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Sequamur Community performance draft

Draft 18

CHARACTERS

WILLIAM JOHN GIBSON
JOHN MACRAE
NORMAN CAMPBELL
PATERSON
JESSIE FINLAYSON
DUNCAN FINLAYSON
MARY GIBSON
NICOLSON
RODDY MORRISON
UNKNOWN SOLDIER
MAIREAD

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PROISEACT NAN EALAN
the gaelic arts agency



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that a number of the characters here can be played by the same individuals.

* It should be noted

SEQUAMUR

ACT 1

(The setting resembles the front entrance to the Francis Street building. However, the central stairway can be moved in and out, enabling it to function as a room in the Rector's home as well as part of the school. This leads up to a plaque on the wall, concealed by a curtain. In front of the stairway stands Gibson, a large, powerfully built man who is wearing his cloak as he addresses the scholars who sit in a semi-circle around him. It is August 1914)

GIBSON – A school is like a person.....It has a character; a personality of its own....

GIBSON – ‘Like the generations of leaves, the lives of mortal men. Now the wind scatters the old leaves across the earth, now the living timber bursts with the new buds and spring comes round again. And so with men: as one generation comes to life, another dies away.’ Where does that come from, Campbell?

CAMPBELL – The Illiad, sir.

GIBSON – Good, good. We'll make a scholar of you yet. A credit to your people out on the croft. ‘Bella, horida, bella. Et Thybrium multo spumatum sanguine cerno.’ Finlayson? Translate.

FINLAYSON - ‘I see wars ...’

GIBSON – Too slow again. Paterson?

PATERSON – ‘I see wars, horrible wars, and the Tiber flowing with much blood’.

GIBSON – Well done. We might even make a Rector out of you one day. Someday you, too, may flap around wearing this gown, writing endless letters and reports, getting chalk dust on your fingers. Who wrote that? The quotation about the Tiber, I mean? Finlayson?

FINLAYSON – Virgil, I think.

GIBSON – Think, man, think? You should know. In what book?

FINLAYSON – The Aeneid, sir.

GIBSON – Well done! Well done! (Pause) What about this much shorter one? ‘Fortune favours the brave’. Morrison?

MORRISON – Terence.

GIBSON – Good. Good. A writer remarkable for good morals, good taste, and good Latin. Excellent. Excellent. (Pause) ‘Hell to ships, hell to men, hell to cities.’ Who wrote that? Paterson?

PATERSON – Aeschylus.

GIBSON – And who was speaking, Duncan Finlayson? And about whom?

FINLAYSON – I can't remember, sir.

GIBSON – I can't remember? You must have left your brains behind you on the croft this morning, clipped from your head like your father's wool.

(Laughter)

GIBSON – Mairead?

MAIREAD – It was Agamemmon. About Helen.

GIBSON – Excellent! At last a right answer from a lass from the croft. One who is as smart as her sister Jessie was before her. 'This is the one best omen, to fight in defence of one's country'. Who wrote these words, Campbell? Where are they?

CAMPBELL – Homer in the Illiad, sir.

GIBSON – Excellent. Excellent. And the way this world is changing, one can see that you lads might have an opportunity to do just that. A shot is fired in Sarajevo and its echo is heard around all the cities, towns and villages of Europe. But for all its dangers, it brings opportunities with it. To march even to the battlements of Troy with a copy of Homer's Illiad in your knapsack.

PATERSON – My father was in the Boer War. He thinks that if the politicians and princes want to go and fight battles, they should go and put on armour and fight them for themselves.

GIBSON – Does he? Well, you can tell your father that this conflict is quite different from the Boer War. It is a way for the poor to prise power away from princes and politicians. If young men like you go out and fight in this war, they will need to make the changes that are necessary to transform our society. It's an opportunity for people like yourselves – the sons of crofters, weavers and fishermen.

PATERSON – But to go to Serbia, Turkey... What do these places have to do with us?

