENS TO INEXPERIENCED PIPERS)

NEIL                     Raining ...

SEAMUS                   I was trying to get some sleep ...

NEIL                     It's past twelve ...!

SEAMUS                   I only got in at two ... where's Mum?

NEIL                     Gone to the village.

SEAMUS                   God ... I could do with a cup of coffee, be a good chap and ...

NEIL                     Get it for yourself (SEAMUS GROANS AND SHUFFLES OFF TO THE KITCHEN) (NEIL BEGINS TO PUT HIS PIPES AWAY AND BRINGS OUT THE CHANTER. HE STARTS FINGERING THE TUNE OF "Soldiers of the Queen", AGAIN).

SEAMUS                   (FROM KITCHEN) ... So what's it like to be a "soldier of the Queen, my boy, the Queen my boy, the Queen my boy?" All ready to do or die are we? Ready to give our wild Irish cousins a touch of the rubber bullet are we? Where's the Nescafe?

NEIL                    On the Aga ... can you make me a cup too?

SEAMUS                 Get it for yourself ... (RETURNS WITH HIS COFFEE) When do you go?

NEIL                    (ON HIS WAY TO KITCHEN) The fifteenth ...

SEAMUS                 How long for? Ugh ... can you bring the sugar ...

NEIL                    Five months.

SEAMUS                 Where are they sending you?

NEIL                    Londonderry.

SEAMUS                 Derry (NO REPLY FROM NEIL IN KITCHEN) I suppose you know what you are doing (STILL NO REPLY) God, I think it's criminal.

NEIL                    (FROM KITCHEN) I do know your views on Northern Ireland, Seamus, and by the way have you seen my Arran sweater?

SEAMUS                 You don't know my views on Northern Ireland, Neil, not one tenth of them. (NEIL RETURNS WITH HIS COFFEE AND THE SUGAR) You don't know anything about the North, you've never been there.

NEIL                    Well, I'm going there now aren't I?

SEAMUS                 As part of the British Army of Occupation.

NEIL                    Your words, not mine.

SEAMUS                   It's how the Catholics in Derry will see you.

NEIL                     The British Army went into Northern Ireland at the request of the Catholic population in order to prevent sectarian violence. We are there to back up the Royal Ulster Constabulary and to maintain law and order.

SEAMUS                   Do you have to learn that by heart?

NEIL                     I know your Irish litany by heart, Seamus ... "The historical wrongs of Ireland ... British Imperialism, Oliver Cromwell ..." you are like the worst pub Irishman, you go on and on about history ... its an addiction.....and you have't answered my question ..... have you seen my Arran sweater?

SEAMUS                   We have to go on and on because the British never listen-and they never learn.

NEIL                     Flaming hell ... the Irish never listen ... they never learn ... never forget ... never forgive ... they go on and on about themselves ... they are the most bloody self-centred nation on earth.

SEAMUS                   Listen ... mate ... we ... the Brits, have never known what it is like to be a subjugated people, never known what it is like to be occupied ... that's what makes us so arrogant and insensitive, seven hundred years of it Neil.       Seven hundred years of another country's soldiers tramping your street, your land confiscated from under you, your language

SEAMUS                   suppressed, your religion dis-established ...  
(contd)                   first it was the Normans ...

NEIL                    The Normans ..... for Christ's sake the  
Normans! ... that's what I mean about the  
Irish. We had the Normans here too ...  
occupying the whole country, replacing the  
language ... every damned Saxon landowner  
turfed out, but we're not still sitting on our  
bums beefing about the Normans!

SEAMUS                   The Normans were just the beginning ... then  
it was the Elizabethans ... then Cromwell ...

NEIL                    If the Elizabethans had not gone over there  
they'd have had Philip of Spain annexing the  
country and using it as a military base to  
conquer England. They might have been a  
Spanish colony to this day ... the Inquisition  
... General Franco and all that ... try that  
on your lefty Republican friends ...

SEAMUS                   That is the classic excuse for British  
Imperialism. If it hadn't been us it would  
have been someone worse ...

NEIL                    I'm fed up with all these cliches about  
British Imperialism. Of course, we've done  
some rotten things in the past, but we've done  
some bloody marvellous things too. Give me  
your cup. (HE TAKES THE DIRTY CUPS INTO THE  
KITCHEN).

SEAMUS

You still think of Ireland as an off-shore island of Britain, don't you? Like Lundy or Colonsay ... (NEIL FROM THE KITCHEN ... "What about my Arran sweater") They are a different race, a different culture, a proud and different people. (NEIL, FROM KITCHEN .. Have you nicked it?) Haven't you any imagination, Neil? Can't you see what it must be like ...? Soldiers everywhere, stopping cars, lifting teenagers, breaking down doors .....

NEIL

(COMING BACK IN, POSSIBLY WITH SOME KITCHEN IMPLEMENT OR DISH CLOTH WHICH HE USES TO MAKE HIS POINT) Arran sweater ... Arran sweater .. Arran sweater.....

SEAMUS

So you have no right to criticise if the Irish go on about their history. We have left them nothing else for food for the soul but poetry and history and the glory of the men who died.

NEIL

Well, it's a lousy diet, a maudlin self-deceiving diet ... always blaming someone else for their troubles ... my God the carnage they inflicted on each other during the civil war was quite as bad as anything we did to them.

SEAMUS

That's got nothing to do with it ... Mum says .....

NEIL

Leave Mum out of it ....

SEAMUS

You can't leave Mum out of it, she's part of the picture, whether she likes it or not ....

NEIL                    So it comes to this Seamus.    You support violence .....

SEAMUS                 That's rich, from someone who's making a career of violence.

NEIL                    You agree with these terrorists who wage this coward's war, this vicious circle of murder and revenge and intimidation of innocent people.

SEAMUS                 There comes a moment for a wronged people when violence is the only road left to them. Anyway, face the fact Neil, that political freedom has never been won without bloodshed. It's only when violence reaches an unacceptable level that the British Government ever stirs its stumps and does anything.

NEIL                    I can't argue with you Seamus. I just think it's not as simple as you paint it. A lot of men have tried for years to solve this problem. I'm a soldier, I shall go over there and try and do my duty.

SEAMUS                 That's what the Nazi troops said when they marched into Czechoslovakia ...

NEIL                    (WITH A DEADLY QUIETNESS) Don't you ever say that to me again.

                          (SOUND OF A CAR DRIVING UP ...DOORS OPENING, ETC)

MARY'S  
VOICE

Yoo hoo ... I could do with another pair of hands (NEIL GOES OUT) Could you take those to the kitchen darling? ... I've been terribly extravagant ... you're so seldom both home ... couldn't resist celebrating ... I've bought a saddle of beef ... your Father was frightfully choosy about his beef (SHE COMES IN WITH SHOPPING) Your dry-cleaning Seamus ... I bumped into the Vicar ... I could tell he'd been watching your telly series ... last Wednesday's episode ... he couldn't make up his mind whether to congratulate me for having a son who was making a name for himself as an actor or to condone with me on the state of your morals. His nose went pink and his eyebrows went up and down. (TO SEAMUS) Gosh, darling, you look revolting. Haven't you shaved yet?

SEAMUS

Wednesday's episode ....

MARY

Yes, the one with you rolling about in the buff with that blonde female ... (TO NEIL WHO HAS RETURNED) Did you put the frozen stuff in the deep freeze? (NEIL NODS) So I did my Irish thing "Yifrah Father, 'tis a wicked world, 'tis, 'tis, and when I think of me darlin' son exposin' himself in his pelt with all the nation's heathen gazin' their fill ... well I don't know what the world is comin' to. Indeed I don't." Anyway he laughed, so I don't think he's going to denounce you from the pulpit tomorrow ....

SEAMUS

Too bad, be rather fun if he did ...



MARY                   Actually, if you really want to know ... (WITH  
SUDDEN TOUGHNESS) I thought that episode was  
perfectly horrible.   (SHE DEPARTS INTO THE  
KITCHEN AGAIN)

NEIL                    Alright mate ... don't try and change the  
subject HAVE YOU GOT MY ARRAN SWEATER?

SEAMUS                 How should I know where your fuckin sweater  
is?

NEIL                    Did you borrow it?

SEAMUS                 You're so bloody mean, I don't bleat if you  
borrow my clothes.

NEIL                    I wouldn't be seen dead in your clothes, where  
is it?

SEAMUS                 I don't know, in London I think ...

NEIL                    Oh shit, Seamus ... that sweater cost me fifty  
something quid .....

MARY                    (FROM THE KITCHEN) Must you two use such  
revolting language?

NEIL                    Sorry .....

SEAMUS                 Oh Mum, it doesn't mean a thing .....

MARY (COMING BACK IN) Well I hate it ... will you please remember that your mother is so dotty and anti-diluvian that she can't help visualising what those words actually mean ..... and it's very, er, unsavoury, so, you will please refrain from using any word referring to any bodily function that happens below the waist .... in her presence .....OK?

SEAMUS AND  
NEIL

..... OK ..... OK

MARY Now lunch .... what do you both want .... would soup and grilled cheese sandwich be in order ....?

SEAMUS I have a better idea, I am, for this brief moment, immensely rich.

NEIL (UNDER HIS BREATH) Rich enough to buy your own sweaters ....

SEAMUS I'm in work and I've just done a telly series ... so I'm inviting you both to come out to lunch with me.

