

SECTION A**General notes****Setting**

- Part One is set mostly in the Fairchild-MacKenzie stately home in Argyll, though one scene is on a hillside.
- Part Two is partly in Auntie Betty's flat in Clydebank and partly out in the street.
- The play has a gap of 14 years between the two parts.

Set, props, lighting, sound, costume

- The sets are not intended to be representational. The furniture in Part One is over-sized to be in proportion to the size of the adult actors playing the children. In Part Two, Auntie Betty's flat is partly repainted during the action.
- Some props are more than just dressing, they are essential parts of the plot – the Britannia chariot and helmet, for example.
- Lighting could make up for a lack of scenery, particularly in scenes where it will create mood and atmosphere – Hughie's hillside, for example.
- There is the effect of a firework display.
- Sound too is used to set the scene – the music, the owl hooting, the radio effects, etc. Rufus's barking, though done on-stage by the actors, is an important sound effect.
- The period requires appropriate costume which should also reflect the class of the characters.

Language

- The language is realistic.
 - Mostly that of working class Glaswegians – '*A sair haun*', '*big dod o' breid*'.
 - But also Emily's 'posh' speech – '*actually*', '*face-flannels*'.
 - There is comedy in Emily's failure to understand the demotic – '*Sayer honn?*'
- The children use vocabulary and sentence structure appropriate to their age.
- The children use vocabulary and dialect appropriate to their class.
- The children gradually adopt each other's language and speech patterns.

Comedy, wit and humour

- This is a predominantly comic play, though serious issues are dealt with.
- Much comedy arises from the use of dialect and the sharp Glasgow wit.
- There is comedy in the way the children pick up each other's language.
 - Emily: '*You were dead lucky, Hughie. Nae kiddin...*'.
 - Morag: '*You were unconscious, actually, Hughie...*'.
- The 'childishness' of the Part One dialogue is funny.
- The relationships between characters are another source of comedy.
- There are elements of slapstick in Billy's wall-papering scene.

Acting style/techniques

- It is important to capture a realistic, naturalistic quality in the acting. These are ordinary people in situations that are far from ordinary in Part One, and out of the ordinary in Part Two.
- This naturalism must be maintained against non-naturalistic settings.
- The naturalism must be maintained even though the audience are aware that children are being portrayed by adult actors.
- Even Hughie's monologue (Part One, Scene 5) has a naturalistic sound and feel, though Hughie would not, of course, speak like this in real life.
- Dialogue is often brisk and witty, almost like a stage routine.
- Four of the actors must age 14 years between Parts.

Actor/audience relationships

- The actors sometimes speak their thoughts aloud.
- Audience laughter in a play that is funny helps to shape the flow of the action.
- Four (out of the five) characters age 14 years in the course of the play. The actors must persuade the audience to accept this leap from childhood to adulthood.

Stage directions

- The writer leaves many decisions about staging to the director and designer.
- There are few descriptions of the physical appearance of the characters.
- Some decisions are left to the director: '*Improvised business with the "how to detain an alien card"*'; '*Perhaps it is mounted on bogey wheels?*'; '*Possible business here with the budgie...*'.
- Stage directions are often informal – '*Billy makes she's-a-loony sign*'

at others'; 'leaving lonely wee Hughie – who's probably just shat himself again'. This helps to indicate to the actor the mood required at that moment.

Relevance to Scottish society

- The play is about Scotland and Scottish society:
 - The poverty of Scotland just before the Second World War
 - A lack of employment
 - War
 - Ambition
 - The dependence of young people on their elders
 - Integration of foreign nationals
 - The difference between the clear moral standards of the community and the apparent laxity of the younger people
 - Racism – anti-German feeling deliberately fostered by the government.

Target audience

- Scots, especially, perhaps, those who remember the War and the Coronation
- Those who are concerned about how Scotland has developed since the Thirties – the diversity of influences from the past, the conflicting pressures of different ethnic backgrounds, the changing relationships within society
- Young people, who will identify with the problem of relationships between generations
- Those with an interest in history
- Those with an interest in politics.

Structure of the play

An overview

- Each Part progresses chronologically. Between them, there is a gap of 14 years.
- There are 15 scenes, giving the play a cinematic structure. This technique pushes the storyline on quickly, even when there is a break in the time sequence. It builds up a sense of tension.
- One important character, Auntie Betty, only appears in Part Two.
- One influential character – Elizabeth Quinn – does not appear at all but we hear a great deal about her and recognise her influence on Morag.
- The children’s parents too are unseen but important; their very absence has a significant effect on the children.
- Two nationalities are involved – Scottish and German. The Germans are the off-stage villains of the war, killing the families of our characters. At the same time, German Agatha is a heroine to Emily and a victim of persecution by the British government.
- Religion. The children have a barely-conscious awareness of the religious difference between them, if only at the level of football teams. As an adult, Hughie rejects the bigotry, even though he is alienating his father in doing so.

Part One: Shanghaied

Scene 1

(Pages 10–31) The Fairchild-MacKenzie stately home.

Begins action/introduces storyline

- The ‘scene-setting’ Chamberlain broadcast
- The arrival of the evacuees
- The working-class dialect
- The memories of the parting from family and the train journey
- The contrast between the two social classes.

Introduces characters

- We meet the four characters and learn something of the relationships between them.
- We see the evacuees’ fear – inspired by the house as much as the separation from their families.
- We see that Billy is protective of Morag.

- We see that Hughie is an outsider, not just because he isn't related to any of the others but also because of his social problems and his religion.
- We hear the invisible Rufus, a useful confidant for Emily and a further cause of bewilderment for the evacuees.

Introduces themes and issues

- The War
- Relationships
- Social divisions
- Religion
- Sense of family
- The work ethic.

Scene 2

(Pages 32–44) The Fairchild-MacKenzie stately home.

Develops action and storyline

- Emily, the hostess, is self-confident and in charge.
- The evacuees are sensitive and defensive.
- Morag is, temporarily, drawn to take sides with Emily against the 'rough' boys.
- Emily laughs at the others' ignorance of social graces.
- They laugh at her ignorance of the language and traditions of street life.
- Their lack of a common framework of social behaviour leads to hostility.
- They discover a shared hatred of Hitler which brings them together briefly.
- The 'get-Hitler' game inadvertently marks out Hughie as an outsider and, therefore, a natural victim.

Develops characters and relationships

- Billy is very protective of Morag.
- Billy is also protective of Hughie when he feels he is being unfairly treated.
- Morag instinctively clings to Billy but is captivated by Emily's *savoir-faire*.
- Hughie fights his own corner, a natural outsider.
- At first, Emily is self-confident and feels superior to the evacuees.
- She becomes frustrated and angry when the others make her feel excluded by their shared enthusiasm for food she has never heard of.
- The children try to score points off each other with their stories about their parents.

- The anti-German feelings that have been drilled into the children surmount the social divide between them.
- Billy is impressed by Emily and subconsciously begins to imitate her way of speaking.
- Morag senses that Billy fancies Emily.