GIBSON – You say that after reading the Illiad? Really? Have you learned nothing? The walls of Troy are to be found in Turkey. The whole of our civilisation has its foundation there. It will give you an opportunity I never had. It will widen your vision, add to your knowledge of the halls of learning that your teachers have opened up for you, you will get glory and honour that will be a shield you can bear with you wherever your journey goes in this life.

FINLAYSON – That's why my brother's going. He's just signed up.

GIBSON – Well done! A brave decision but the right one. Men who spend their lives at home rarely achieve very much. The history books show us that.

FINLAYSON – He said you'd be pleased.

GIBSON – Well, I am. I am. And after the war, he can take his hard-won understanding of the world with him, showing his mastery of the English tongue, knowledge of science and mathematics, his awareness of the Classical Age wherever he goes. (He stops, aware that the bell is ringing for a change in class.) “ I go, and it is done; the bell invites me. Hear it not, Duncan for it is a knell that summons thee to heaven or to hell.

PATERSON – (reaching out to jostle with FINLAYSON) – Wake Duncan with your knocking, I would thou couldst.

GIBSON – I keep hoping for the opposite from the two of you.

(As this is said, there is a gentle knock at the door. MACRAE enters, bearing a letter in his hand.)

ACT 1 SCENE 2

MACRAE – This arrived for you. It's marked 'personal'.

GIBSON - Oh. Thank you, Mr Macrae. (He opens the letter. As he does so, a look of disappointment crosses his face. He crumples the letter in his fist.)

MACRAE – Bad news?

GIBSON – Just a letter from Perth Academy, thanking me for my interest in the post of Head teacher there. Very kind of them to write. 'O miki praetentios referat si Iuppiter amos'. Translation please, Macrae. Oh, sorry. Sometimes I forget you're a mathematician. It means 'If only Jupiter could give me back my past years.'

MACRAE – Meaning?

GIBSON – I've stayed here far too long. (Pause) There is nothing in this town but the reek of salt fish and education.

MACRAE – There are many worse places. People have a good life here.

GIBSON – Aye. But it's your place. Not mine. I should have listened to my father's advice. (He imitates a Northern Irish accent.) 'Never spend more than ten years working a garden. Five years setting out flowers. Five years watching them bloom. After that, you only to see the rot and mildew set in.' It's a bit like being a headteacher. Ambitious men like you and Maciver staring at and judging you, wondering if there will ever be a time when the old fool will move on and let them occupy the space he has occupied far too long.

MACRAE – I don't think like that. Neither does Mr Maciver. I'm sure of that.

GIBSON – I see it in your eyes? The restlessness with which you young men sometimes watch me. It's good for cubs to want to bring down the leader of the pride. You've been waiting for me to stumble a long time. Either that or flying from this town, getting a new job somewhere else.

MACRAE – But I'm perfectly content here. I Don't see why I should fly.

GIBSON – So what did they say in the Town Hall last night?

MACRAE – The usual froth and fervour. There was Provost Anderson in his full and splendid glory, his faith in the Union Jack, His Majesty and the Tory party never in a moment's doubt. There was Baillie Maclean, his mouth foaming as usual. One of the good burghers was

quoting those words I hear for the first time in your classroom. 'In peace there's nothing so ...

GIBSON - 'In peace there's nothing so becomes a man as modest stillness and humility: but when the blast of war blows in our ears, then imitate the action of the tiger; stiffen the sinews, summon up the blood, disguise fair nature with hard-favoured rage; then lend the eye a terrible aspect.'

MACRAE – I'm not so sure. For all that it's happening all over the country. The flag-waving. The cheering. The seagulls being plucked clean of feathers.

(As he says this, two of the schoolboys – PATERSON and FINLAYSON – enter the side of the stage. The others follow them, dressing them in an army uniform. The backdrop turns red. A drum beats lightly. There are images of men dressed in uniform.)

GIBSON – You seem to think I've got a lot to answer for.

MACRAE – It's a dangerous thing, this learning, when it takes people away from their roots.

GIBSON – It's how we Scots have become great, mingling with the people of other countries, teaching them, developing industries on their shores. Carnegie in America. Livingston in Africa. MacQuarrie Australia. You just can't see that because you've only worked in your home-town.