MARY Darling how kind ....

SEAMUS The Red Lion usually do a decent spread, or I could ring Fosse Manor..... save you cooking.

MARY That would be lovely.

NEIL Count me out.....

MARY Oh, darling ....I see so little of you, and I've heard nothing ..... (SENSING THE ATMOSPHERE) Have you two quarrelled?

NEIL No....

SEAMUS Liar....

MARY What's it all about?

SEAMUS Sorry Mum, no comment.

MARY (LOOKS AT BOTH OF THEM) Well I would like to go out to lunch with both of you, but that's up to you ....I'll go and make myself look respectable, and you ... (TO SEAMUS) darling, need to get dressed.

SEAMUS I am 24 Mother dear ....not 14!

MARY (SOFT VOICE TO NEIL AS SHE GOES OUT) Neil dear, don't sulk.....

THERE IS A SILENCE.....SEAMUS STARTS TO LEAVE THE ROOM.

NEIL I'll pay for my own lunch.

BLACKOUT

LIGHTS COME UP ON MARY KNEELING DOWN STAGE FRONT, SHE HAS SEVERAL NEWSPAPERS SPREAD OUT IN FRONT OF HER, AND SHE IS CUTTING THINGS OUT WITH A PAIR OF SCISSORS. ON HER DESK IS A LARGE SCRAP ALBUM INTO WHICH SHE PASTES THE CUTTINGS.

MARY

(HOLDING UP A CUTTING "... this mawkish production was saved from total disaster by Seamus Gordon's witty and intelligent performance as Welman" ... huh ... (LOOKS AT PICTURE) ... doesn't look much like him (COLLECTS CUTTINGS AND GOES TO HER DESK) ... rather a sentimental occupation this ... still his children may enjoy looking at it one day ... I used to adore looking at Mum's album ... "Dad, winning the Grand Military at Punchestown!" ... "Gran with the Gaelic League" (SHE IS PASTING AND PUTTING THINGS INTO THE ALBUM) ... funny ... one can't reach much further back than one's grandparents ... beyond that one's ancestors are a cipher ... I'm not like the rest of my race, can't get worked up about lineage ... I wish I had more about Neil to put into this book ... his career has not been exactly spectacular, to date ... (THE 'PHONE) Seamus! Darling ... lovely. Where are you? Bristol ... of course you can ... and you don't have to be at the next place until Monday evening ... Oxford ... no, no distance ... yes of course, what's her name? Sarah, have I seen her in anything, I see, well that will be delightful - I'll rush up and make the bed ... no ... no, I'll put her in Neil's room, she'll be perfectly happy there ... I see, well you can do what you like

MARY

(contd)

while you're on tour or on telly but in my house you sleep in separate bedrooms ... and I don't want any creaking about in the corridors at two in the morning either. You can live without copulating for a couple of nights. It's not the end of the world. (TO HERSELF WITH SATISFACTION). That shocked him, bet he didn't know I even knew the word ... Yes I know, my morals are out of the Ark but the Ark if I remember right, preserved life on this planet ... well I'm not a logical woman but alright I'll listen ... yes, "moral rules, based on social needs of human tribes" ... go on, "thou shalt not steal", commonsense, cuts down conflict. Yes, "honour thy father and mother" ... I'm hoping you're going to take that one very seriously ... "adultery ... family life" ... Yes ... WHAT!?!- ... "because they didn't have the PILL" ... Virginity, the only form of birth-control! What a lot of intellectual rubbish, cooked up to launder your promiscuous life-style - well I don't care if the Pill has liberated human sexuality. I am still not putting this girl in the same bedroom as you!

SHE SLAMS DOWN THE 'PHONE; LIGHTS COME UP ON NEIL, ALONE, IN UNIFORM. HE IS WRITING A LETTER:

NEIL

"Well Mum, I actually made it to the wedding and Aunt Nora and all the Castlekilgo cousins send their love. It poured with rain but everyone drank a lot of champagne and enthused about the bride. She has money so they are

NEIL

(contd)

all hoping that happy days are here again and that Castlekilgo will be restored to its former splendours. It was a terrific business getting permission to go. I had to get MOD clearance and then convince my CO that I simply had to represent the family in the Curragh. They don't encourage serving soldiers to take R and Rs in the South.

The day after the wedding I hired a car and drove South, spent a day in Cork and then followed the coast road down. Passed a place called "Clonakilty". Apparently, "Clonakilty, God help us" is a saying from the famine days, because there was a workhouse there which was the most terrible place to end up in. As you drive south there is a lovely little town called Roscarberry ... do you know it? an estuary winding out to the beach between lovely heads ...

(LIGHTS UP ON MARY READING THE LETTER)

MARY

Roscarberry ... we used to go there as children in the summer holidays ... play on the beach ... there's a causeway across the tidal pool and willow herb ... the valley all pink with willow herb.

NEIL

Very fine old church ... a cathedral they call it. I was shown around by the Dean, an old man who knew your family. Ireland is a small place isn't it? Everyone knows everyone else ... by the way I didn't know you had an uncle

NEIL

(contd)

who fought in the Civil War and was a friend of Erskine Childers!

MARY

Uncle Arthur ... the black sheep ... the die-hard ... yes ... yes, everyone knows everyone and everyone remembers everything ... (SOBERLY) Was I wrong to bring them up completely over here! They neither of them knows anything about the real Ireland.

NEIL

It's extraordinary isn't it that all the finest old churches and cathedrals are Church of Ireland ... with only 4% of the population being protestant. Bit unfair really. The South is so different from the North, one is made to feel welcome here, part of the family. Got back here last week ... only two more months of this tour ... then Germany ... but I think I'm going to get leave for Christmas.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACKOUT ... SOUND OF MUSIC ... (ELIZABETH POSTEN'S CAROL "Jesus Christ the Apple Tree") WE BECOME AWARE OF THE FLICKERING OF A LOG FIRE FROM MARY GORDON'S DRAWING-ROOM. SOUND OF LAUGHTER ... OFF. MARY COMES IN AND TURNS ON A STANDARD LAMP. THERE IS A HALF-DECORATED CHRISTMAS TREE STANDING IN THE CORNER. SEAMUS ENTERS ... TALKING. NEIL FOLLOWS CARRYING A TRAY OF COFFEE.

SEAMUS                   ... Yes. It must be four years since we were together at Christmas. One time of year when an actor can always get work. I could write a book on Panto in Eastbourne, World Premiers in Whitby and Dandinis I have known.

NEIL                     Where was it last year?

SEAMUS                   Porthcawl ... God it was a dump. (SEAMUS NOW GOES OFF INTO THE FULL ACTOR'S RACONTEUR BIT. IT IS DONE WITH FULL ACTIONS, COMEDY TIMING, THE LOT, AND CAN GO ON AS LONG AS SEAMUS CAN HOLD HIS STAGE AUDIENCE ... HIS MOTHER AND NEIL ... AND HIS AUDIENCE PROPER, IN FITS! ANY EMBELLISHMENTS, AD LIBS OR EXTRA COMEDY MATERIAL THAT A GOOD ACTOR WANTS TO ADD AND IS PERFECTLY PERMISSIBLE) We were doing Jack and the Beanstalk, the opening night was a riot ... nothing worked. We had this orchestra who were all geriatric and a stage crew who were all on bail from the local bin ... You know the moment when the beanstalk begins to grow? Well, the damn thing got stuck half way up ... tug, tug, tug ... wouldn't go any higher ... so they let it down again and had another go ... same place tug, tug, tug ... it was still stuck, and there was Jack, this unlikely blonde, legs like football posts, in fishnet tights, striding about ready to climb up. It went on and on - orchestra kept playing - geriatric drummer ... boom, boom, boom.....

We thought he was going to fold with heart failure any moment, and there was this woman on the organ ... Phantom of the Opera, we called her, hideous and all in black. She was



SEAMUS

(contd)

pounding away on the organ ... "Night on Bald Mountain". It's always Night on Bald Mountain" for blood-curdling moments ...  
.....(HE GOES INTO MUSICAL RENDERING) ... and there was this trumpeter ... he was stationed under the stage, and he was off-key .....  
(IMITATION OF AN OFF-KEY TRUMPET) ... and then, bingo, the beanstalk got over the hitch and went shooting up. Jack strode forward and began to climb ... drums going ... boom, boom, boom ... but they hadn't fixed it properly at the top ... she got half way up and the whole thing collapsed. Down it came, Jack and all ... through the trap, into the cellar ... luckily there was a mattrass down there so she didn't come to any harm but there was this sky blue language coming up through the trap. Well, we had all these little Welsh moppets ... overweight fairies from the local dancing school. They were all dressed up as butterflies, God help us .... Red Admiral, Tortoiseshell, Cabbage White ... They were supposed to come and do a butterfly dance ... Valse des Fleurs, Tschaikovsky ... they were all standing in the wings waiting to come on and this teacher: chaperone woman kept trying to push them on to keep the show going (BAR OF VALSE DES FLEURS, THEN IN WELSH ACCENT) Bronwen ... Mavis ... Angharrad ... go on lovey ... (TRA LA LA LA) keep it going children. And the DSM was shouting "Bring in the tabs" ...

is it that hath let this renegade Robin Hood escape?" And swung round and the cloak caught all the Sheriff's men across the shins ... they were all doubled up ...

