

The Bedsit

Despite its title, Paul Sellar's short, sharp thriller about hunters and the hunted is set in a gloomy, skeletal space without a bed and with only one armless chair to sit on.

Brady's sparsely furnished flat, which he shares with a couple of young thugs, Irish birds of passage, is probably in Kilburn. Off stage we see Polly Bowles and Phillip Hoffman as pub vocalists rendering a stirring republican ballad to help swell the IRA rattlebox.

James Ellis plays Brady, an ageing Ulsterman with a pot belly and sad eyes, drawing our attention to the sole decorative feature of his room, a rural landscape depicting horses and riders in hunting pink. "Chinless wonders and Hooray Henries," he scoffs, "but notice, there's no sign of the fox."

Enter the cocky Dempster (Cliff Hylands), Brady's lodger, soon followed by his foul-mouthed chum Anton (Andrew Maclean), and we have a threatening situation reminiscent of *The Birthday Party* or *The Caretaker*. But despite the deliberately Pinteresque dialogue, delivered with rapid-fire precision, there are few pauses and no real mystery about the developing plot.

These are ruthless IRA hitmen on active service, come to exact vengeance on a foxy former gunman. And apart from a little joke about a coded telephone message, designed to hoodwink the audience, the only questions are how and when? But author Sellar and his director Mike Friend keep us guessing right up to the end with a neatly staged denouement — a volley of gunfire in the dark and question marks over what will be revealed as the final body count.

John Thaxter