MACRAE – What do you mean by that?

GIBSON – Leaving the shoreline of the familiar world is the best and most noble form of education. It can turn the sons of crofters into gentlemen. It can free them from the bonds of class, the hold of their locality. Me, the son of a poor Irish immigrant, a gardener's labourer no less.

MACRAE – And that's the reason you support the war?

GIBSON – The class system fixed and fossilised. It's all just the same. It seems to me that when these young men lift their rifles, they are grasping the possibilities of change, destroying the inertia that has been with us for far too long. It is one that will bring us peace in Europe, a more just system in this country. That's why I support the war. Not the blood-lust of Baillie Maclean. Nor the flag-waving of Provost Anderson. Not any of that guff. But because I believe that from this conflict, a greater, finer world can come.

MACRAE – I only hope you're right. I only hope you're right.

ACT 2 SCENE 1

GIBSON – October 1915

MORRISON – Dear Mr Gibson.

GIBSON - It is one of your old pupils here.

MORRISON – Roddy Morrison.

GIBSON - I will not attempt to tell you the pleasure your letter gave me this morning. It is almost impossible to realise that the war is in its second year.

MORRISON - I often meant to write you but I was so long in hospital before I could even hold a pen.

GIBSON – I can manage now and want to tell you what happened.

MORRISON – It began at 7.30 in the morning.

GIBSON- The air above us was filled with screaming and wailings roars.

UNKNOWN SOLDIER 1 – Get down! Get down!

GIBSON - It was a terrible noise. Shells of all sizes, some of them the very biggest in the world, were speeding high over us to bring death to our enemies.

MORRISON - nearly 500 cannon planted thick behind and around us, and each trying which would fire quickest and best. About 10 am, there was a lull...

UNKNOWN SOLDIER 2 – Come on, you Jocks! Let's move forward! Come on. Come on. Come on.

GIBSON – In redoubts by the side of the road to our first line, we took shelter from the German shells.

MORRISON - Here we saw wounded borne past on stretchers, and German prisoners brought back under guard.

UNKNOWN SOLDIER 2 - (waving an imaginary rifle in his hand) - Hande hoch! You filthy Germans! Schnell! Schnell!

GIBSON – Many were wounding and one of the shells killed a lot of men.

UNKNOWN SOLDIER 1 - Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil:

MORRISON(reading letter) – On one occasion in late November my dugout ended up full of mud and water.

UNKNOWN SOLDIER – (imitating holding a bucket) Let's get this trench dry again. Use the spade. Get a move on.

MORRISON - I felt the temperature drop alarmingly.

UNKNOWN SOLDIER – Freezing! Freezing!

GIBSON - The wind from the north-east was suddenly biting cold, straight off, it seems to me, the steppes of Russia.

MORRISON - We were still in our summer – indeed our only – gear of shorts and nothing else between us and the icy blast.

UNKNOWN SOLDIER – Not in the least, Jock. Not in the bloody least.

GIBSON - Further along the trench I saw a comrade whom I had considered wayward. He was reading his Bible.

UNKNOWN SOLDIER 1 –(reading) - 'Yea though I walk through the valley of death, yet shall I fear no evil.'

MORRISON - It was about 3 pm that the order to advance reached us ...

UNKNOWN SOLDIER 2 – Prepare to advance!

UNKNOWN SOLDIER 1 - Then we were rushing, over 200 yards, in the open to the front line. Maxim fire from flank and front.

UNKNOWN SOLDIER 2 – There we lost most, falling down before our feet.

MORRISON - Oh God, oh God, oh God ... Have mercy on us.

UNKNOWN SOLDIER 1 - Trying to find our friends.

MORRISON – You all right?

UNKNOWN SOLDIER 2 – Aye. You?

MORRISON – I'm fine. I'm fine.

GIBSON - And I saw my wayward comrade on the right, at his duty, carrying out the order.

UNKNOWN SOLDIER 1 - Rapid fire!

GIBSON - The one who had been reading the Word of God a little while before. He died shortly after.

UNKNOWN SOLDIER 1 – Give this Bible to my mother.