Develops themes and issues

- The War
 - Emily's father is off at the War.
 - Billy and Morag's father is off at the War.
 - Emily and Hughie share the fact that their mothers are doing war work.
 - Hughie's father is in a reserved occupation. The others find this discreditable.
 - The evacuation has changed the lives of all of them for ever.
- Relationships
 - The relationships within the group are complex and constantly shifting:
 - The evacuees against Emily
 - The girls against the boys
 - The other three against Hughie
 - Morag and Hughie against Billy.
- Social divisions
 - Emily is separated from the others by speech, vocabulary, food, way of life.
 - But Hughie is even more deprived than Billy and Morag.
- Sense of family
 - Billy and Morag tend to stick together.
 - Hughie is temporarily made a member of the family.
 - 'I don't wanny be safe if my mammy's in danger!'
 - 'I love my Uncle Jackie!'
 - Children of both classes boast about their parents' activities.
 - Hughie is very defensive of his non-combatant father.
- The work ethic
 - Hughie boasts about his father's work in the shipyards.
 - Hughie's mother is doing war work.
 - Emily's mother feels the need to work, if only as a volunteer.

Scene 3

(Pages 45–52) The Fairchild-MacKenzie stately home.

Develops action and storyline

- The children now play games together.
- Tension, still, due to ignorance: Hughie doesn't understand cake candles.

Develops characters and relationships

- Emily automatically takes the lead in the games.
- Morag's admiration for Emily is approaching hero-worship levels.
- Emily has picked up some 'lower class' speech mannerisms.
- Emily feels sorry for Hughie since he is even more deprived than the others.

Develops themes and issues

- The War
 - Evacuees are believed to bring nits and diseases with them.
- Relationships
 - Morag plays at being Emily whom she admires so much.
- Social divisions
 - No-one at school plays with Emily because she is from 'the Big House'.
 - Hughie doesn't understand the etiquette of blowing out cake candles.
- Sense of family
 - Hughie's mother has never visited him.
 - Morag and Billy do get parental visits.

Scene 4

(Pages 53–56) Morag's bedroom.

Develops action and storyline

- Morag has a nightmare about an air raid.
- Billy believes Emily is a spy.
- They plan to 'detain' her.

Develops characters and relationships

- Billy's suspicions of Emily bring about a change of attitude to her.
- Morag's essential sweetness is emphasised by her prayer which even includes the neighbour's cat.

- Billy the organiser is prepared to cope with planning the arrest of a German spy.

Develops themes and issues

- Racial prejudice
 - All things German, even songs, are bad.
- Sense of family
 - Morag’s prayer lists all family members.
 - Billy’s care of the frightened Morag.
- The war
 - The air-raid nightmare.
 - The attitude of suspicion – spies under every bed.

Scene 5

(Pages 56–57) A hillside.

Develops action and storyline

- Hughie has run away.

Develops characters and relationships

- Hughie is displaying considerable courage, tackling the unknown journey to Clydebank.
- He shows some sympathy for Emily.

Develops themes and issues

- Social divisions
 - Agatha does not realise how seriously Hughie will take the burning of his trousers.
 - Wearing a kilt strikes Hughie as making him like a lassie.
 - Different attitudes to cleanliness.
 - Different breeds of dogs for different social classes.
- Religion
 - Hughie’s Catholicism.
- Sense of family
 - Hughie is going back to his “ma ‘n’ da”.

Scene 6

(Pages 58–62) The Fairchild-MacKenzie stately home.

Develops action and storyline

- Billy and Morag capture Emily, the ‘spy’.
- They assume she is responsible for Hughie’s disappearance.
- Emily persuades Morag that she isn’t a spy.
- All three go to search for Hughie.

Develops characters and relationships

- Emily treats the spy business as a game.
- In her anger, she becomes even more emphatically ‘posh’ in her vocabulary and attitude.
- Once released, her language becomes more like Morag’s again.
- Emily takes confident charge of the hunt for Hughie.

Develops themes and issues

- The War
 - ‘There’s no such thing as a good German.’
- Relationships
 - Morag and Billy are united against the German spy.
 - Morag is easily persuaded that they are wrong.
 - Emily takes charge when real action is needed.
- Social divisions
 - Emily’s speech shows her natural upper-class slang being eroded by the introduction of new terms learnt – subconsciously – from the others.
- Sense of family
 - The drama of Hughie’s disappearance gives the children a sense of belonging together, like a family.

Scene 7

(Pages 63–66) The Fairchild-MacKenzie stately home.

Develops action and storyline

- Hughie has been rescued.

Develops characters and relationships

- The four children are united.
- They have become very like each other in their attitudes.

Develops themes and issues

- The War
 - Ironically, it is the German Agatha who has carried Hughie all the way home.
 - Agatha is to be interned.
- Relationships
 - The evacuees are now entirely supportive of Agatha.
 - All four children slip in and out of each other's linguistic styles.
- Social divisions
 - The social divisions are much less clear now.
- Sense of family
 - The children show all the characteristics of members of the same family.
 - They all sing what should be Hughie's song – 'My Maw's an engineer!'

Part Two: Elizabeth**Scene 1**

(Pages 68–71) The Street.

Begins action/introduces storyline

- The 'scene-setting' Coronation Day radio sounds
- The introduction of Morag and Hughie, fourteen years on
- Hughie's anti-bigotry stance
- The first glimpse of the grown-up Emily.

Introduces characters

- We meet Morag and Hughie again and learn something of their adult relationship.
- Hughie has changed: no longer a streetwise wee hooligan, more a 'sweetie-wife'.
- We meet Emily again, her social class above the others very evident.
- Our curiosity is aroused by Emily's distressed state.
- We wonder if Billy, too, will make an appearance in the play.

Introduces themes and issues

- The Coronation
- Relationships
- Social divisions

- Religion
- Sense of family
- The work ethic.

Scene 2

(Pages 72–86) Auntie Betty's house.

Develops action and storyline

- Billy is reintroduced. He will paper the room rather than get caught up in Coronation celebrations.
- The arrival of Emily.
- We learn about the Clydebank bombing and the deaths in Billy's family.
- Morag is planning to emigrate to America, with Elizabeth Quinn.
- We learn of Billy's affair with Elizabeth Quinn.
- The budgie escapes.

Develops characters and relationships

- We are introduced to Auntie Betty.
- We meet Billy again.
- We 'meet' the invisible budgie, a parallel figure to Rufus in Part One.
- Billy reveals his communist sympathies.
- Hughie regards Billy's political stance as no more than 'a chip on your shoulder'.
- Morag is much tougher than she was as a wee girl.
- Hughie is much softer than he appeared to be as a wee boy.

Develops themes and issues

- The Coronation
 - Auntie Betty is excited about the preparations for the celebrations.
 - Auntie Betty is a fervent admirer of the Queen.
 - Billy regards royalty as an anachronism.
- Relationships
 - Auntie Betty bullies Billy, in a motherly way.
 - Billy teases Auntie Betty very affectionately.
 - Auntie Betty is immediately sympathetic to Emily's plight.
 - Billy reveals his attitude to women.
 - Billy doubts if Morag can bring herself to leave Auntie Betty.
- Social divisions
 - Billy's attitude to society.
 - Emily expects them to have a bath in the house.
 - Billy mocks Emily's accent.

- **Religious bigotry**
 - Billy blames Catholicism and Protestantism alike for social problems.
- **Sense of family**
 - Auntie Betty's self-sacrifice in bringing up Morag and Billy.
- **The work ethic**
 - Billy is full of talk about the rights of the working classes.
 - He isn't a hard worker: he has failed to fill in the mouse-hole for Auntie Betty; the wallpapering is long overdue. He is only doing it now as an anti-Coronation gesture.

Scene 3

(Pages 86–90) The Street.

Develops action and storyline

- The boys are searching for the runaway budgie.
- Hughie is about to do his National Service. Billy has already done his.

