Pentecost by Stewart Parker is a play set in Belfast during the Ulster Workers’ Strike of 1974. It grapples the nettle of Belfast history, politics and division and makes it a little less tangled. There’s people power on the streets, but unlike in the idealistic 60s, this very power traps other people in their houses. Our four characters are so trapped, together with the ghost who joins them from time to time.

The set is claustrophobic and cluttered. We’re in the main room of the house. It’s called the kitchen but the working kitchen with range and Belfast sink is beyond this living part of the kitchen. The furnishings of the room are frozen in the fifties and layers of wallpaper are peeling off the walls. The top of the walls are unfinished with layers of bricks emerging at the very top.

The wall on our left, which slopes inwards, houses a fireplace in its centre with alcoves on either side of it. The first alcove contains a wooden cabinet with 2 drawers and beneath them, one on either side, 2 cupboards. The surface of this cabinet is dressed with a lace trimmed cloth and laid out with ornaments and souvenirs. Then comes the fireplace, a black leaded one with a row of figured ceramic tiles, set vertically on either side of the grate. A fire glows in the grate from time to time; there’s a coal scuttle and companion-set on the hearth and in front of the fire there’s a hearth rug. The mantelpiece is crowded with more bric a brac; a small clock has pride of place in the centre and the ledge is trimmed with an overhang of scalloped lace. Above the mantelpiece is a large, faded, landscape painting and on either side of this is a gas light. 2 gas pipes leading down to the lights descend from the ceiling. Beyond the fireplace in the next alcove is the dresser. It’s pine with shelves above and cupboards below. Delph-ware is laid out on the shelves of the dresser with old- fashioned mugs on the wide shelf. The wall facing the audience meets the first wall at a wide angle. There’s a door set in it which leads to the working kitchen. Beyond this door the working kitchen houses the range, complete with kettle and a Belfast sink, Tea towels and food storage. The working kitchen has another door, sometimes apparent, which leads out to the yard, with its high enclosing brick wall. Next to the door, nearer the centre of the stage, is a small semi-circular table covered with a cloth and set with a variety of ornaments and decorative objects. Further along is the sash window, obscured by a lace curtain and with thicker curtains on either side of the window, hanging from a curtain wire. The window looks out on the covered yard, with a high wall and dustbin. This yard is sometimes lit and visible through the window. A standard lamp with fringed shade stands to the right of the window. The final wall meets the forward facing wall at a wide angle just beyond the window. There’s a cupboard set in it, with a sloping edge, closed with a painted wooden door. This is the under-stairs cupboard. Closer to the audience is the door which leads out into the hall and the stairs. The hall is sometimes visible and when the stairs are lit up anyone standing on them, or running up and down them, can be seen through the right hand side wall, and its tissue thin wall paper.

The furniture in the room is fifties-style or older. There’s a wooden rocking chair with cushions, almost directly in front of the kitchen door, but a bit further forward. Pushed under this is a bag full of knitting. There’s an old-fashioned 1 bar electric fire close to the chair. To the right of the chair, closer to the audience, is a 2 seater, upright sofa. The sofa is dressed with antimacassars and cushions. At the right-hand end of the sofa is a small round occasional table. A faded rug lies in front of the sofa, while behind it is a table, covered with a lace cloth and with a small vase in its centre. A cassette recorder is on the table and 4 bentwood chairs are tucked underneath it, one on each side.

The room is drab and shabby, and lacks even a touch of vibrant colour. It all looks cold, faded and comfortless.

**The Characters**

The first person we meet is Marian. She’s a personable young woman in her early thirties, slim, with regular features, neat nose and small mouth and large intense eyes. Her long, straight hair is mid-brown in colour and frames her face. She wears a tan leather coat, over a straight, brown knee-length skirt and a red jersey. A striped scarf is round her neck and she wears black knee-length boots. Later she appears in a thigh-length, Aran knit cardigan over a long nightdress and wears thick socks on her feet. She has a variety of day outfits, including a boldly-patterned, belted, maroon dress with blue and orange lozenges, a smart black jacket and black boots. There’s also a bias cut skirt in bold checks of brown, beige and black with a black polo-neck tucked into the skirt. She wears a slim wrist watch. All Marian’s clothes are neat and well-kept and worn with flair and confidence. They are very reminiscent of the 70s. Judith Roddy plays the part of Marian.

Lenny, played by Paul Mallon, appears next. He is tall and broad-shouldered, lithe and slender and is in his mid thirties. His handsome, lean face has a high forehead, square chin and wide mouth. His dark brown hair hangs lankly to his collar and he sports a dark brown beard. He wears a black jacket and black flared trousers and a striped jumper over a brown and cream shirt. Later he wears a variety of trousers, all flared at the bottom, and different jumpers, all reminiscent of the 1970s. He also wears a tan leather jacket. He and Marian are in the process of divorcing.

Lily is the ghost who once lived in the house and kitchen. She’s a stocky figure with a round, wrinkled face and broad mouth. Her dull, mouse-brown hair is plastered to her head. She wears a small maroon hat and a matching boucle coat and later a navy and white flowery dress with mid-length sleeves and an apron around her waist. Carole Moore undertakes this role.

A frantic banging on the front door heralds the arrival of Ruth, played by Roisin Gallagher. She has long, dark hair, sometimes worn in a pony tail, and her wide eyes are outlined with black liner. She has fine brows and full lips and a slightly dimpled chin. Of medium height, and slender, she is in her early thirties. She first wears a white plastic Macintosh and what seems to be a bandanna round her head. Underneath the coat she wears a navy and red pinafore dress with a yellow blouse with a pointed collar and she always wears sensible shoes with a solid heel. She also wears a variety of outfits which remind us of the 1970s. We glimpse a smart black dress under her coat and later a pretty, gauzy summer dress with small zig-zag pattern, black on white. Later she appears in a full-length nightdress which she covers with a quilted dressing gown, white with pale blue flowers. All the dresses and skirts which the women wear are knee length.

The final member of the cast is Peter, played by Will Irvine. Like Lenny he is tall and thin, with broad shoulders and without an extra ounce of flesh. He has a broad forehead, light eyes, sticky-out ears a broad nose and full lips. There is a slight dimple on his chin. His mid-brown hair is straight and hangs over his eyes and down to his collar. Peter arrives in a classic sheepskin coat, over a beige polo-neck and blue flared jeans. Later he wears a black cardigan over a boldly patterned shirt and black flared trousers. Later still he sports a denim jacket and a maroon and cream patterned shirt, worn with the black flares.

Pentecost was Stewart Parker’s final play. It was directed by Jimmy Fay, with set and costumes designed by Alyson Cummins.

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