MARY (WHO IS DETERMINED NOT TO LET SEAMUS DO ALL THE TALKING) Do they have Pantos over there? In the towns? (DECORATION IN HAND) What do you think of this?

NEIL There's not much professional theatre outside Belfast. A bit higher Mum, next branch up. Some touring companies go to Coleraine and Derry, but there's a mass of activity at Christmas. Yes, that's lovely. Schools do plays and, of all things, Gilbert and Sullivan.

MARY And what do you do ... the Army?

NEIL Eat, of course, but otherwise it's much like any other day, boring and tense. (AND AS HE SEEMS TO BE EXPECTED TO SAY MORE) Well actually during my first tour there I organised some carol singing. I wanted somehow to show them that we were human and that we're a Christian country too. So I got my CO to agree, enlisted about thirty Jocks and we went round the streets singing and collecting for Oxfam. But they all closed their doors in our faces - fear, I suppose. Couldn't be seen being nice to soldiers. All except one family. It was a Catholic area and this family came to the door, children and all. I never forget them standing there in the light, their neighbours watching behind

(BY THIS TIME MARY AND NEIL ARE HELPLESS WITH LAUGHTER)

MARY Stop ... stop ... I'm spilling my coffee ...

SEAMUS And we had this cow ... the director's wife was the back end of the cow and she really was the back end of a cow, we all loathed her, so Sarah, who was doubling as the front end of the cow, kept ...

MARY Stop ... stop ... drink your coffee, you are mad darling, to choose that life ...

NEIL He loves every minute of it.

SEAMUS No more panto in Porthcawl though ... the top of the bill at the Palladium perhaps, but not Porthcawl.

MARY (TO NEIL) Where were you darling, last year? ... Could you pass me that box of silver balls.

NEIL Crossmaglen. (NEIL GETS UP AND BEGINS TO HELP HER DECORATE THE TREE)

SEAMUS Then the year before that I was in Wolverhampton - 'Babes in the Wood'. I was playing the Sheriff of Nottingham - the baddie. Well, I had this huge cloak and wardrobe had weighted the hem with a chain, cast thing nicked from a builders' yard I should think. It was supposed to make the cloak look more rich and heavy. Well, I came striding on "Ho, thou worthless scum ... who

MARY

Seamus stop!

SEAMUS

It's Christmas isn't it? Jolly family time so why not forget other people who are frightened or hungry or deprived?

NEIL

(WHO IS SEETHING BY NOW) So alright, you want to be real ... to talk about real suffering ... real people. Well, I'll tell you what happened to me on Christmas Day last year. We were in bandit country. We'd had this tip off so we went to this farm shed ... a very desolate area ... we thought it might be booby-trapped but we broke in. There was a girl in there. She'd been dead about three days..... beaten to death with rubber clubs ... I disgraced myself, was sick ... roast turkey ... Christmas pud all over the place. Then we had to identify her, contact her family. It was a charming Christmas present for them....

SEAMUS

It's always the IRA with your lot isn't it? They're the ones who do this kind of thing ... All this talk about a peace-keeping force, but it's the IRA the army are after, they are the criminals in your book.

NEIL

No, in three years there I've come to the conclusion that there is very little to choose between IRA thugs, or Prod thugs ...

SEAMUS

Or Brit thugs ...

NEIL

(contd)

their curtains. That was the only good thing I can remember from that time there.

(THERE IS A LONG SILENCE AFTER THIS)

MARY

Angel passing over.

SEAMUS

Dark angel, Mum. You only have to start talking about Northern Ireland and a pall falls over the room.

MARY

Well, thank God his term is over and he's safe home.

SEAMUS

That doesn't solve the problem though does it.

MARY

Irish problems never get solved ... Can you see the star for the top?

SEAMUS

Alright ... let's forget it in true Brit tradition. Out of sight, out of mind, let's all be ever so festive ... (FINDS THE STAR)

MARY

Seamus ...

SEAMUS

(DOES A LITTLE DANCE)

Jingle bells, jingle bells  
Jingle all the way.  
Oh what fun it is to ride  
In a one-horse open sleigh.  
(REPEAT)  
Bells on bob-tail ring, ah ah aa ...  
Making spirits bright, ah ... go ...  
sing ah ah aa ...  
Oh what fun it is to ride and  
Sing a sleighing song tonight.

NEIL                   ... if anything I'm not sure the Prods aren't worse. We found a chap who'd been knee-capped a couple of months ago, he was a Prod. It had been done by his own people, the only difference was that they'd done it with a Black and Decker Drill.

MARY                   Oh God ...

NEIL                   At the end of the tour most of our Jocks have a lot more sympathy for the Catholics than the Protestants. But nobody likes doing a tour in Ulster Seamus ... Five months is about all you can take and I tell you that the best moment of your life is the sight of the Liverbirds as you sail back into Liverpool. Just the same, most people I talk to ... And I do talk to people on both sides, believe that there would be a blood bath if the Army pulled out.

MARY                   Seamus ... Neil, I can't bear this any more ... the story just goes round and round and round ... so stop it both of you ... Seamus give me your coffee cup. (SHE PUTS THE COFFEE CUP ONTO A TRAY)

SEAMUS                But Mum ... you opt out. You're typical of the rest of the Anglo-Irish, want the best of both worlds.

MARY                   Some of the finest fighters for Irish freedom were Anglo-Irish, Parnell ...

SEAMUS

So where are they now? Where is the Protestant leadership in Ireland? In the North they have abdicated to men like Paisley and in the South they are sitting pretty on most of the money and the best land.

MARY

I've said I don't want to go on with this conversation, and I mean it. (TO NEIL WHO IS OFFERING TO TAKE THE TRAY) No, it's alright, I can do it, we'll leave it till morning to wash up.

(SEAMUS MOVES OVER TO THE FIRE AND LIGHTS A CIGARETTE. THE ATMOSPHERE IS VERY TENSE. NEIL GOES OVER TO MARY'S DESK AND BEGINS TO LOOK THROUGH THE MOUNTAINS OF PAPERS THAT ARE LEFT THERE. SEAMUS TURNS ON THE TV, SWITCHES FROM CHANNEL TO CHANNEL AND FINDS NOTHING THAT INTERESTS HIM. HE SWITCHES IT OFF AND COMES TO LOOK AT WHAT NEIL IS DOING)

NEIL

... bills, almost a year old ...

SEAMUS

... parking tickets ... she has a fine disregard for the law ... two, three, four ... God, she must be up before nearly every Magistrate's Court in the County.

NEIL

She's always very contrite. She just thinks she has a special dispensation from God to ignore the petty interferences of life.

SEAMUS

I drove into Abingdon with her the other day ... there was a bit of a block so she turned straight into a one-way street. Well, of course, the Law turned up, stops us, "Madam,

SEAMUS

(contd)

are you aware that this is a one-way street?"  
"Oh Officer" she says, going into that  
terrible bog Irish, "Sure, and I'm only  
driving one way."

NEIL

Did she get off?

SEAMUS

Oh yes. (WATCHING NEIL BEGINNING TO SORT OUT  
THE CHAOS) You do too much for her.

NEIL

You do nothing.

SEAMUS

It cushions her ... if you didn't pick up the  
pieces she'd have to learn.

NEIL

Dad would have done it for her.

SEAMUS

You're not Dad. (SEAMUS SAYS NO MORE AND  
RETURNS TO THE FIRE. MARY COMES BACK IN)

MARY

Switch on the telly darling, let's get the  
news. (SEE NEIL) Oh my dear, you're not  
supposed to go near that desk.

NEIL

You need a filing system.

SEAMUS

She's got a piling system.

MARY

I have a system called "hump". I put  
everything that needs dealing with into that  
pile. It's called "hump" and every so often I  
sit down and deal with "hump" (HER SONS LOOK  
AT HER DISBELIEVINGLY) or Neil comes home and  
... SEAMUS AND NEIL BOTH JOIN IN)



ALL THREE           ... deals with "hump".

NEIL               (DISCOVERING YET MORE HORRORS)   Income Tax Returns ...

SEAMUS            You haven't been doing her Income Tax Returns for her have you?

MARY              He has, he has ... if that's not an act of Christian charity I don't know what is!

SEAMUS            You wouldn't like to extend your Christian charity to doing mine too would you? They swear I owe them £700, and I'm damned if I'm going to pay them.

(HE HAS SWITCHED ON THE TV AND WE HEAR THE SIGNATURE TUNE OF THE 9 O'CLOCK NEWS. THE FIRST TWO HEADLINES ARE INTERNATIONAL ... PROBABLY SOMETHING ABOUT THE WAR IN LEBANON AND ABOUT THE NUCLEAR ARMS DEBATE. THE THIRD ITEM IS ...)

NEWSCASTER        "In an incident in Portadown, Northern Ireland, earlier today, one man was killed and one wounded. The Security Forces claim that the dead man was mistaken for a known terrorist and believed to be armed. There is to be an enquiry into the circumstances of the shooting."

(SEAMUS LOOKS AT NEIL AS THE LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK-OUT)

END OF ACT I

ACT II

AS THE LIGHT COMES UP ON ACT II WE HEAR THE SOUND OF A HOOVER. MARY IS REVEALED PUSHING THE MACHINE ABOUT AND TRYING TO TIDY THE ROOM. FROM TIME TO TIME SHE STOPS THE HOOVER TO PICK UP SOMETHING AND WE REALISE THAT SHE IS RECITING POETRY TO HERSELF

MARY

"I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree.  
(HOOVER, HOOVER) And a small cabin build  
there of clay and wattles made. Nine bean  
rows will I have there (HOOVER, HOOVER) A  
hive for the honey bee..."