Develops characters and relationships

- Billy enjoys warning Hughie about National Service.
- Billy is proud of his 'politicisation'.
- Hughie talks at length about a budgie he saw being picked on because it was 'different'.
- He fears he may prove to be that budgie, in army life.
- Billy has doubts about Hughie's manliness.

Develops themes and issues

- **Relationships**
 - Billy enjoys scaring Hughie about army life.
- **Social divisions**
 - Billy says only Borstal boys and public school boys enjoy the army.

Scene 4

(Pages 90–103) Auntie Betty's house.

Develops action and storyline

- We learn what happened to Morag and Emily's parents.
- Hughie arrives, dressed as Britannia.
- The girls apply Hughie's make-up.
- Auntie Betty reads their cards.
- Is there relevance in the cards each of the three gets?

- Morag tries to kill the mouse while Hughie screams in terror like Emily and Auntie Betty.

Develops characters and relationships

- Emily and Morag develop a new, grown-up relationship.
- Auntie Betty is stubborn.
- She expects to impose her attitudes on others.
- Morag stands up to Auntie Betty – and upsets her.
- Hughie unexpectedly asks Morag to go out with him.
- Prepared to mock, the girls are moved instead by Auntie Betty's account of the loss of her fiancé.

Develops themes and issues

- The Coronation
 - Auntie Betty recalls the Abdication.
 - Hughie is entering fully into the Coronation celebrations.
 - Auntie Betty is excited about the ceremony.
- Relationships
 - Morag and Emily discuss sex.
 - They share jokes and gossip.
 - Morag and Auntie Betty have very different attitudes.
 - Hughie appears to have feelings for Morag.
 - Auntie Betty is terrified that Morag will indeed go to America.
 - She hopes that Morag will get married instead.
- Social divisions
 - Morag and Emily seem unaware of the class gulf between them.
 - Emily's accent is now even more markedly different.
- Sense of family
 - Morag is deeply grateful to Auntie Betty for taking them in.
 - Nevertheless, Morag is keen to emigrate, and leave brother and Auntie behind.
 - Emily is surprisingly casual about her father's death in the war.

Scene 5

(Pages 103–110) Auntie Betty's house.

Develops action and storyline

- Billy is papering the room.
- We learn that Emily has had a row with her fiancé.
- Billy begins to feel attracted to her.
- Their passionate kiss is seen by Auntie Betty.
- Billy is even willing to attend the Coronation Parade for Emily's sake.

Develops characters and relationships

- Billy is – at first – hostile to Emily, mocking her class.
- She is making the effort to be friends with him.
- This develops very quickly into passion.

Develops themes and issues

- The Coronation
 - Billy's DIY is his way of making a statement against the Coronation.
- Relationships
 - Emily's reforming credentials turn out to be at least as genuine as Billy's.
 - She questions his claim to believe that all people are the same.
- Social divisions
 - Billy lectures Emily on capitalism.
 - Emily reveals sympathy with the Scottish Nationalists.
 - Billy has lost his hatred of Germans.
 - He is ambivalent about seeing all social classes as just the same.
- Religious bigotry
 - Billy claims to see no difference between Catholics and Protestants.
- Sense of family
 - Auntie Betty is protective of Billy.
 - Her sympathy for Emily does not extend to welcoming her as a member of her family.
- The work ethic
 - Billy, the workers' champion, is a poor worker himself.

Scene 6

(Pages 111–114) The Street.

Develops action and storyline

- Hughie's splendid chariot.
- Hughie and Morag suspect their childhood pretence, that Billy and Emily were in love, may now be coming true.
- Emily is hiding from her fiancé.

Develops characters and relationships

- Hughie is *very* enthusiastic about the Queen's dress and the ceremony of the Coronation.
- He is ambitious of becoming *chief* window dresser.

- Morag and Hughie share a childhood memory of teasing Emily and Billy about being in love.
- Morag, Hughie and Emily share happy memories of their childhood period together.

Develops themes and issues

- The Coronation
 - Hughie finds it all exciting and stimulating.
- Relationships
 - Emily seems to have decided to break with her fiancé.
 - Hughie and Morag seem to approve of the possibility of a relationship between Emily and Billy.
- Social divisions
 - Emily's attitude to her mother is in stark contrast with the others' attitude to Auntie Betty.
- Sense of family
 - Emily is very rude about her mother.
- The work ethic
 - Hughie, of all of them, has developed a real enthusiasm for his job.

Scene 7

(Pages 114–116) Auntie Betty's house.

Develops action and storyline

- Auntie Betty is furious with Billy. She actually hits him a couple of times.
- She tells him that he must marry the girl he has made pregnant.

Develops characters and relationships

- Auntie Betty's domination of Billy.
- Billy's weakness of character.

Develops themes and issues

- Relationships
 - The Billy/Elizabeth relationship appeared to be over but Auntie Betty is insisting on a marriage.
 - Elizabeth tried to protect Billy by refusing to name him.
 - Her father beat the truth out of her.
 - The women are all strong, determined and know what they want.

- Billy reveals a weakness of character and Hughie is something less than a full-blooded man.
- Religious bigotry
 - Elizabeth Quinn is a Catholic but Auntie Betty thinks 'there's a good chance she'll turn' in order to marry Billy.
- Sense of family
 - Mr Quinn recognises that Auntie Betty is the real power in the household.
 - He is prepared to 'leather' the information he wants out of his daughter.

Scene 8

(Pages 117–122) The Street.

Develops action and storyline

- Morag and Hughie are on a high after the success of the Parade.
- Emily is miserable. Auntie Betty has summoned her fiancé to take her away.
- She tries to get through to Billy but he denies her – as her fiancé's off-stage car horn 'crows' three times.
- Morag tries to persuade Billy to go after Emily.
- She reiterates her determination to emigrate.

Develops characters and relationships

- Morag is furious with Billy.
- She sees marriage as a disaster for Elizabeth, the ruin of her life.
- She hurts Auntie Betty by her defiant determination to go to America.
- Hughie, who once saw wearing a kilt as detestably feminine, now enjoys wearing frocks and make-up.

Develops themes and issues

- The Coronation
 - Hughie's excitement.
 - The fireworks in the sky.
 - Auntie Betty has a bitter moment, imagining herself as the Queen.
 - Hughie has a rather happier moment of pretending he is the Queen.
- Relationships
 - Emily is being forced to resume an unhappy relationship with her fiancé.
 - Elizabeth is being forced into an unhappy marriage.

- **Auntie Betty is behind both.**
- **She seems now to be taking over the management of Hughie's life for him.**

- **Social divisions**
 - **Billy's final words to Emily mock her language and her style.**

- **Sense of family**
 - **For Morag, marriage represents eternal domination by a husband.**
 - **Auntie Betty is welcoming Hughie into her family, just as Morag is choosing to leave it.**

Areas of study for *Britannia Rules*

For this play, the most appropriate area of study is Use of history, nostalgia and popular tradition.

A. Use of history, nostalgia and popular tradition

- **Historical accuracy**
 - Evacuation
 - Poverty of the working classes
 - The internment of the 'enemy aliens'
 - The blitz on Clydebank
 - Attitudes to marriage, pregnancy
 - The place of women in the home and the workplace
 - National Service
 - Divisions between classes.

- **The war**
 - Always in the background of the action in Part One is the war
 - Threat of bombing
 - Fathers separated from their families
 - Death of civilians
 - Suspicion of aliens
 - Fear of spies
 - Rationing.