UNKNOWN SOLDIER 2 - Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, yet shall I fear no evil....

UNKNOWN SOLDIER 1 - I'm glad you read that, I'm glad I read that.

MORRISON - And me? I have a lot to be thankful for. The night I arrived in the field hospital, the doctor there said I would not last the night. However, I did not mean to die if I could help it. I was completely paralysed and could not move a limb – not even my head. I was operated on there and they took the bullet out of my spinal canal.

GIBSON - The doctor thinks I'll be able to walk again in time so I have nothing to complain about.

MORRISON – Kind regards, Roddy Morrison.

ACT 2 SCENE 2

(The set has now been altered into the sitting room/study of a domestic home. GIBSON is sitting at his desk, a light before him. He scribbles on paper, looks up and writes again, appearing distracted and exhausted. While it is only the winter of 1915, he has aged considerably since he was last seen. At the side door, his wife MARY enters. She is wearing her night-clothes. On the backdrop, leaves still fall.)

MARY – Come to bed, William.

GIBSON – I can't. A heavy summons lies like lead upon me, and I cannot sleep. This night's work has to be done.

MARY – (looking exasperated) Oh, not more Shakespeare. Can't you take a rest from the man? Put your work aside. Surely it can wait till tomorrow.

GIBSON – No. It can't either. In the daylight, there are too many distractions. I'd like to get this done by tomorrow. The boys have been good enough to write letters to me. Sometimes from the field of battle. The least I can do is write a letter back to them from the comfort of my home.

MARY – With everything else you have to do during the school-day? You'll wear yourself out like that.

GIBSON – Aye. So be it. It's better than the way my old man wore himself out. Pushing a wheelbarrow through a garden. Bending over with a hoe in his hands.

MARY – You always end up comparing yourself to him. The reading of these letters doesn't help you in all that.

GIBSON – Aye. I've thought that a few times. Some of them are horrifying, harrowing. Letters from the trenches in France. The ships of the Navy. From the Dardanelles, where so many of the young lads I taught over the last few years went. All these worlds whirling in my mind. Each scribbled note making my knowledge of life seem so narrow, cramped and small, living here in Stornoway. It makes me wonder how I ever dared to open my mouth and speak about the things that could be gained from the war.

MARY – You don't doubt what you told them back then?

GIBSON – No ...

MARY – In that case, spare yourself the torment. (Pause) You came out with the same script as just about every other minister and teacher in this town did, encouraging the young men to join up.

GIBSON – Everyone apart from Macrae. He said nothing to them about the conflict. Just continued to speak about Pythagoras and trigonometry.

MARY – What else would you expect. That's his job.

GIBSON – And someone who is very anxious to do mine.

MARY – Look. All I'm saying is don't be too hard on yourself. You have done all you can and more to make yourself the most highly regarded man in this town. Gardeners son or not, you transformed a tiny school here and made it one of the most highly regarded educational establishments in the country. They all say you were the right man in the right place at the right time.

GIBSON – Thomas Jefferson.

MARY – What?

GIBSON – They said that of him.

MARY – Oh, you and your endless quotations. The older you get, the more I've come to believe they've removed the contents of your head and put in other people's words instead.

GIBSON – It saves me thinking for myself, something that gets harder the older I get.

MARY – I think your main issue is that you think far too much. Sometimes I think you've signed up and are away in the Dardanelles with the best of your pupils.

GIBSON – I can't help it, until all this is over. Then I will return ... But at the moment, I've got letters to write. A job to complete. The duty that lies nearest thee, which thou knowest to be a duty'.

MARY – Good night, William. Come to bed when you've found yourself again.

GIBSON – Good night, Mary. The sage of Ecclefechan.

MARY – What?

GIBSON - Thomas Carlyle, said it.

(Mary looks at him with annoyance, as she leaves the room. Gibson begins to read from a piece of paper that lies before him, doing so aloud. As he does so, three young men in soldier uniforms enter the stage, circling him as if they are half-listening, half-threatening him. They begin to take over the reading of the letters, moving from the stage to stand among the

audience. They act out their movements. At the back of the stage, the stairway is shifted forward, no longer part of the walls o

f their home, allowing it to serve as a substitute for Gallipoli later in the scene.)