... extraordinary diet ... green beans and  
honey ... "And live alone in the bee-loud  
glade." I'm sure Yeats never had to plant a  
bean-row in his life (STOPPING AND LOOKING AT  
HER DESK) Oh Lord what a mess ... Neil where  
are you ... June ... He's got leave in June  
... only another month and he'll be here ...  
if I made "hump" tidier it wouldn't look so  
awful ... (TAKES OFF A SCARF FROM ROUND HER  
NECK) I'll put that over it ...and that (A  
PAPER WEIGHT) on top and ... "I shall have  
some peace there (STARTS TO HOOVER AGAIN) for  
peace comes dropping slow" ... blast I think  
the bag's full (STOPS AND OPENS UPS THE  
HOOVER) ... yuk, I'll have to empty it ...  
actually I don't think he would have stuck it  
for a week on Innisfree ... wattle cabins  
leak, glades are full of midges as well as  
linnets ... couple of nights and he'd have  
gone streaking back to Lady Gregory and linen  
sheets ... (SHE TAKES OUT THE HOOVER BAG) ...  
how revolting ... (FITS ANOTHER) "I hear lake  
water lapping with low sounds by the shore;"

MARY

(contd)

While I'm changing hoover bags.

(STRAIGHTENS, CLOSES HER EYES AND "SEES" IT)  
"I hear it in the deep heart's core."  
(COLLECTS THE PAPER SHE HAS LAID ON THE FLOOR.  
AN ITEM CATCHES HER EYE) ... that's  
interesting. (SHE TAKES THE PAPER TO A CHAIR  
AND SITS DOWN TO READ IT. THE 'PHONE RINGS)  
Hello ... yes ... darling! I was just  
thinking of you ... yes ... yes ... I'm  
counting the days ... the 11th for ten days,  
how marvellous. You are sure you want to come  
home? Don't want to rush off to St Tropez or  
something? Yes, who? but of course, I'd love  
to have her, what's her name? Katy ... Katy  
what? O'Bryan, that's an Irish name ... she  
is Irish! (GOING IRISH) me darlin' boy, am't  
I glad! and will you be walking the same path  
as your dear Father and losing your heart to  
an Irish girl? O'Bryan! Now there were some  
O'Bryans who lived in Kerry when I was a girl  
and a Henrietta O'Bryan married your Father's  
cousin who lives in Devon. Does she spell it  
BRYEN? That's the Thomond name and they are  
descended from Bryan Boru who was High King of  
Ireland ... Oh (GOES ENGLISH AGAIN) ... I see  
... I wouldn't know her family ... Just the  
same this is rather exciting. Is this  
friendship what is known as "serious"?  
.....I'm not jumping to conclusions - but I'm  
beginning to think you two ought to get  
married, how old are you? ... twenty-six isn't  
it? And I think you'll be a better family man  
than our beloved Seamus ... alright my  
darling, I'll be discretion itself ... yes ...  
no, he's out on another tour but he sometimes  
rushes back down for Sunday if the geography

MARY

(contd)

permits . . . . Lovely. Looking forward to the  
11th . . . mustn't run up your 'phone bill . . .  
bye. (PUTS DOWN THE 'PHONE) Katy O'Bryan . . .  
'tis a nice name . . . oh I do hope she's a nice  
girl . . . I wonder if she'll like me . . . it'd  
be too awful if she took him away completely  
. . . grand-children . . . stop it woman, you're  
going much too fast. I'd love to have had a  
daughter, at the time I was so proud to have  
sons . . . appalling primitive chauvinism . . .  
but now it would be lovely to have a daughter.  
Plan a wedding . . . be needed when babies come.  
Daughters give you more sense of continuity, I  
think. Stop day dreaming you stupid woman,  
and finish the job. (COLLECTS THE HOOVER, AND  
THROUGH THE NOISE OF THE MACHINE WE HEAR HER  
RECITE).

"Though I am old with wandering  
Through hollow lands and hilly lands,  
I will find out where she has gone,  
And kiss her lips and take her hands;  
And walk among long and dappled grass,  
And pluck till time and times are done  
The silver apples of the moon,  
The golden apples of the sun."

(THE LIGHTS FADE OUT ON MARY AND COME UP ON  
NEIL SITTING AND WRITING A LETTER)

NEIL

Dearest Katy.

I'm so glad you liked Mum. It was mutual, she has never stopped talking about you and is shockingly inquisitive about every detail of your life. I have laid a small egg for you. Mum says I'm better at expressing things on paper than in words. I don't know if this is true but it is supposed to be a poem ... so here goes ...

To Katy the girl from Donegal:

"I cannot ignore this yearning,

Nor rationalise the chemistry

Of this keen hope

That you will be there.

Will walk beside me.

Align your life's purposes with mine

Will you come with me Catherine?

The road, the goal, the journey purposes

Are not clear to me.

And yet the focus sharpens even as I write

And you are part of it,

You Cathleen i houlihan,

Will you come with me Catherine?

A man and his Country are so enmeshed,

You cannot stand back and cry

"Oh wicked deeds, but not my deeds"

I am what they are, they are me,

Can you forgive us Catherine?

Perhaps with male or British arrogance

I ask the wrong questions.

Perhaps you already know what you must do,

Have already turned your face

Into the Western gale.

Can I come with you Catherine?

NEIL  
(contd)

Army life in Germany is blisteringly dull, but I'm due to go on a course at Staff College next month, so I will be appearing on your door-step before long to renew my efforts to persuade you to love me as I love you.

Yours ever,  
NEIL

(THE LIGHTS HAVE BEEN FADING TO BLACK-OUT DURING THIS. LIGHTS UP ON THE BOYS' ROOM WHICH NOW HAS ONLY ONE BED IN IT. SEAMUS IS SITTING ON THE TOP OF THE BED LEARNING LINES FOR HIS PART IN "THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST". HE HAS A PIECE OF PAPER THAT HE COVERS THE LINES WITH AND MOVES DOWN THAT PAGE)

SEAMUS

"I really can't see anything romantic in proposing. It is very romantic to be in love. But there is nothing romantic about a definite proposal." (HE STUMBLES AND HAS TO REPEAT THE LINES FROM TIME TO TIME) "Why, one might be accepted. One usually is I believe. Then the excitement is all over. If ever I get married I'll certainly try to forget the fact."

(LIGHTS COME BACK UPON THE DRAWING-ROOM. NEIL IS SITTING AT THE DESK SORTING BILLS ETC, MARY IS BEHIND HIM STUDYING A BRIGHTLY-COLOURED GARDEN CATALOGUE)

MARY I always believe it all, I look at the pictures and absolutely drool, abyssinian gladiola ... so lovely ... I wonder ... if I'm sheltered enough ... I know it's a snare and a delusion ... what you actually get is not remotely related to the splendours of those pictures ... but I'm still the complete sucker ... always fall for the bait ...

NEIL Could you sign these (SHE COMES OVER AND COLLECTS THE CHEQUES) Rates ... telephone ... that's the bill for the roof repairs ... and that's Collard's for the firewood ...

MARY Oh my dear I'm so grateful for all this ... I thought you'd want to spend the entire leave in London with Katy ...

NEIL ... last October ... two tons, is that right?

MARY £30 ... it's always damp ...

NEIL Here are the envelopes ...they're addressed ...

MARY (SIGNING CHEQUES) £259.68p ... that's awful ... and they go on saying that they are pegging the price ... £83.20 ... that was only about four tiles, etc ... disgraceful ...

NEIL Don't mix them up ... that's for Aga fuel ...

MARY My pen's not working ... can you lend me one ... (HE DOES SO) ... how was it darling ... this time?

NEIL                   What?

MARY                   This last term over there.

NEIL                   Tour ...?

MARY                   Tour ... of course, tour (PAUSE) why tour?  
You don't actually tour ...

NEIL                   Not in Germany anyway ...

MARY                   Germany? ..... Ah ...

NEIL                   (LOOKING AT HER)    Were you thinking about  
Ireland?

MARY                   No ... no ... well yes, I suppose I was.

NEIL                   Where do you keep your stamps?

MARY                   Stamps? I've got some in my purse I think ...  
wait a moment (HIATUS WHILE SHE CHURNS AROUND  
IN HER BAG).    NEIL WAITS PATIENTLY WHILE  
EVERYTHING IS DISGORGED THEN BEGINS TO GET HIS  
WALLET OUT TO FIND STAMPS) No ... no, I know  
I've got some in here somewhere ...

NEIL                   I keep thinking about Ireland, myself,  
actually.    The trouble is, the more one  
understands the situation, the more hopeless  
it all seems.

MARY                   Aha... ha ... here they are (PRODUCING STAMPS)



NEIL                   Something has got to be done, some changes must be introduced, but no one in London seems remotely interested.

MARY                   Oh ... Whitehall ... they've elevated evasion to a fine art.

NEIL                   Katy's very cynical about the British Government too ... this "perfidious Albion" thing ... it used to irritate me, but there is some truth in it ... we're terribly good at smoothing things over ... can I have my pen back?

MARY                   (HANDING IT OVER) Where is she? Why didn't you ask her down for the weekend?