- **The Coronation**
 - Working-class enthusiasm for the young Queen
 - The detail of the ceremony, the gown, the pomp
 - Street parties and parades
 - Fireworks.

- **Nostalgia**
 - However hard the war years, there is often a kind of rosy glow to memories of the past.
 - The audience – if old enough – will remember the songs
 - The play, especially in Part One, pictures a way of life that has disappeared
 - The costume of both periods – the New Look, for example
 - The children have an innocence about them
 - Stricter views on pre-marital sex
 - America was seen as a land of dreams.

- **Devices used to create a sense of period**
 - Chamberlain broadcast
 - The Coronation Day broadcasts
 - References to National Service.
- **Use of period song and dance**
 - The children's songs
 - Guy Mitchell.
- **Variety, pantomime and farce**
 - Billy's wallpapering recalls a famous variety act
 - Hughie's Britannia costume recalls the pantomime dame tradition.
- **Celebrations, rituals, social gatherings**
 - Emily's birthday cake
 - The Coronation Parade
 - Fireworks.

In this play, there are some issues that are relevant also to the area Social, political and religious dimensions.

B. Social, political and religious dimensions

- **Social background and conditions**
 - The poverty of the working classes.
 - The bad health of the poor – nits, impetigo, etc.
 - The gulf between Emily and the other children with regard to food, clothing, home life.
 - Emily's family has a live-in servant.
 - Commitment to the family, demonstrated by Auntie Betty taking in the children.
 - The post-war rise of left-wing politics.
 - Poor living conditions even in the 1950s.
 - A bath is available for the poor only at the Steamie.
- **Nationalism**
 - The children grew up in a period of anti-German hatred.
 - Agatha encourages Emily to learn German songs.
 - The children are fiercely confident that the Allies will win the war.
 - In Part Two America is seen as an ideal world compared with Britain.
 - In Part One the children gloried in their fathers being in the army.
 - In Part Two, this has deteriorated into Hughie's dread of National Service.

- **Political theatre as entertainment**
 - The play is very entertaining but this does not detract from the clarity and power of its political statement.
 - Billy's preaching of his half-understood political beliefs is often very funny.

- **Distribution of wealth**
 - Young Hughie's clothes are patched and dirty.
 - Young Emily is posh.
 - The play is set in widely contrasting areas – the large comfortable house of the Fairchild-MacKenzies and the small ill-equipped flat of Auntie Betty.
 - Emily's grown-up lifestyle includes cars, balls and expensive dresses.
 - Auntie Betty's 'split-new dress' is home-made.

- **Relationship between the individual and the establishment**
 - Children were forcibly separated from their families and dumped on unwilling hosts in the country.
 - National Service was compulsory.
 - Government ignored the popular outcry against the execution of Bentley.
 - The Royal Family were immensely popular, especially perhaps amongst the poor.

- **Sectarianism**
 - Hughie is nominally Catholic as a child, but hostile to bigotry when he grows up.
 - Young Billy has an automatic reaction to Hughie naming Celtic as 'his' team.
 - Auntie Betty regards Elizabeth Quinn's Catholicism as something she can easily shrug off, like an old sweater.

- **Devices used to communicate social and political messages**
 - The children united in song and in games illustrates the possibility of a coming together of the classes.
 - Only when they choose to act together can the children save Hughie.
 - People were expected to conform in the 1950s, not to break the rules on behaviour and morals.
 - Billy's enthusiastic, if undigested, preaching of the communist word.
 - Emily, perhaps surprisingly, demonstrates against capital punishment.

In this play, there are some issues that are relevant also to the area
Issues of gender.

C. Issues of gender

- **Symbolic martyr**
 - Auntie Betty has, to some extent, martyred herself, choosing to devote her life to bringing up her niece and nephew.
 - She gives Emily her own new dress, lovingly made for this important day in her life, and silences Morag's sensible interjections.
 - She provides Morag with a precious pair of stockings, even though Morag doesn't want – or need – them. Auntie Betty is hurt by this rejection of her self-sacrifice, as she sees it.

- **Romantic hero**
 - Billy, as a child, plays out the role of a hero, capturing the wicked German spy.
 - As an adult, Billy sees himself as a romantic hero, bravely fighting the fight against social injustice. No-one shares his view.

- **Relationships**
 - Billy and Morag. When they are children, he is protective of her, seeing himself as *in loco parentis*. Nevertheless they can fall out, as each sometimes sides with another child – Billy with Hughie, Morag with Emily. As adults, they are much more prickly with each other. She has, in fact, become the stronger character and doesn't hesitate to criticise him.
 - Billy and Hughie. As children, Billy usually feels superior to the poorer and younger boy. Occasionally he takes sides with him against the girls. As an adult, he maintains his attitude of superiority – knowing all about National Service, boasting about his wide reading in politics, preaching his communist creed. He regards Hughie, the window dresser, as unmanly. Yet Hughie is a better worker than Billy and has more genuine sympathy for other people.
 - Hughie and Morag. The little girl feels sorry for the poor wee boy, even though he sometimes disgusts her. The grown woman still sees him as her inferior and is surprised, perhaps even shocked, by his presumptuous request that she go out with him. She is very much on his side after he fails to win a prize at the Parade.
 - Hughie and Emily. The young Emily, recognising that he is the most needy of the evacuees feels, or thinks she feels, sorry for him. She – condescendingly – befriends him. Hughie is in awe of her.

When she turns up fourteen years later, in distress, Hughie is warmly comforting but she hardly notices him.

- Morag and Emily. Little Morag admires the more sophisticated Emily. However, as adults they are much more on an even footing. Morag no longer admits that anyone is her superior. As a result they enjoy gossip and a frank exchange of views. The difference in their social class matters less.
 - Billy and Emily. To some extent as children they vie for leadership of the gang. Emily has the advantages of sophistication and being on her home ground but Billy has a toughness learned on the streets. Grown up, they are instantly drawn to each other. Billy's rejection of her, at Auntie Betty's command, may be in line with the social morality of the time but is deeply hurtful. Emily and Billy share few common beliefs, but the need to change the country's social system is one of them.
 - Auntie Betty and Morag. Two strong women, each determined to have her own way. Inevitably there are clashes. Morag fully recognises how much she owes to her aunt, but has no intention of sacrificing what she believes will be a glorious future in America. Auntie Betty, who did sacrifice a great deal for the children, is deeply hurt by Morag's intransigence.
 - Auntie Betty and Emily. The older woman is genuinely concerned for, and anxious to help, the distressed Emily. She insists on lending her the new dress and sees to her other needs as best she can. However, she has no hesitation in organising Emily's removal from the scene when she becomes an obstacle to a respectable ending to the Elizabeth Quinn affair.
 - Auntie Betty and Billy. She can be harshly critical of him but it is clear that his weaknesses are largely the result of her spoiling. They show considerable affection for each other. She gets rid of Emily and forces him to marry Elizabeth not for any selfish reason but because of her strict moral code. The child must have a father, married to its mother. Nothing else is acceptable. As the person who brought Billy up and taught him his moral code she sees it as her responsibility to see that he behaves appropriately.
 - Auntie Betty and Hughie. At the end of the play she seems to be welcoming him into her 'family'. She may be genuinely recognising someone with similar attitudes, but she may also be preparing to manage him as she has managed the other two.
- Marriage and the family
 - There are few successful marriages surviving in the play:
 - War destroyed Emily's parents' marriage