ACT 2 SCENE 2A

FINLAYSON occupies the place at the top of the landing, gazing at GIBSON below. The backdrop changes to a night-sky, filled with stars.)

FINLAYSON – It was calm when we left Lemnos. You remember that name, Mr Gibson?

GIBSON - Lemnos...Lemnos.

FINLAYSON - Where the men deserted all their women-folk. There was little sign of any women-folk when we arrived in Lemnos. Just fishermen and other soldiers. We got lectures about Gallipoli.

CAMPBELL - The fierce reception committee that was probably coming our way.

PATERSON – The Turks have got a lot of guns there.

CAMPBELL - Artillery.

PATERSON – Old guns.

CAMPBELL - They won't be all that accurate, but they will be fierce.

PATERSON – Like all men defending their homeland.

CAMPBELL – Like us defending the place it turned out to look like.

PATERSON – The entrance to Stornoway Harbour.

CAMPBELL - Holm. Airnish.

FINLAYSON - Who'd have thought it?. I almost expected to see ex-Provost Anderson and Baillie Maclean standing there, urging me on to battle, waving white feathers in their hands. So much for travel broadening the mind. Eh, Mr Gibson?

PATERSON – And so we sailed, 103 former pupils of the Nicolson.

CAMPBELL - Heading out across the Aegean Sea.

FINLAYSON - towards these places beloved and immortalised in the tales and myths of the Greeks.

GIBSON - 'And if some god should strike me, out on the wine-dark sea, I will endure it...'

FINLAYSON – That’s enough, Gibson. It was no wine-dark sea of Homers. Instead, after the high winds and rainy squalls, it was a hazy morning, fog upon the water. The plan was for the Allied Forces to fan out and land at various points. The French were to disembark at Kum Kale, a few miles from where the sumptuous halls of Troy once stood, to silence the guns that threatened Cape Helles where we were to go.

FINLAYSON – And then came the rosy-fingered dawn, of which Homer speaks, when we landed near Cape Helles.

(There is the sound of explosions, pictures of war portrayed on the screen. The three men are standing together, hauling at a rope. Behind this is the mock-up of an artillery gun.)

CAMPBELL - We were protected by what was happening to the boys in the Lancashire Fusiliers who were landing at W Beach nearby. They were not so fortunate. The Turkish troops cut a swathe through them.

PATERSON - Over 600 men mangled by shells and bullets on that sand.

FINLAYSON - We watched that as we hauled our guns to shore... Couldn’t do a thing to help them.

CAMPBELL- Just haul our guns in place.

PATERSON -Moving them up the slope.

FINLAYSON - And even when we dug our artillery in, we couldn’t even fire at the enemy. Their men were mingling with ours.

CAMPBELL - Impossible to separate.

PATERSON - Impossible to work out who was who.

CAMPBELL - On the other side of Cape Helles, the place they called V Beach.

FINLAYSON - Some stupid officer, receiving all his education through books and Greek.

PATERSON - Using an old collier, as a Trojan horse.

FINLAYSON - 2,000 soldiers crammed in it.

CAMPBELL - The Turkish troops mowed them down with their guns, rank after rank, line after line.

PATERSON - The living and dead were tangled together in a dark red weave on wave and sand.

FINLAYSON – Some ‘Wine-dark sea.’

GIBSON - Equo ne credite, Teucri.

FINLAYSON – Well Gibson?

GIBSON (looking despairingly) - Do not believe in the horse, Trojans!

PATERSON – Here in Cape Helles, boys only eighteen, nineteen.

FINLAYSON - All pupils of the Nicolson. Not given not enough guns...

CAMPBELL – Not enough ammunition.

FINLAYSON – The nature of the terrain making it hard to reach any kind of targets.

CAMPBELL – Some of the guns unshielded, forcing us to work without cover, open to enemy fire.

(There is a loud explosion. CAMPBELL tumbles, clearly shot. The other two men continue to 'load' the gun.)