NEIL                   I did, but she wasn't sure she could make it..

MARY                   I do like her Neil, she's absolutely charming ... which reminds me! I've got something I want to give you ... wait a sec ... I brought it down especially ... (FISHES AROUND IN HER BAG AND FINDS WHAT SHE IS LOOKING FOR, A LITTLE JEWEL CASE ... SHE GIVES IT TO HIM AND HE OPENS IT. IT IS A "BLACK WATCH" BROOCH OF SILVER WITH SMALL JEWELS)

NEIL                   Your "Black Watch" brooch ... Mum ...

MARY                   I want you to have it. "Nemo me impune lacessite". ... rather a ferocious motto isn't it?

NEIL                   You shouldn't ... it's yours ... Dad gave it to you ...

MARY Yes, when Seamus was born ... it was rather the done thing in those days, if your wife had done her duty and presented you with a son, you gave her a sort of gratitude gift! Actually it was marvellous ... he was so thrilled about the baby ... joy was exuding out of every pore in his body, but at the same time he was trying to be very British and 'stiff upper lip'.

NEIL Mum, you mustn't give it to me ... not yet ...

MARY I thought you might like to have it to give someone ... at some point ...? (NEIL'S FACE CLOUDS OVER AND HE SAYS NOTHING) ... I'm sorry ... have I spoken out of turn ...? Has it all cooled off a bit?

NEIL I haven't "cooled off".

MARY Oh ..... why don't you give her a ring ...? See if she could come down ... tell her I asked her.

NEIL Oh for heaven's sake Mum ...

MARY Sorry, sorry, sorry ... no business of mine ...here they are, and I've not put the wrong cheques in the wrong envelopes ... I think I'll light the fire ... it's still quite chilly in the evenings (SHE GOES OFF) (NEIL STAYS AT HIS DESK LOOKING OUT OF THE WINDOW AND THEN AT THE TELEPHONE - AFTER A MOMENT OR TWO HE LIFTS THE RECEIVER AND DIALS)

NEIL Hello ... hello ... Katy!! Yes, of course it's Neil ... who did you think it was?

(FADE FROM NEIL AND BACK UP TO SEAMUS WHO IS STILL SITTING ON HIS BED LEARNING HIS LINES ...)

SEAMUS "I really can't see anything romantic in proposing. It is very romantic to be in love. But there is nothing romantic about a definite proposal. Why one might be accepted. One usually is I believe. Then the excitement is all over. The very essence is uncertainty. If I ever get married I'll certainly try and forget the fact". (HE THEN RUSHES THROUGH JACK'S LINES) "I have no doubt about that dear Algy. The Divorce Court was especially invented for people whose memories are so curiously constituted."

NEIL (NEIL COMES INTO THE ROOM AND SAYS WITH A COLD FURY) You are a bastard Seamus!

SEAMUS (CONTINUING WITH HIS TEXT) "Oh! there is no use speculating on the subject" I don't know what you're talking about ...

NEIL You know exactly what I'm talking about ...

SEAMUS "Divorces are made in heaven" ...

NEIL I've just been on the 'phone with Katy ...

SEAMUS "Please don't touch the cucumber sandwiches - (NEIL GRABS THE SCRIPT AWAY FROM SEAMUS) How is she?

NEIL                    You're a bloody thief as well as everything else. Can't keep your hands off someone else's girl.

SEAMUS                 You're not engaged to her.

NEIL                    She was my friend.

SEAMUS                 I can't help it if she's my friend too now, and if she prefers me ...

NEIL                    Don't act so bloody innocent. You took one look at her and then went into gear. All the old charm machine - all that show-biz garbage. "come back to my flat after the show - I've got some Irish records I'd love to show you" .....your're a rotten lecher.

SEAMUS                 And your're behaving like the hero of a Victorian novel ... "Sirrah! you have besmirched the honour of an innocent girl." Anyway ... you grossly under estimate Katy if you think that that sort of line would wash with her ... shows how little you really know her. She likes me because I care about the future of Ireland ...

NEIL                    God what a load of shit ... you don't give a damn about Ireland Seamus. It's one big act, you're in love with yourself being the hero of some Republican death and glory act. It's all phoney... hot air ... you haven't helped a single Irishman.

SEAMUS                 Anyway I didn't know you were really keen on her.

NEIL                    You don't know a thing Seamus. You live in a world that revolves entirely round yourself. (WITH TREMENDOUS DELIBERATION) You are the most bloody selfish man I know.

SEAMUS                 Just stung, aren't you? The old male pride. She didn't fall for the Black kilt and hairy legs ..... macho man. All this fuss because I bedded your girl, and you didn't even get to first base with her.

NEIL HITS HIM. SEAMUS CRASHES OVER THE BED AND DOWN THE OTHER SIDE. AFTER A MOMENT HE PICKS HIMSELF UP)

SEAMUS                 The final argument ... force, the fist ... you thug ...!

NEIL                    I'm going to leave. I'm sorry to do this to Mum, but I can't stand being the same house as you. (HE GOES TO THE DOOR) You can explain to her, (HE LEAVES. SEAMUS SITS DOWN ON THE BED)

SEAMUS                 Oh shit! (HE GOES TO THE MIRROR TO SEE IF HIS FACE IS BADLY DAMAGED. THEN SITS DOWN AGAIN. THEN UP AGAIN TO GET HIS SCRIPT FROM OFF THE FLOOR. READ ...) "Literary criticism is not your forte, my dear fellow. What you really are is a Bunburyist. (HE HURLS THE BOOK AWAY AND LIES BACK ON HIS BED)

MARY APPEARS IN THE DRAWING-ROOM BELOW WITH BASKET OF LOGS AND SOME KINDLING. SHE SWEEP OUT THE GRATE AND THEN BEGINS TO LAY THE FIRE NEIL COMES DOWN WITH A SUITCASE AND DISAPPER WITHOUT LOOKING AT HIS MOTHER. CAR DRIVE OFF... MARY HEARS IT WITHOUT TAKING TH PHENOMENON SERIOUSLY. SEAMUS GETS OFF HIS BE AND COMES DOWNSTAIRS ... HE CROSSES THE ROC AND STANDS LOOKING MOODILY OUT OF THE WINDOW)

MARY                   It's always damp ... he never gives me reall dry wood. I tremble to think what thi chimney must be like ... inches deep with ta I imagine ... (SENSING HIS MOOD) Won't i come?

SEAMUS                 What?

MARY                   The part ... your lines ... "Importanc of.....?"

SEAMUS                 It's OK. Neil's gone.

MARY                   Gone where?

SEAMUS                 Don't know ...

MARY                   Village probably ... blast, he could hav taken my letters to the post.

SEAMUS                 He's taken his suitcase.

MARY                   What are you talking about ...? What's goin; on ...?

SEAMUS                 We had an argument and he's taken off.

MARY                   But that's ridiculous ... He's only just got here. Minutes ago he was on the 'phone to Katy and ... (SHE SUDDENLY SEES IT ALL) ... Katy ... Seamus have you been seeing her in London?

SEAMUS                 Yes ... alright Mum, yes, yes, yes. Yes I've been seeing her in London, she's become a friend of mine. Yes, Neil is furious with me and thinks I've been poaching on his patch. (SILENCE)

MARY                   Seamus why ...?

SEAMUS                 Oh don't you start lecturing me. I've had just about all I can take.

MARY                   But why, why, why? Do you have to grab every woman you meet?

SEAMUS                 I've probably done him a good turn. A girl that was that easy to lay would have been no good to old Neil as a wife.

MARY                   May God forgive you Seamus, that's the most cynical remark I've ever heard.

SEAMUS                 Alright Mum, you think Neil's so wonderful - so responsible, and you take this high moral tone about Katy - but I know all about Neil, and he's a hypocrite. Oh he's a gentleman, he opens doors and keeps the rules but he gets exactly what he wants just the same, only he does it on the quiet. I believe in honesty. If I'm sleeping with a girl, then I say so. I live in the open.

MARY                   What's so honest about seducing your brother's girl while he's away?

SEAMUS                 I didn't seduce her, she's no dewy virgin. (THERE IS A SILENCE) You always believe Neil don't you ... you don't know a thing about him. You don't know what army officers get up to when their women folk are not around ...

MARY                   I don't want to hear tales from school.

SEAMUS                 Oh no, we must preserve the Enid Blyton code of honour mustn't we?

MARY                   Don't be rude ...

SEAMUS                 I bet you didn't know a thing about Dad's sex life ...

MARY                   Leave your Father out of it ...

SEAMUS                 It's a myth Mum, a hypocritical myth, and you help to perpetuate it, this this "officer and gentleman" rubbish ... don't tell me that Dad was a virgin when you married ...

MARY                   I was ...

SEAMUS                 That's what I mean, sexist charade where women were supposed to ...

MARY                   Seamus stop it ... stop it ... you're getting me all confused .....its YOU but YOU I'm talking about ... not Neil ... or Dad ..... but YOU! What is happening to you, you seem



MARY to be getting more arrogant and more selfish  
(contd) every day.

SEAMUS (SULKILY) I am what I am. Neil is what he  
is. Nothing we can do about it.

MARY And the world goes round and round and round.

SEAMUS (RELUCTANTLY) Actually I wish it hadn't  
happened ... I seem to get into these things  
without planning it ...

MARY What did happen?