- **Morag and Billy's father abandoned his motherless children for another woman.**
- **War robbed Auntie Betty of her possible marriage.**
 - Auntie Betty has no doubts about pre-marital sex being morally wrong or about the importance of marriage.
 - The moral code of the time demands that Billy marry Elizabeth, even though neither is any longer committed to the partnership. (Better an unhappy wife than a happy single mother?)
 - The wider family is important to the poorer children – Uncle Jackie ranks alongside her Da in Morag's mind. Auntie Senga's death is linked with his mother's, in Billy's memory. Auntie Betty takes over the parental role when it becomes necessary.
- **Women and power**
 - Auntie Betty effortlessly exercises control over Billy and Morag. She has been father and mother to them and is recognised in the community at large as the head of the household, even though Billy at 24 and a male should, perhaps, have taken on that role.
 - Billy meekly brings Auntie Betty his pay packet every week – unopened.
 - Morag, too, bullies Billy who, as a child, tried his best to protect her.
- **Men and power**
 - Billy has no power at home. Instead he dreams of winning political power through a communist revolution.
 - Hughie's ambitions lie elsewhere – creativity rather than domination.
 - The men with real power that we hear about in the play, the government leaders, have, in everyone's view, made a mess of things.
- **Sexual development of characters**
 - Emily. At the beginning of Part Two she has just fallen out with her fiancé. She has, therefore, been in a mature relationship. Nonetheless she is instantly attracted to Billy, possibly only on a physical level, since we are told that he is 'attractive'. She is reluctant to go back home and to resume her commitment to Hamish. She is 'stricken' when Billy rejects her.
 - Billy. He, too, has been in an established relationship which everyone knows about. He has, in fact, made Elizabeth pregnant. He claims that he has broken off the affair. Tellingly, he speaks of the frustration that men feel because of the way girls are brought

up, especially Catholics. Elizabeth is a Catholic. (Remembering that he is speaking to Catholic Hughie he hurriedly but belatedly blames Protestant up-bringing, too.) Morag says that Elizabeth dropped *him* because she didn't want to 'get serious'. He responds to Emily as eagerly as she does to him. He is clearly upset by Auntie Betty's insistence that he forget Emily and marry Elizabeth.

- Morag. Morag appears to be free of entanglements with men. She denies that she is going to America in order to marry a 'Yank'. Her plan is to be fancy-free and have herself a good time.
 - Hughie. Though not camp, Hughie is certainly in touch with his feminine side – his job as a window-dresser, his decision to dress up and be made up as Britannia, his detailed interest in the Queen's dress, his pleasure when Auntie Betty puts Emily's dress on him, his acting out the role of Queen. It is no surprise that there is no mention of a woman in his life; it is surprising that he asks Morag to go out with him. This comes out of the blue and he shows no emotion at her response. They are clearly good friends and he will miss her when/if she goes to America, but is he seriously contemplating a love affair with her?
- **Oppression/suffering**
 - The Germans – and other aliens – suffer arrest and internment during the war.
 - Families suffer bitter loss because of the bombing – on both sides.
 - Poverty affects everyone in the play except Emily's family.
 - Billy is obsessed with the class struggle, regarding the working classes as oppressed by Capitalism.
 - Women do not have equal rights, even over their own bodies: Elizabeth tried to keep her lover's name from her father but he 'leathers' it out of her. She must accept a forced marriage rather than live as an unmarried mother.
 - Hughie's sister is beaten by her husband. Her father plans to wreak revenge but ends up drinking with the man. Even her mother tells her she must just put up with being beaten.

Current productions and interests

1. **A specific production of *Britannia Rules***
(This section is relevant if you have seen a production of this play.)

Setting and props

- How did the Company cope with the problem of the play employing several different settings?
- Did this match Liz Lochhead's intentions?
- Did they use oversize furniture in Part One? If so, did it help the audience to accept adult actors as children? If not, did the audience find it difficult to accept (or understand) this?
- How did the set design and use of props add to your understanding and enjoyment of the play?
- How did design help to suggest the two periods of the play?
- Were the setting, décor and props appropriate?
- How well did Britannia's chariot fit Liz Lochhead's specification of being both 'homemade' *and* 'rather splendid'.

Lighting, sound

- What was interesting about the use of lighting?
- How effective was the use of sound, other than music?
- What use did the production make of music?
- How effective was the choice of music?
- Did the lighting, sound effects and music enhance the mood and feeling of the play?

Costume

- Did the company use costumes appropriate to the characters in the play?
- Which costumes in particular helped to emphasise character?
- Did the costumes match the two periods of the play?
- How did the costumes help suggest the ages of the characters?
- Was the Britannia costume as impressive as Liz Lochhead asks for?

Language

- Were the Scottish local accents convincing and effective?
- Was Emily's accent a strong enough contrast – in both Parts?
- How did the performers use language and accents to bring out character?
- How well did the Part One actors demonstrate that they were sometimes picking up each other's linguistic characteristics?

- Did you have difficulty in penetrating the Scottish accents and vocabulary?

Comedy, wit and humour

- Did the Company correctly identify and establish the comic elements of the play?
- Did they use different *styles* of comedy for different scenes or characters?
- How effective was their use of comedy?
- Did they at any point play for comedy *inappropriately*?
- Did the director invent good comic business?
- Was timing for laughs well handled?

Acting style/techniques

- What acting style did the actors adopt in Part One?
- Was this appropriate?
- Did they adopt a different style for Part Two?
- Was this appropriate?
- Did the actors' interpretation of their *child* characters show a clear development over the course of Part One?
- Did the actors' interpretation of their *adult* characters show a clear development over the course of Part Two?
- Did each actor make it credible that that child grew up to be that adult?
- Was the actor's interpretation always in keeping with the writer's intentions?

Actor/audience relationships

- What techniques did the actors use to involve the audience?
- Were the actors always successful in involving the audience?
- Did the actors appear to respond to audience reactions? If so, in what ways? Was this appropriate? Was it effective?
- Were there times when the audience appeared to lose concentration? If so, why did this happen?
- What would you say was the overall impact on the audience?
- Did you feel that the company had correctly identified Liz Lochhead's dramatic intention?
- How successfully did they put it across?

Relevance to Scottish society

- What relevance did this particular production of *Britannia Rules* have to a modern Scottish public?
- In your view, was this greater or less than Liz Lochhead intended?
- Did the production make use of techniques borrowed from Scottish

popular entertainment – music hall, pantomime or the variety stage?

If so, were the techniques appropriately used?

- Did the production make use of ritual or other traditional activities? If so, were the techniques appropriately used?
- Did the production correctly identify the social background of the characters? What techniques were used to put this across to the audience?
- How did the Company create a sense of the play being set in Scotland?

Target audience

- Did the Company manage to attract the appropriate audience for the play?
- How had they used their marketing and publicity to ensure that the appropriate people came to see the play?
- Was their acting style appropriate to their audience?

2. The work of Liz Lochhead

(This section is relevant if you have studied other works by this playwright.)

- Is this play in a similar style to her others?
- Does it raise the same questions and deal with the same issues?
- Has the writer created characters similar to those in her other plays?
- Is the play aimed at the same target audience?
- In what specific ways does it differ from her other work?
- What specific contribution does this play, and the writer's work in general, make to Scottish theatre?
- How does this play fit in to the whole picture of the writer's output?
- Does the play reflect the other areas studied in Contemporary Scottish Theatre – Social, Political and Religious Dimensions; Use of History, Nostalgia and Popular Traditions; Issues of Gender?