PATERSON - The dead before us unburied, lying with their shattered limbs, open guts, broken heads, all exposed to the raw wind and warmth.

FINLAYSON - The entire battlefield like a mix between a midden and a graveyard someone had turned over with a spade.

PATERSON - Then there were the flies – the greenbottles some called them – coming down like one of the plagues of Egypt, bringing dysentery and death on their wings.

FINLAYSON - The burial parties used to be sick when they saw them, watching all the maggots, spawning in their thousands in the open wounds.

GIBSON - I've read about it.

FINLAYSON – Aye. But you didn't live them, did you? The gardener's son from Greenock wrapped up in his academic gown

PATERSON – Like a cocoon.

FINLAYSON – A dark hood.

PATERSON – Protecting you from seeing all the blood.

FINLAYSON – And then came the winter. a fearful thunderstorm, hail and snow.

PATERSON - Some of them drowned in a sudden flood of water. Suffering from frostbite. Frozen to death.

FINLAYSON - They withdrew, taking their hungry, emaciated troops with them.

PATERSON - Leaving the bodies of over 1,800 men behind us.

FINLAYSON – A new wall built for Troy. One that even Helen will never bring tumbling down.

PATERSON – Mounds of the dead.

FINLAYSON - ‘Fortis fortunis adivat’ ?

PATERSON - ‘Fortune favours the brave’?

FINLAYSON – ‘This is the one best omen, to fight in defence of one’s country?’

PATERSON - How are you going to react when Francis Street, Church Street and Keith Street haunt you with their ghosts?

FINLAYSON – What are you going to say to them?

SCENE 2 SCENE 3

(When the lights rise a few moments later, GIBSON is alone on stage, frozen in the same position. A man wanders on stage, wearing the clothes of the late twenties, early thirties. It is now set in this era. His head is down, depressed.)

GIBSON – Oh, Mr Nicolson. I haven't seen you in ages. How are you? And how is your son? I haven't seen him in long enough. Is Dougie doing well?

NICOLSON – No, Mr Gibson. Dougie's not well at all.

GIBSON – But I thought he'd got over things. After he got wounded fighting in the Dardanelles.

NICOLSON – Did you not here what happened?

GIBSON – No, what happened?

NICOLSON – He dropped down dead in Maryhill Road. My wife Margaret claims it was because he was dancing. Wasn't behaving properly, decently. Apparently there was a piece of lead left lodged beside his kidneys. The wound had turned septic from all these years before.

GIBSON – That's awful... I am so sorry to hear that.

NICOLSON – my wife's awfully worried at the thought that he died on his way to the dancing. Is it a sin to dance?

GIBSON - Some people have said that to watch people dance is to hear their hearts speak.

NICOLSON – Is that one of these Greek philosophers you're always on about? There's nothing that can be changed for the likes of Dougie. As the tree falleth ... Remember how you told the boys there would be peace and prosperity after the fighting. You didn't turn out to be much of a prophet. There's been no peace and prosperity to speak of. Just more wars and threats of war.

GIBSON – No. I didn't turn out to be much of a prophet. I didn't foresee a world like this, how none were left to weep their loss: unwept the souls of matrons, of brides, young men and ancients – all vanished to the blind wilderness of wind.

(When he says this, a woman comes wearing a shawl comes near to him. She stops for a moment and then walks away)

ACT 2 SCENE 4

GIBSON – Jessie?

(The woman stops, starts and then moves on.)

GIBSON – It is you? Jessie?

(Jessie stops and stands still.)

GIBSON – It is you. Isn't it? What's the matter?

JESSIE – Nothing's the matter. Nothing.

GIBSON – But there is. I can tell there's something wrong.

JESSIE – No.

GIBSON – Come over here.

(Jessie lets down her shawl. When she uncovers her face, it is clear that it is badly bruised.)

GIBSON – Oh, God. You're in some state, my girl. Who did that to you? Who did that?

JESSIE – Donald. He did that. (Pause) But it's not his fault. When he tries to sleep at night, he often wakes up. Lashes me with his fists.

GIBSON – Oh...