SEAMUS She came to see me in the show ... we talked  
... about Ireland. I took her out several  
times ... Oh for heaven's sake Mum, do I have  
to spell it out. You know what it's like when  
things get going ... She wasn't in love with  
Neil you know.

MARY Do you love her?

SEAMUS I ... I don't know. She is a marvellous girl.  
Oh, I don't know ...

MARY Neil was deeply in love with her, I have never  
seen him so committed to anyone (NO REPLY FROM  
SEAMUS) What is the state of play now? What  
about Katy herself?

SEAMUS Her firm is sending her to Canada, to Montreal  
for two years. I don't think she wants to see  
any more of either of us.

MARY (SADLY) It's all so heartless Seamus. You pick girls up and drop them again, leaving the shards of their hopes and feelings littered behind you ...

SEAMUS Life's like that in the theatre, Mum. You work so closely with people for a few months ... form these potted friendships and the show ends and you start all over again with a new lot ...

MARY Katy was not in show business .....

SEAMUS I have tried Mum, really I have ... I know I'm selfish but I can't help it ... it may be what makes me a good actor ... I know about rottenness ... Sometimes I hate Neil because it all seems to come so easily to him ... paying bills, doing the washing up ... thinking about other people ... even his clothes behave! His sweaters seem to fold themselves up and put themselves into drawers without his even looking at them. Mine hide under the bed or roll themselves in the dirt when my back is turned.

MARY Very amusing ...

SEAMUS I tried once ... I tried for three whole weeks to ... to be a better person. I was about sixteen and I made this huge resolve to turn over a new leaf. So I rushed about being nice to people I loathed and thinking up good deeds like a bloody boy scout and Mum I nearly went round the twist because why was I doing it? To make me feel more virtuous, less guilty all

SEAMUS  
(contd)

the time? To convince you that I was as good as Neil? All these reasons were in fact selfish ... it's a vicious circle. That was when I decided that I am what I am, ... that I was going to be myself - and never try to be anything else ... I cannot spend my life feeling guilty ... It's a sort of blackmail. So I concentrate on my excellencies.

MARY

Which are?

SEAMUS

Well ... I'm a good actor, and I do care about Ireland. If I do only one thing with my life, I would like to have done something towards the reunification of Ireland.

MARY

Well, I hope these excellencies will stand you in good stead when you arrive at the pearly gates ..... I wonder where Neil has gone.

SEAMUS

Don't know.

MARY

Would he have gone to try and see Katy do you think?

SEAMUS

I doubt it.

MARY

(SUDDENLY FURIOUS) Seamus I could slay you for this.

(SHE LEAVES HIM. SEAMUS GOES SLOWLY BACK UP TO HIS ROOM AND PICKS UP HIS SCRIPT AND COMES DOWN AGAIN WITH IT. HE STARTS LEARNING LINES AGAIN)

SEAMUS

"The truth is rarely pure and never simple, modern life would be very tedious if it were either" ..... "The truth is rarely pure and never simple ... modern life would ... etc, etc ...."

BLACK-OUT

LIGHT COMES UP ON MARY IN HER BEDROOM. SHE IS CHANGING THE SHEETS ON THE BED. SHE HAS A LAUNDRY BASKET WITH HER INTO WHICH SHE THROWS THE DIRTY SHEETS.

MARY

This is the triumph of hope over experience ... neither of them has been home for months ... (FINDS A DIRTY SHIRT UNDER THE BED) Oh yuk ... (THROWS IT INTO THE BASKET) He doesn't even 'phone ... too busy working ... huh! ... is there a link between talent and egotism? So much potential for good and bad in one person ... I wish I understood the chemistry of character ... what can make a person change and want to grow up?

SHE COLLECTS ALL THE LINEN ETC INTO THE BASKET AND BRINGS IT DOWNSTAIRS AND DUMPS IT ON THE SOFA ... OPENS SCRAP ALBUM AND LOOKS AT A CUTTING)

Kilburn Rally. "British actor supports 'Troops Out' Movement" ... the Daily Telegraph! ... I don't know ... does it achieve anything? Is it just an escape from

MARY

(contd)

himself? He's going back over there next month ... I don't know what he's up to.... It's unfair really, I keep thinking about Seamus when it's Neil who takes the real knocks. He's back in the North too ... his fourth term there ...

SPOT COMES UP ON NEIL WRITING A LETTER

NEIL

I am finding this tour even more depressing than the last. It all has a terrible familiarity, the graffiti, the averted faces ... even the suffering ... you get hardened to it. I had to go to the home of that RUC man who was shot the other day. There was a wife and two kids, an old mother ... all in tears ... but I felt nothing ... I even found myself thinking "well, he probably asked for it" ... The RUC are so one-sided in their dealings with the population.

In my first tour there were riots, in an awful way riots were quite fun ... there'd be about twelve of us in a van and we'd leap out and they'd turn and run ... about two hundred running from twelve soldiers ... it appealed to the hunting instinct I suppose ... at least it let off pent-up feelings. But now it's just uniformly grim. The IRA have got things sewn up, they have a mafia control over people's lives and I don't see any military solution. It's become increasingly difficult to explain to the Jocks just what the hell we are doing over there. They can see no hope of any solution ... no end to it all ...

MARY

(IN A SPOT, READING THE LETTER AT HER DESK)  
There must be some solution. There must be  
.... it can't go on for ever.....

NEIL

I think it's the children that worry me  
most.....here in barracks we are all  
barricaded in, layers and layers of barbed  
wire, concrete and mesh between us and the  
public.....not much difference between this  
place and the Maze! ...but from my window I  
can just see a corner of the street, sometimes  
I watch the children playing down there and,  
Mum, they make my stomach turn over. All  
small boys are aggressive but with these kids  
violence is the norm, they are becoming a  
warped generation. And yet...and yet parallel  
with all this prejudice and hate you meet the  
most marvellous people, the most generous,  
most forgiving, funniest, bravest people on  
earth.....it is such a complex  
country.....

MARY

He writes rather good letters ...

NEIL

Which brings me to the point of this letter.  
I am seriously thinking of coming out of the  
army. I've got another 18 months and then I  
could get a discharge. I shall miss army  
life, I enjoy it, but I've come to the  
conclusion that we are a rather ineffective  
fire brigade. I'm thinking of going into the  
Church.

MARY

The Church ...! The Church ... Neil a parson!  
Are my sons both lunatics? Neil in a dog  
collar! But he's never been remotely  
religious! (PICKS UP A PIECE OF PAPER AND  
BEGINS TO WRITE) "Neil dear ... I am stunned  
... bewildered. Come home for your next R and  
R and explain all this to me." (SHE FINISHES  
THE LETTER WITH A FEW QUICK FLOURISHES AND  
SEALS AND ADDRESSES IT ... SEARCHING FOR A  
POSTAGE STAMP ... THEN SHE LEANS BACK)

Neil a clergyman ... well, I suppose I can get  
used to anything ...!

THE LIGHTS COME UP FULLY TO REVEAL NEIL, IN  
HIS BLACK WATCH KILT, STANDING UNDERNEATH THE  
PORTRAIT OF HIS FATHER. MARY RISES FROM HER  
DESK AND CROSSES INTO THE DRAWING-ROOM AREA  
AND SITS DOWN)

NEIL

Well, that's the story. I'm not really sure  
what I should do when I come out, but it'll be  
either politics or the Church.

MARY

The Church!

NEIL

Well ... I know I'm not an especially  
religious sort but I keep thinking that most  
of the troubles are caused by human nature,  
and that's what Christianity is all about ...  
change of motive ... forgiveness ... renewal  
... I know I'm not a very good example, but I  
thought that if I could get a parish over  
there I might be able to do something  
constructive.

MARY                    You would try to get a parish in Northern Ireland?

NEIL                    Well ... yes.

MARY                    I'd have thought you'd have had enough of religion after four years over there.

NEIL                    The conflict's not about religion, it's about power. That's why I fluctuate between the church and politics. There is no justice in Northern Ireland. The Catholic community don't get justice, the Protestant community don't get a hearing and this country doesn't give a damn. The Northern Ireland Office is a political graveyard. It's "hearts and minds", but it's politics too that need to change. I can't decide which is the cart and which is the horse.

MARY                    Neil, I'm lost. I don't really know what you're talking about. When did all this start? Where has it come from?

NEIL                    Well.....

MARY                    Cut out the "wells" and remember that you're talking to a bear with very few brains.....

NEIL                    Well - (HE STOPS AS HE REALISES THAT HE HAS SAID IT AGAIN, TAKES A DEEP BREATH AND STARTS AGAIN). I suppose it started some years ago, in my second tour there. We'd lifted a girl; we knew she was involved and we were screening her - giving her quite a rough time, really. We don't do that sort of work any more, the



NEIL

(contd)

RUC does it. But anyway, there she was, quite young, dumpy, fresh face, with big round eyes, and she kept praying, under her breath, "sacred heart of Jesus, keep me faithful, sacred heart of Jesus keep me strong", over and over. She...she really meant it. It suddenly struck me like a bolt - I wonder which side God is on? I couldn't stop thinking about it. Then I began to wonder what God thought about the conflict in Northern Ireland - and what He thought about me. I know there's a joke about us thinking that God is an Englishman; it wasn't so far from the truth as far as I was concerned. At least, not an Englishman, but an educated Scot with sensible ideas.