3. A current theme or trend in Contemporary Scottish Theatre

(This section is relevant if you have read or seen a range of plays by different Scottish writers.)

- How do the issues raised in *Britannia Rules* echo those familiar in the works of other Scottish playwrights?
- In what ways is the style of the play similar to that of other contemporary Scottish plays?
- What trends do you identify in style, origin and theme in contemporary Scottish theatre that are exemplified in *Britannia Rules*?

Examination of a key scene

Examine Part Two Scene 5, pages 103–110

Interpretation

- What does Billy's whistling tell us?
- What does it reveal about Auntie Betty that she has 'never nagged him into acquiring any' DIY skills?
- What *is* Billy's Coronation-Day plan?
- Why does he stop whistling when Emily comes in and why does he start again?
- What is Billy's attitude to her for the first two pages?
- Why does Billy say, '*So kind, the villagers. Such good simple people.*'?
- What is Emily's mood as she tells the story of her disaster? Is she adopting a tone to engage Billy's sympathy?
- Why does Emily call Billy a 'Puritan'?
- What is the full force of Billy's '*Dear oh dear oh dear...?*'
- Why does Emily say he is speaking 'like a pamphlet'?
- What is the significance of Billy's line, '*Aye right!*'?
- What differences are there between Billy's crusading speech and Emily's?
- How is Emily affected by Billy's speech about the German schoolgirl?
- What is going on in their minds during the '*long pause as they stare at each other*'?
- Who takes the lead in moving into a sexual situation?
- How does each of them feel after the interrupted kiss?
- Why does Auntie Betty make sure Emily exits before her?

Characterisation

- What is Billy's mood at the beginning of the scene?
- How is it affected by Emily's entrance?
- How does he feel as he listens to her story about her fight with Hamish?
- How genuinely felt are his comments on Socialism?
- Is Emily right to imply that he is just spouting stuff he has read in a pamphlet?
- How does he feel about the Bentley story?
- How is Emily feeling at the beginning of the scene?
- How does Billy make her feel by his first three comments?
- Why does she go into such detail about her break-up with her fiancé?
- What are her feelings as she tells the Bentley story?
- What feelings does the German schoolgirl story rouse in her?
- Is her list of six pairings deliberately planned to build up to '*Men and women*' in order to provoke a sexual reaction in Billy?

- What does Auntie Betty feel when she sees the kiss?
- Why does the stage direction say, '*She whips round*'?
- How does Auntie Betty feel by the time she makes her exit?
- How does Emily feel as she exits?
- How does Billy feel as Emily exits?
- How has Billy's attitude to Emily changed during the scene?
- Has Emily's attitude to Billy changed during the scene?

Audience reaction

- How should the audience react to Billy's wall-papering?
- How will they feel about Emily in the first few minutes of this scene?
- How will they feel about Billy's attitude to Emily before her story about Hamish?
- Will they agree with Emily's accusation that Billy is a Puritan?
- Will they be surprised by Emily's speech about Bentley?
- How will they react to Billy's story about the German schoolgirl?
- Will they be surprised by the kiss?
- How will they react to Auntie Betty's manoeuvres?
- How will they feel about Emily by the end of the scene?
- Will they have revised their opinion of Billy during the scene?



SECTION B**Acting roles*****Billy***

As a child Billy is responsible and sensible, feeling that he must look after his little sister but also the strange wee Hughie who has been thrown his way. He is impressed by the new surroundings and by Emily, but he also feels defensive about his own way of life. His natural inclination is to side with Morag; but when she is drawn to Emily, Billy sometimes takes sides with Hughie, boys against girls. He sees that Emily is a rival for leadership of his little gang. Occasionally, though, he finds himself forming a partnership with her against the others, the older pair against the younger.

As an adult he has acquired strong socialist opinions, seeing the upper classes, like Emily's family, as oppressors of people like him. He resents any implication that they had shown genuine concern for the evacuees. He is genuinely fond of Auntie Betty, as well he might be since she has thoroughly spoiled him, encouraging his laziness. He may not be telling the truth about his break-up with Elizabeth. He finds Morag too forceful a character for comfort.

He treats Hughie with some condescension, enjoying teasing him about army life because he recognises that Hughie is far from suited to it. He is aware of the feminine streak in Hughie and feels a macho superiority over him as a result.

When Emily arrives, he is torn between desire for her and contempt for the class she represents. His principles melt quickly – *'I'll come to the Parade, oh maybe I shouldnae, but I'll come for you, Emily'*.

How would *you* interpret the character of Billy?

- Would you try to make him a sympathetic character? In each Part?
- How would you choose to play his humour?
- How would you show how he feels about Auntie Betty?
- How would you show how he feels about Morag, in each Part?
- How would you show how he feels about Hughie, in each Part?
- How genuine would you make his feelings about communism and the need to change the social order?
- Would you try to suggest that these feelings are only superficial?

- How would you portray his selfishness over Elizabeth?
- How would you show his reaction when forced to resume his relationship with her?
- How do you interpret his attitude to Emily, in each Part?
- What physical mannerisms would you give him, in each Part?
- How would these mannerisms change between the two Parts?
- What techniques could you use to make sure that audiences can see a continuation from young Billy to adult Billy?
- What sort of voice would you want him to have, in each Part?
- How would you portray his change of heart after the kiss?

Hughie

As a child Hughie is the most pathetic of them. He seems to be poorer, less well cared for and more lonely. On the surface he has a toughness acquired from street life and harsh conditions, but he is vulnerable, ignorant and over-excitable. He is an outsider. Yet within the terms of his own very limited experience he is confident and knowledgeable. His attempt to 'escape' takes courage but it is also a mark of weakness – he cannot cope with the life of an evacuee.

As an adult he is still an outsider, not macho enough to be one of the lads. His interests are unmanly – dresses and make-up. He gets on well with Morag to whom he can speak without embarrassment about subjects that he might not raise with his own family – his passionate interest in the Queen's dress, for example. His suggestion that she should go out with him is unexpected and seems out of character. He does not press her for an answer. Is he trying to prove something to himself? Is he worried about losing touch with her when she goes to America? He asks, perhaps sadly, if she intends marrying an American.

His relations with Billy are ambivalent. He talks openly to him, as if they were friends, but he falls an easy victim to Billy's teasing. He worries about his father's reaction to his behaviour. He does not share his family's faith, seeing his father as a bigot. (As a child, on the other hand, he seemed quite proud to have come near being appointed an altar boy.)

He is on good terms with Auntie Betty. He can be open with her about his fondness for dresses. We feel that his own mother would not approve!

How would *you* interpret the character of Hughie?

- Would you make him a cheerful character?

- How would you suggest the latent manic element in his nature in Part One?
- Would you want to suggest that it is still there in Part Two?
- How would you portray what Liz Lochhead calls his 'sweetie-wife' quality in Part Two?
- What physical characteristics would you want to give him, in each Part?
- How would these change between the two Parts?
- What techniques could you use to make sure that audiences can see a continuation from young Hughie to adult Hughie?
- What sort of voice would you want him to have, in each Part?
- How would you interpret his feelings about Morag?
- How would you portray his feelings about Auntie Betty?
- How feminine would you make him when dressed as Britannia?
- How feminine would you make him when dancing and cat-walking with Emily's dress?