JESSIE – And then he's sorry about it the following morning. Cries about it. Shakes and weeps. (Pause) He says he thinks he's back on that boat delivering supplies in the Dardanelles. And he's raising his hands to protect himself from all the explosives being set off. The bombs crashing into the water all around.

GIBSON – You poor soul.

JESSIE – He's just doing it to save himself. You understand that, don't you, Mr Gibson? It's not his fault.

GIBSON – I know that, Jessie. The Greeks got it right all these centuries ago. War is 'hell to ships, hell to men, hell to cities.'

JESSIE – (stiffening, looking at him.) The Greeks?

GIBSON – Aye. The words of Aeschylus.

JESSIE – Oh. His brother died just a short distance from where he was . He puts his hands up to protect him too, save him from the shells and bullets that were flying in his direction, pounding his fists in my direction, screaming and yelling as he does so. (Pause.) But it's not his fault.

GIBSON – No.

JESSIE – It's the fault of those people who encouraged men like him to go to war. As if it was an adventure. As if it was a way of seeing the world. They're the ones to blame.

(She walks away then, leaving Gibson on his own in the middle of the stage. He shakes his head, bewildered. Finlayson and Paterson move out of the shadows.)

ACT 2 SCENE 5

GIBSON - Why do I remain, unyielding? Why do I linger here? Why do you preserve me, wrinkled old age? Why prolong an old man's life, cruel gods, unless it is for me to view more funerals, more deaths?

FINLAYSON – A good question, Gibson. But it's not the only one you're going to have to answer, is it?

PATERSON – Like where's all that peace and prosperity you talked about us enjoying when this war was over?

FINLAYSON – You're a well-travelled man since you hung up your headmaster's cloak, Mr Gibson. You've been to Italy, seen the good work of Mussolini there. (He clicks his heels, raises his arms in a Fascist salute.)

PATERSON - 'Mussolini ha sempre ragione'?

FINLAYSON – Translate, Gibson.

GIBSON – Why must I?

PATERSON – The men who died obeyed more ridiculous orders.

PATERSON - 'Mussolini ha sempre ragione'?

GIBSON – Mussolini is always right.

PATERSON – You've been to Russia... Seen what Communism can do.

FINLAYSON (shaking his fist in a Communist salute.) - The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the minds of the living. Who said that?

PATERSON - You must have left your brains behind you in your father's garden this morning, clipped from your head like the dead head of a rose.

FINLAYSON - I'll give you an easier one. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains.

GIBSON – Karl Marx.

PATERSON – Better. Better. There is hope for you, Gibson.

FINLAYSON – And I hear you’ve even followed the example of the pussy cat in the nursery rhyme and gone down to London to see the Queen and King.

PATERSON – Kneel down before us.

GIBSON – What?

PATERSON – Kneel, please. One knee will suffice.

(Gibson does as he is asked. Paterson touches head and both shoulders with an invisible sword.)

PATERSON – I now name you Sir William John Gibson, Knight Commander of the British Empire. You may stand.

(He gets himself to his feet.)

FINLAYSON - Received a nice little honour there. Congratulations on that. There may be more to come.

PATERSON – And have you seen much sign of the promised peace in these places? Have you, Mr Gibson? Have you?

FINLAYSON – And what about the end of class divisions?

PATERSON – And what are you going to say when MacRae comes to your door again, asks you to unveil a plaque in the school?

FINLAYSON – One where 148 names of former pupils are noted? Those whom the war has killed?

PATERSON – What are you going to say to him?

FINLAYSON – Any idea?

(The two men disappear when there is the ring of a door-bell. It rings persistently. During this time, instead of answering it, Gibson goes to sit at his desk.)

ACT 3 SCENE 1

MARY (entering stage) - William! Can't you answer that? Where are you? William? My hands are dirty. William!

(She gives an exasperated sigh as she finally goes to answer the door. MACRAE is standing there with a letter in his hand.)

MARY – It's strange to see you at this time of day. I can't imagine that it's a social call. You haven't been here in quite some time.

MACRAE – It's the job. Its demands. Well, you know more than I do about them.