MARY

I was brought up to believe that God went to Trinity College, Dublin. Go on.

NEIL

My first time there, it was all so simple. Lunatic Prods fighting lunatic IRA and us Brits trying to cope with both. But then I began to think. It was our fault to begin with, we put the Protestants there in the first place - used them as a buffer for defence. The more I thought about it, the more I asked myself "Has there been a single motive in the history of Britains official dealings with Ireland that has not been selfish?" ....other than some of Gladstone's endeavours. I couldn't think of any. (VERY SOBERLY) It's a rather .....sobering conclusion.

MARY

History ... history ... history ...

NEIL                    You cannot understand the problem of Ireland unless you understand her history. That's where we made our mistake. We think you can draw a line at 1921 and forget what went before.

MARY                    I know, every soul in Ireland knows the story of our struggles with Britain ... Wolfe Tone, the flight of the Earls ... Parnell ... it comes with our mother's milk. In this country no one ever heard of it ....

NEIL                    Or cares ... it's strange to me ... I love this country ... I'm proud of it and I've always thought that although we've done some pretty ropey things in history, we've had a reforming streak ... a sort of self-righting device that came to the rescue just in time ... the strain in our character that produced Wilberforce, and Shaftesbury, or Keir Hardie ... or Burke.

MARY                    Who was an Irishman!

NEIL                    Who was an Irishman! The one situation where we seem to have had no conscience at all ... is in our dealings with Ireland.

MARY                    So, let me see if I have got this right: you are going to leave the army and go either into politics or the Church in order to try and change things in Ireland?

NEIL                    I think the only lot I can hope to "change" are my own lot. The Brits ... me.

MARY (WITH SUDDEN BITTERNESS) You can't change the British ... they never change.

NEIL (SURPRISED) Well ... thanks for the encouragement!

MARY (WITH PASSION) The British never change ... it's their strength and their weakness ... we Irish have our faults ... we drink ... we scrap ... we're liars ... but it's nothing to the ruthless hypocrisy of the British. Oh, the British are polite, are civilised, but they are ruthless ... and Neil, they don't see it! They have no idea how selfish they are because it is all so civilised. The British Government is a master of hypocrisy, the judicial inquiry, the calm reply, and if they ever do the right thing it's for the wrong reason ... money usually. If the British ever became honest all hell would break out.

NEIL Mum.....(THERE IS A SILENCE AS NEIL TRIES TO TAKE ON BOARD HIS MOTHER'S STRENGTH OF FEELING. MARY PULLS HERSELF TOGETHER)

MARY I...I'm sorry...I've lived here for years and I love England but.. ancestral reflexes die hard.

NEIL (MAKING A DECISION) I think it's politics.

MARY What?

NEIL I shall try and get into Parliament.

MARY                    You really are serious about all this (NEIL  
NODS)    You personally are going to try and  
tackle the problem of Northern Ireland?

NEIL                    Yes.

MARY                    How.....?    For God's sake .. how?

NEIL                    I'm not sure yet, but I think it must have  
something to do with nerve ....will.    I think  
the end solution must be a united Ireland  
but.....

MARY                    But what about the Protestants?

NEIL                    I don't know Mum.    That is the rock that every  
wave breaks on.....but I can't believe that  
that peoples greatest role lies in shutting  
gates.....there must be a further ...destiny  
for them.....God I've gone round that one in  
my head a thousand times.....look what is the  
best of the Protestant tradition?    It's a  
gritty independence that has pioneered new  
ways, a determination to let nothing stand  
between me and my God ... it's a gritty  
personal morality too.    On a wider scale it's  
scholarship, education and reform and thirteen  
presidents of the United States from Ulster  
stock? ... doesn't the world need that spirit  
....doesn't Ireland?

MARY                    You're talking way above most peoples heads.

NEIL I suppose so....but there must be some vision...some goal ...? mustn't there? otherwise, we all just live in the past and become smaller and smaller.

MARY Yes...yes...but I still don't see how you can make such concepts real for the Northern Ireland Protestants.

NEIL It's when I think of them that I go back to the Church idea, every political problem has a moral and spiritual aspect, or so it seems to me. And I thought as both sides have had a fairly raw deal from us it might help if a Brit was seen to simply want to serve them.

MARY I fear you're being a bit idealistic ... and anyway darling, all the wrongs the British have committed in Ireland...they weren't your fault, you can't make up for the mistakes of a whole nation.

NEIL No...no I know that....but somewhere in a deadlock situation like this someone has got to stand up and say "Mea culpa"...someone has got to break the circuit of blame....I happen to think that is what Christianity is all about.

MARY I wouldn't stand in your way if you wanted to go into the Church.

NEIL I know you wouldn't, Mum.

MARY The idea just took me by surprise rather.....

NEIL                   It took me by surprise too.

MARY                   In my day people used to ask "Do you have a calling?"

NEIL                   Are you asking me?

MARY                   Yes.

NEIL                   Well....well...no trumpets or voices or anything. Just a persistent feeling that I'm meant to do more with my life than just soldiering. That there is some sort of job for me. I read a lot....I'm pretty convinced that Christ's claims are true ... so perhaps I'm meant to serve Him that way .....but then I come back to us British ...us...our responsibility...and I end up thinking that to tackle that first...that must be the only way forward.

MARY                   I don't think you know what you are up against.

NEIL                   Probably just as well.

MARY                   Twenty, thirty years of rotten hard thankless work...perhaps a life-time.

NEIL                   .....so?

MARY                   You'll be up against both Irish intransience and the British Establishment ....and I don't know which is worse...

NEIL                   I'm     not     daunted     by     the     British  
Establishment...I've been part of it...I'm a  
product of a British public school...the  
British Army...I am British...warts and all!

MARY                   Yes....yes....you are, bless you!     and it's  
such a relief that you know what you are.

NEIL                   I can't pretend to be Irish, like Seamus does.  
It's phoney anyway, as phoney as all those  
accents he can produce.....

MARY                   Have you forgiven him Neil?....about Katy?  
(NEIL SAYS NOTHING.     MARY LOOKS AT HIM  
SHREWDLY)     You know you won't do much for  
Ireland if you can't forgive your own brother.

BLACK-OUT

(A SPOT COMES UP ON THE UPSTAGE AREA, SEAMUS IS IN COSTUME AS MALCOLM, SON OF DUNCAN, IN MACBETH, ACT IV, SCENE III)

SEAMUS  
AS MALCOLM

I think our country sinks beneath the yoke.  
It weeps, it bleeds, and each new day a gash  
Is added to her wounds; but for all this,  
When I shall tread upon the tyrants head,  
Or wear it on my sword, yet my poor country  
Shall have more vices than it had before,  
More suffer and more sundry ways than ever,  
By him that shall succeed.

What should he be?

It is myself I mean; in whom I know  
All particulars of vice so grafted,  
That, when they are opened, black Macbeth  
Will seem as pure as snow.

I have none of the King-becoming graces,  
As justice, verity, temperance, stableness,  
Devotion, patience, courage, fortitude,  
I have no relish of them.  
Nay, had I power, I would  
Pour the sweet milk of concord into hell,  
Uproar the universal peace, confound  
All unity on earth.  
If such a one be fit to govern, speak;  
I am as I have spoken.

(THROUGH THE LAST LINES OF MALCOLM'S SCENE COMES THE PERSISTENT RINGING OF THE 'PHONE. MARY COMES TO HER 'PHONE, THE LIGHTS HAVE LEFT SEAMUS AND COME UP ON NEIL AT THE PAY-PHONE UPSTAGE LEFT. HE IS IN UNIFORM. AS HIS



MOTHER ANSWERS ... HE PUSHES THE COINS THROUGH)

NEIL Mum...It's me ... It's Seamus ...

MARY What ... Seamus ...

NEIL (SHOUTING) No ... it's me, Neil ... about Seamus ...

MARY Can't hear ...

NEIL Mum, it's Neil here, I'm ringing about Seamus ... it's very urgent ...

MARY What's happened ...?

NEIL You've got to get him out of Belfast ... tell him you're ill ... you're dying ... anything ... but get him out of here ...

MARY What are you talking about ... This line is terrible ...

NEIL Mum ... I can't go into details ... can you hear me now?

MARY Yes ... that's better ... about Seamus ... yes?

NEIL You've got to get him out ... he knows too much.

MARY Oh, my God ...

NEIL                   He thinks they trust him ... that they know he's on their side ... but they don't ... may even suspect he's a Brit agent ...

MARY                   Oh, no....

NEIL                   He knows too much, drinks too much, talks too much ... they can't risk it with him ...

MARY                   How do you know all this?

NEIL                   I don't know anything for certain ... (HIS MONEY RUNS OUT ... PIPPING SOUND, HE PUTS MORE COINS IN)

MARY                   Are you still there ...?

NEIL                   Just accept Mum that I know enough of the situation over here to know that he's at risk ... it may have been my fault.

MARY                   Dear God ...

NEIL                   Pull out every stop ... get him away ... I've tried but he won't listen to me ... alright Mum...?

MARY                   Yes, Yes ... alright darling ... I'll try and think of something ... are you alright Neil?

NEIL                   What ...?

MARY                   YOU ... are you alright...?