Morag

As a small child, she is sweet, dependant and caring. She cries at the thought of the rabbit in the song, shot by the farmer. She prays for her neighbour's cat as sincerely as she does for her family. She stands up for the underdog in the changing relationships of childhood. She is afraid of fire but bravely lights a match to undo the harm Hughie has done, spoiling Emily's birthday.

That strength of character comes into full flower in adulthood. She is forceful and determined. She doesn't want to change British society as Billy and Emily claim to do; she is simply going to abandon it and find a dream life in America.

She has good relations with Hughie but is fairly contemptuous of her brother's attitude to life. She fully recognises what Auntie Betty has done for them but she does not intend to let her rule her adult life. She stands up to her over the stockings and over her intention of going to America.

The wee lassie who cried for an imaginary rabbit has no qualms as an adult about trying to smash a mouse to death with Britannia's trident.

How would *you* interpret the character of Morag?

- How would you use your voice and body to show her as a child?
- How would you use your voice and body to show her as a woman?

- In Part One, how would you make her sweet and innocent without seeming false?
- In Part Two, how would you make her tough and determined without making her unlikeable?
- How would you portray her relationship with Hughie?
- How would you show her feelings about her Auntie Betty?
- How would you interpret her fury when she learns that Elizabeth is pregnant?
- Is she a sincere or insincere person? How would you show this?
- What techniques could you use to make sure that audiences can see a continuation from young Morag to adult Morag?

Emily

Young Emily is self-assured and self-centred. Her loneliness is emphasised by her treatment of Rufus as a friend. She is on home territory and this gives her feelings of superiority over the other three. Her attitude to their poverty and scruffiness is borrowed from Agatha rather than being genuinely felt. She is, if anything, quite impressed by some of the things she learns from them. She is, of course, snobbish because she has been brought up to be, but she adapts quickly to having these strange beings in her house and plays happily with them. She unconsciously comes to use some of their phrases and vocal mannerisms.

In Part Two she has lost none of her posh, stropky snobbishness. Her accent is perhaps even more class-marked; her lifestyle is a world away from Clydebank – a world of cars and balldresses. She is taken aback to learn that there are houses without baths. But she seems genuinely fond of the three former evacuees and responds to the natural warmth of Auntie Betty's kindness. Her sexual interest in Billy is strong and may surprise even herself. She seems keen to embark on a lasting relationship with him – if her reaction when deprived of it is anything to go by.

How would *you* interpret the character of Emily?

- What kind of accent should she have in Part One?
- How do you interpret her letter-writing to her father?
- How would you persuade the audience to accept Rufus as real?
- How do her relationships with the other three children vary during Part One?
- How would you show her character changing during Part One?
- Would you change her accent for Part Two?
- How does she behave towards Billy in their first scene during Part Two?

- How does this change later in the play?
- How would you present her relationship with Morag in Part Two?
- How would you play the speech where she describes the demonstration against Bentley's hanging?
- How would you show her feelings towards Billy as the scene moves towards the kiss?
- How would you show changes in her character during Part Two?
- What techniques could you use to make sure that audiences can see a continuation from young Emily to adult Emily?

Auntie Betty

Auntie Betty is warm-hearted and stout-hearted. She has given up her adult life to looking after her niece and nephew. She is generous – giving her new dress to Emily whom she has just met for the first time, and her stockings, which she badly needs, to Morag. Yet, there is a selfish element in all of this. She tries to insist on Morag accepting the stockings even though Morag clearly doesn't want them. She is desperately anxious about losing Morag to America. She has ensured that Billy needs her by spoiling him all his life. We get the feeling that she enjoys being a martyr.

She has a strongly-held set of moral principles: she complains about the use of bad language by both Billy and Emily; she will not allow Billy to avoid marrying the girl he has made pregnant. In order to impose her moral code on Billy she resorts to interfering in Emily's life, sending for Hamish to come and get her.

She is more sympathetic towards Hughie's idiosyncratic tastes than his family would be. She seems genuinely to enjoy the Guy Mitchell moment with him. But is there perhaps a sense of taking in Hughie as a replacement for the Billy she has driven out and the Morag who may yet escape? She promises to stand up to Hughie's father for him if he causes trouble. Is her grief for the escape of her budgie a disguise for the loss of Billy?

How would *you* interpret the character of Auntie Betty?

- What kind of accent should she have?
- What vocal and physical techniques would you use to suggest her age and character?
- How does she behave towards Billy in their first scene?
- How does this change later in the play?
- How would you present her early relationship with Emily?
- How does this change when she sees Billy and Emily kissing?

- **Why does she decide to interfere in Emily's personal affairs?**
- **How would you portray her relationship with Hughie in the last scene?**

Recommended acting pieces

Part One, Scene 1

Page reference: 11–17

Closing line: Morag: *(very sadly)* ‘*Cheerio!*’

Casting: 2 male and 1 female

Characters: Billy, Morag and Hughie

Approximate length: 8 minutes

Comments: The scene gives the actors the challenge of playing young children – 10 and 7 years old. They begin in a mood of mingled awe and apprehension but this soon gives way to squabbling and joking in a natural childlike way. The shifting relationships among the three need subtle playing and the timing of the comedy lines is crucial.

There is a good opportunity to develop an appropriate mime routine in the train journey scene, as well as the intriguing task for the actor playing Billy of playing a child playing an adult, while Morag speaks words that are really only in her mind.

Altogether a deceptively simple scene.

Part One, Scene 1

Page reference: 18–26

Opening line: '*Ten green bottles!*

Closing line: '*You did so.*' Omit the Emily speeches on page 20

Casting: 2 male and 1 female

Characters: Billy, Morag and Hughie

Approximate length: 8 minutes

Comments: Although the scene begins with a song, it is not *just* a song: each actor establishes his/her child character by the way he/she is singing. They can also establish the fact that they are (pretending to be) on a train. Billy and Hughie gang up on Morag, the lassie, but she holds her own, in spite of her age. The underlying hint of sectarianism must be brought out in the boys' conversation. For the final sequence they move out of their memory of the train and into the house.

Part One, Scene 2**Page reference:** 32–41

Closing line: *'Aye! I don't think much of a daddy that willny fight tae keep all the wee boys and girls safe from Heil Hitler.'*

Casting: 2 male and 2 female**Characters:** Billy, Hughie, Morag and Emily**Approximate length:** 12 minutes

Comments: Much humour to be made out of the breakfast scene, with its acres of incomprehension between the two classes, on life style, language and taste. This gives way to a scene of childish rough-and-tumble that turns into something much nastier under the influence of the government propaganda at the time. This requires careful playing to keep the illusion of the actors playing children. Hughie's natural role as the outsider in any group is emphasised not only by the fighting sequence but by the others' unthinking assumption that it is cowardly not to take part in the fighting.

Part Two, Scene 2**Page reference:** 72–77

Closing line: *'Billy Kerr!'*

Casting: 1 male and 1 female**Characters:** Billy and Auntie Betty**Approximate length:** 6 minutes

Comments: The female role is the more demanding, having to establish the most difficult age for a young actress to assume – 39. She must also be funny, dominant, harsh and warm-hearted. The relationship between aunt and nephew is teasing, argumentative but fundamentally warm. She has clearly spoiled him and he equally clearly thoroughly enjoys her attention. Billy's political speeches are sincere but possibly only half-digested.

