

Hunted becomes the hunter

*The Bedsit by Paul Scellar
performed by Hurstwood Theatre
Company at the Jubilee Theatre
Chiswick - until Nov 16/17*

WITH all things Irish currently in vogue, Paul Scellar's play is a well-timed slice of Celtic drama.

The central character in *The Bedsit* is Brady, a middle-aged Ulsterman who we discover sitting alone in his dingy bedsit contemplating a bloodsport painting which dominates the wall.

Clutching a Bible, he seems nothing more than a harmless, lonely old man, who 'lives in broken bottles and empty bars.' But it is not long before Dempster, his new lodger, and Anton arrive. What they want with Brady becomes increasingly clear as the tension in this brutal play mounts.

Scellar's third play is tightly scripted, with a brooding undercurrent of menace that erupts in a terrifying finale. The painting of the fox-hunt is the play's symbolic metaphor. The fox is terrified and lonely, always running, much like Brady himself.

As Ireland's troubled history unfolds, we realise that Brady was once a hitman for the IRA and Dempster and Anton want him back in the fold.

But Brady is having none of it. "Don't expect me to follow you, I'm not like you any more. How do you sleep at night? I can never sleep with anyone else, but I never sleep alone either, the guilt always creeps in," he says.

In this way Brady becomes the hunted, Dempster and Anton the hunters. Brady is played by James Ellis, who has rarely been absent from the stage and screen since he became a household name as Bert Lynch in the seminal 60s cop show *Z Cars*.

His performance is gripping, and he is more than ably supported by Cliff Hylands and Andrew Maclean as the terrorists.

The sparse set contributes to the malevolent atmosphere, and the beautiful and haunting Celtic lyrics sung by Polly Bowes and Phillip Hoffman place *The Bedsit* in its historical context.

At the play's climax, Brady is forced to put a gun to his head for rejecting 'The Cause'. I won't let the cat out of the bag, but the finale is a superb twist where the meaning of the painting is completely reversed.

The Bedsit courts controversy in the same way that Neil Jordan's film 'Michael Collins' does. No doubt this will propel Paul Scellar into the land of important playwrights.

Paul Edwards