NEIL                   Yes, I'm alright ... don't worry about me Mum ... bye now (RINGS OFF)

(LIGHTS ON MARY ONLY)

MARY

Oh, my God, what shall I do? Oh, Seamus you stupid idiot ... this is real war you're playing at ... not Star Wars ... what shall I do? Ring him ...no, that's no good, he won't take any notice of me ... send him a telegram ... do they send telegrams these days? (SHE GRABS 'PHONE BOOK, LOOKS UP TELEGRAMS AND THEN DIALS) Telegrams? Yes, can I send a telegram to someone in Northern Ireland these days ...? telemesssage ... delivered next day ... no ... no thank you for your help ... it must get there today ... thank you ... (PUTS DOWN THE 'PHONE) ... no good ... a telephone message to the stage door ... they don't have a stage door 'phone ... the management ... that's better ... will bear more weight ... (CONSULTS BOOK) ... (PICKS UP 'PHONE) ... 0232 669660 ...yes ... hallo could you take a message for Seamus Gordon please ... he's appearing in Macbeth ... no I can't speak to him ... yes ... a message ... it's very urgent ... it's his mother calling and I have terrible news ... please come home at once ... that I must see him ... very bad news ... yes, that's right ... you'll see that he gets it when he comes in? Thank you very much. (PUTS DOWN 'PHONE) ... Well it's the truth isn't it? It's very bad news ... now what do I do ...? He'll ring me back ... go away for twenty-four hours? Leave the 'phone off the hook? Then he's have to come ... no, no ... better be honest ... I can get him to come ... at least I think I can ... better be here when he 'phones ... Oh, dear God protect him ,... if

MARY

(contd)

it is possible please put out your hand and save Seamus ...don't let him get killed ... stay the hands of those who think he must die ... (STOPS PRAYING) ... Dear God when will it ever end ... this Litany of revenge ... God (SHOUTING) do something about Ireland ... do something, do something ... do something ... we are a Nation who have loved you ... a holy nation. We have taken your Word to the ends of the earth ... why can't you save us from ourselves ... can you hear me God ... I'm a lousy Christian, why should He listen to me ... I just stopped caring ... opted out ... yes, yes, it's true ... I was comfortable, I was happy so I forgot the troubles of my Country and now Seamus ... oh, please God DO something ... dear Heaven what's the use, it's what we all do ... ignore God and then come screaming to him when cornered by our own mistakes (HONESTLY AGAIN) Dear Lord, please protect my son, Seamus, ... please preserve his life. (THE 'PHONE RINGS ... MARY STARES AT IT ... CAN IT BE SEAMUS ALREADY?) Yes ... hallo ... Oh, Joan (CONFUSED) yes ...no ... yes ... lovely to hear you ... the Church Fete ... Garden Stall ...the fifteenth ... no, I didn't get to the Chelsea Flower Show ... Agapanthus, yes, yes, can you have some when I divide them in the Autumn? ... (HER MIND IS MILES AWAY) no ... yes, yes, yes ... look Joan I am expecting a very important call from my son and I'm not being very intelligent, could you ring me tomorrow? Yes, yes, he's alright ... no, no ... nothing serious ... yes, yes, goodbye!

(PUTS DOWN THE 'PHONE AND WANDERS ROUND THE ROOM, EVENTUALLY SHE SITS DOWN IN FRONT OF THE FIRE. THE LIGHT FADES GRADUALLY, POSSIBLY THERE COULD BE MOONLIGHT REFLECTING THROUGH THE WINDOW. OTHERWISE THE ROOM IS IN DARKNESS. MARY SITS IN HER CHAIR, A CLOCK TICKS. SUDDENLY, THE ROOM GOES COMPLETELY BLACK AND AN EXPLOSION BLASTS THE STILLNESS ... A HUGH HARSH EXPLOSIION. AS THE SOUND DIES DOWN MARY'S VOICE CAN BE HEARD CRYING "no ... no ... no ... no ..." A SPOT PICKS UP THE FACE OF JAMES GORDON IN THE PORTRAIT AND THEN WIDENS TO TAKE IN THE WHOLE ROOM. MARY IS SITTING IN THE SAME PLACE IN A POSTURE OF STUNNED GRIEF; A MAN COMES TO THE DOOR ... IT IS SEAMUS.

SEAMUS

Mum! (HE GOES OVER TO HER, SINKS DOWN IN FRONT OF HER AND PUTS HIS ARMS AROUND HER. SHE WEEPS UNASHAMEDLY ON HIS NECK. LATER HE SAYS:)

I've brought him home ... he's in the church. Do you want to go down?

MARY

Later.

SEAMUS

(SITS BESIDE HER) Anything I can do?

MARY

This Army Chaplain came and told me. He said ... do you know any more?

SEAMUS

Not much, it was a remote control bomb in a culvert under the road. His vehicle was simply blown to pieces. He wouldn't have known what was happening.

MARY                   He only had three more weeks to go, his last term.

SEAMUS                 Yes.

MARY                   Did .....did you see him? (SHE WANTS TO KNOW IF THEY WERE ON SPEAKING TERMS)

SEAMUS                 Yes ... he turned up at the show one night, came round afterwards and we went round to my digs and talked. I'd do anything to undo the past ... not to have hurt him ... but there are things you can't undo.

MARY                   (DULLY) No ...

SEAMUS                 Did he get you to send the message?

MARY                   He rang me ..... what was it all about?

SEAMUS                 I know this Catholic family in Belfast, they're sort of cousins of Katy, they're friends of mine, they've got a son called Kevin ... Kevin's, well, quite involved. Sometimes when he had had a jar too much he talked ... I wanted to show them that at least some Brits sympathised, cared about their cause. The night Neil came round to my digs Kevin dropped in ... rather late. I introduced Neil as my brother but I think Kevin sussed that he was a soldier. Neil was very worried, thought he might have endangered my life by coming to my digs ... but it may have been the other way round.

MARY                   He was coming out of the Army.

SEAMUS                    Yes ... he told me.

MARY                      He wanted to try and do something ... make the British understand ... I thought he might have been able to achieve something because he cared so much about this Country...

SEAMUS                    This country ...?

MARY                      This country ... this country ... he loved his own Country enough to suffer if it's policies were wrong ... and to spend a life-time trying to get things right ... but there wasn't any time .. we didn't give him time ... it's what we always do ... destroy the people who could help the most ... they didn't give him any time ...

SEAMUS                    People like him do change things ... Egoists just muck things up (SILENCE)

MARY                      (KNOWING WHAT IS ON HIS MIND) Seamus, they weren't connected ... that visit to your digs and ... the bomb under his Ferret. I'm sure of it.

SEAMUS                    I'll never know ... for sure. (HE BREAKS AWAY, WRESTLING WITH HIS OWN SUFFERING) Do you believe in life after death?

MARY                      I don't know ... I think so ....

SEAMUS                    But where ... where ... how? He was all blown to bits ... They seem nonsense ... the platitudes ...

MARY "In my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so I would have told you" ... mansions ... different sort of places ...

SEAMUS I shall never know ... all my life I shall never know if I hadn't ... Oh, my God (HE BREAKS DOWN) Oh, for God's sake Mum, shout at me, blame me, give me hell or something ... I'm no good, even the things I care about back-fire ... I hate myself so much ... (SHE GOES AND SITS BY HIM AND CAN BE HEARD MUTTERING SOMETHING LIKE "FORGIVENESS..... "OUR TRESPASSES .....BOTH OF US". SEAMUS EVENTUALLY CALMS DOWN AND PULLS HIMSELF TOGETHER)

SEAMUS Mum - the service. I promised to ring the Vicar. The regiment are sending a Guard of Honour. Can you think what hymns you want?

MARY St Patrick's breast-plate..

SEAMUS "I bind unto myself today" ...isn't that a prayer?

MARY It's a hymn, too. We used to sing it every day at school - nearly every day. (SHE SINGS RATHER WILDLY)

I bind unto myself today  
The power of God to hold in need  
His eye to watch, His might to stay,  
His ear to hearken to my need.  
Something, something, something,  
The word of God to give me speech  
His heavenly host to be my guard."  
It's a hymn, I know it's a hymn....



SEAMUS (CALMING HER) It's OK, Mum, I'll find it. I'll get old Watson onto it and we'll sing it.

MARY And "Morag of Dunvagen".

SEAMUS "Morag of Dunvagen".

MARY It's a lament. Ask the piper to play "Morag of Dunvagen". It's very beautiful. The pipers played it when your father died.

SEAMUS Alright.

MARY (BREAKING AWAY - THEN TURNS AND LOOKS AT HIM - SUDDENLY, SHARPLY) Seamus, don't give up. Don't give up loving Ireland - and trying to find a way forward.

SEAMUS I hate Ireland. It's a bloody ruthless, cruel place. I never want to go there again.

MARY This is a reaction you know.

SEAMUS Yes...

MARY Ireland is a terrible place. If you once love Ireland it never gets out of your blood. That's why you mustn't give up. If it could be healed, Seamus, this thousand years of sorrow - this thousand years of wrong between these two islands - then it would be a benison for all mankind. Seamus don't give up.

SEAMUS

(TURNS AND LOOKS OUT OF THE WINDOW; TO HIMSELF) "Grace of grace". (THE MEANING OF THE WORD "GRACE" IS NOW WHOLLY FRESH TO HIM. HE STRAIGHTENS UP AND LOOKS DOWN AT THE VERY UNTIDY DESK). Would you like me to try and deal with "hump"?

FADE

END OF PLAY