Part Two, Scene 3
Page reference: 86–90
Casting: 2 male
Characters: Hughie and Billy
Approximate length: 6 minutes
Comments: This is a good scene for two male actors, depending on the subtle interplay of character. Billy is revelling in his coarse manliness, deliberately trying to make Hughie anxious about army life. Hughie is a strong contrast – not camp, but not high on testosterone either. Underlying it all there is the theme of the missing budgie, with a sub-text implying what happens to those who are ‘different’ – as a budgie is amongst starlings, so Hughie will be amongst tough National Service soldiers.

Part Two, Scene 4
Page reference: 90–95
Closing line: <i>‘Course you will!</i>
Casting: 2 female
Characters: Morag and Emily (plus Auntie Betty read in)
Approximate length: 6 minutes
Comments: A fine scene, needing good character playing from both actors. The mood continually switches between gossip, sorrowful reminiscence and nostalgia. The relationship between them is easy, but the class difference is still there in the language and attitudes. Morag is a forceful character, with much of her Auntie Betty about her. Emily is subtly commenting on what she sees, saying much more about Auntie Betty and about Morag at the end of the scene than her couple of speeches appear to suggest. This makes considerable demands on the ingenuity of the actor playing her.

Part Two, Scene 5**Page reference:** 103–109Closing line: *'They go into a devouring kiss.'***Casting:** 1 male and 1 female**Characters:** Billy and Emily**Approximate length:** 6 minutes

Comments: A scene that begins with a touch of slapstick with an intractable piece of wallpaper, develops into a hostile encounter between representatives of different classes, throws in two deeply-felt emotional speeches and ends in passion. An emotional roller-coaster. The passion should not be completely unexpected; the actors need to create a sense of URST (= Unresolved Sexual Tension) from quite early on.

An interview with the playwright

In your introduction to *Britannia Rules* you sound as if the play is a particular favourite of yours?

Oh, yes. Especially *Shanghaied*. It was a very early play and a real success for me. It worked. You never really know if a play is going to work until you see it. And writing it was great fun, too.

Was that because of the way you worked on it – with actors, in workshop sessions?

The workshops got me going. We didn't work through improvisation. I always want to run a mile when I hear that word. What we did was that I wrote something and then next day the actors would work on it, try it out. Then I would go away and re-write it. I'd often throw away a lot of it and start again. This method of working lets you see the shape of the play more quickly. You can't see it properly when you're working on your own, not at first anyway. Of course, you *can* put things right at rehearsals, do a bit of re-writing, but you shouldn't. In rehearsals the actors and director should be concentrating on getting it ready for performance. There isn't time for changing the script. From that point of view the workshops were a great luxury; we had time to try things out.

Have you been able to work that way again?

Not often. But the play I'm working on at the moment – I've been doing workshops with actors on that. It is for Borderline Theatre who did *Shanghaied* in the beginning. It's the first new play I've done with them since then, though they have done revivals of other plays in the meantime. It was good fun to be working that way again. The actors in the workshops won't necessarily be in the final production but it helped me to see how the script was developing in my head.

I don't structure a play first. Academics who talk about how to write a play always say that you must get the structure clear first, before you start writing the dialogue. But I don't know any playwrights who actually work that way or say that you should do it that way. Dramatists often start writing without a very clear idea of where the play is going. Characters can grow out of the dialogue. Of course, a lot has to get thrown away, but that's part of the writing process.

Academics (again) often claim that a strong, dominating woman, a matriarch figure, is at the heart of much Scots drama. That would be true of *Elizabeth*?

Certainly. Auntie Betty is a powerful, central character. I don't think it's true of all of my plays; Queen Mary isn't really a dominant figure in *Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off*. Nor is Mary Shelley, in *Blood and Ice*. But I really needed a powerful figure in *Elizabeth* to contrast with the other four who are still, in a way, children. Maybe it would have been better if she had just been a shadow, like Agatha, the off-stage German maid in *Shanghaied*. We never see her but she has an important influence on the action. Could Auntie Betty have been written in the same way? Maybe if I'd been a more skilful writer, I could have done it. I don't know. I'm happy to say that I'm still learning, after all these years.

The thing about *Britannia Rules* is that *Shanghaied* is the stronger play. Which is a pity, because you want to end with your most effective theatre, you want to build up to a climax. It might be interesting to try a production that starts with *Elizabeth*. Let the audience get to know these characters and wonder where they came from, wonder what influences in their childhood made them what they are in 1953. Then you show them *Shanghaied*. Would that work? Maybe in schools, teachers could look at *Elizabeth* first and then move on to Part One? I might persuade a company to try it one day. A play isn't finished with just because it has been published. You're experimenting all the time in theatre. So it would be interesting to see how it worked, doing the two plays in reverse chronological order. I can't tell just by reading them and thinking about it. I would have to see it to know if it was successful.

You experimented with reverse chronology in *Quelques Fleurs*.

Yes, though structurally that's a bit of a mess. But it's never wrong to *try* things. See if they work. All writing is experiment. It takes a long time to learn how to make things simple, to have the courage to throw away what isn't necessary.

Do you have a target audience in mind as you write?

Not really. *Shanghaied* was intended for audiences of children, of course, but the adults enjoyed it just as much, though at a different level. I thought that *Perfect Days* would appeal particularly to women in their forties but in fact it seems to work for everybody.

The people I write about always want something very badly. It may not be anything very grand or very dramatic – maybe just a peaceful life, but it is their need to achieve it that interests me. You should always ask, 'What does this character *want*?' Then you can start to understand them.

A hero doesn't choose his journey; it's thrust upon him. I don't mean a hero in any grand sense, just the person a play happens to be about. You ask what he (or she) wants. You wonder where he is going, and why. It's a dramatist's job to ask questions rather than provide answers.

You create the atmosphere of wartime Scotland and of the 1950s very convincingly, though you're too young to remember them.

I did a lot of research, and a lot of speaking to people. When I was growing up, folk were still talking about the war all the time. We heard so much about what it had been like that we felt we'd lived through it ourselves.

How long does a play stew in your mind before you're ready to commit to dialogue?

Years, sometimes, though *Shanghaied* came quite quickly. The one I'm working on now – I've got the themes and the characters, but I haven't got the story or the structure yet. And note that they're not the same thing. It's set in the 'here and now'. Recently I've been writing plays set in historical times, like the Greek plays. Though they're history, they're relevant to our times. But the new one is set firmly in the present day.

Which playwrights do you admire?

Caryl Churchill. (*Top Girls. Cloud Nine.*) David Mamet, especially the earlier plays. Brecht, for the theatricality. And Molière, of course. A brilliant comic writer – painful. He can hurt.

The Scots seem to have an affinity for Molière.

They do. I think he's performed more in Scotland than anywhere, even in France. Of course, over there he's seen as a figure from the past but in translation we can give him a modern edge. [Liz Lochhead translated *Le Misanthrope* into Scots and set it in the new Scottish Parliament.]

And amongst Scottish playwrights, who do you admire?

John Byrne. Seeing *Slab Boys* changed my life. Those wonderful baroque speeches, but in my language. It was a breath of fresh air. It was wonderful. He's been a big influence on me.

What's your view of the Contemporary Scottish Theatre?

I swing between optimism and pessimism. I feel strongly that we must keep telling stories; writing plays mustn't become an excuse for exploring our own feelings, being too inward-looking. We should capitalise on our strengths – Scottish audiences haven't given up on theatre. It hasn't become a purely middle-class concern as it has in other parts of Britain.