MARY – Aye. But it's what you wanted so much, John, waiting for all those years for the old man to take leave of office. Tell me how is the crown of thorns?

MACRAE – It weighs heavily sometimes.

MARY – I thought it might. It's harder for you hometown boys, you know. You're a lot closer to the voices of people around them than those who come in from afar.

MACRAE (ignoring her) How is the old man these days?

MARY – I'd like to say he was enjoying his retirement, but that's not always true. Sometimes it's as if he's never retired at all. Wrapped up in his own little world. Thinking of the boys that were lost back then.

MACRAE – As far away as ever then?

MARY – Just about. But I would be uneasy about that if I were you. His fate might be exactly what happens to you if that new war some people are predicting comes about. It's not just the robes of office that wears you down at times like that. Sometimes it's the sorrows too.

MACRAE – Can I see him then?

MARY – Oh, of course. I'll give him a call. He'll be delighted to see you.

MACRAE – I doubt that, Mrs Gibson. I doubt that very much.

MARY (giving him an ominous look) I'll shout him. William!

(We see GIBSON rising from his desk, making his way towards MACRAE. Mary disappears.)

GIBSON – Oh, Mr Macrae. It's a long time since I've see you. You well?

MACRAE – Passably so. Passably so. You?

GIBSON – What can I do for you?

MACRAE (hesitant) It's what we spoke about last year. The task I asked you to perform.

GIBSON – The unveiling of the plaque ? (sighs) I thought I suggested other names, like the M.P Ramsay. One of the local ministers. The Lord Lieutenant. Some esteemed visitor or another. Goodness knows some of them are vain enough to even want to do it.

MACRAE – I've talked this over with the other teachers. They all want you to take on the task. No one dissented. And that's a rare thing these days.

GIBSON – Oh? I'm surprised at that.

MACRAE – It's what always happens when one dog's occupied the manger for too long. The others become set in their ways, difficult to alter or change. Anyway, they all want you to be the main speaker and perform the unveiling. They'd feel honoured if you did it.

GIBSON – Oh, it's an honour, is it?

MACRAE – Some would see it that way.

GIBSON – Oh, fine. Fine. I'll do it then. Seeing as it's an honour.

(MacRae hands over the envelope before leaving the room. The stage darkens as GIBSON stands in isolation, opening it.)

ACT 3 SCENE 2

(The hall fills with the singing of 'All people that on earth do dwell ...'; the lyrics provided on the programme. When the curtain opens, MR GIBSON sits on the stage with MACRAE, wearing academic gowns. Gibson looks weak and tired as he stands behind the lectern, older too than in earlier scenes. Below the landing is the wreath, which consists of white lilies and red poppies in the shape of the Nicolson badge. On the backdrop, there are once again images of leaves. In the audience, we can hear talking. MARY is in the audience. They quieten when GIBSON begins to speak.)

GIBSON – A school is like a person. It has a character; a personality of its own. This is always being built up, being added to, by each generation that passes through its classrooms – not only by what they do while at school, but also by the kind of men and women they show themselves to be after they leave school. We are met here today to commemorate a great and generous contribution made to our tradition as a school. One hundred and forty eight ... One hundred and forty eight former pupils of this school laid down their lives in the Great War...

Our school motto says. 'Sequamur', 'We will follow.' And the Nicolson tradition will always be the richer by this. Though their service on land and sea, they were scattered far and wide. Some passed straight out of the classroom to the roar of the guns. There was no fighting front without its share of these Lewis lads. The dust indeed of most of them rests in foreign soil – and beneath the seas of all the oceans.

They hoped that the two other fruits of good would follow from their effort when peace was won. One – that this war would end wars and that never again would the civilised world see its armies face one another in enmity. Two – in the field our soldiers developed comradeships among all classes. Everybody was hopeful that the good fellowship and comradeship thus formed in common action in a great cause were bound to be carried over into the days of peace, (He stops, trembling.) and would go far to solve the social problems of the country.

GIBSON (continuing) - My words are, too, for those who were next older who were too young to have a share in the war, and to those – and I see many of them here – who were comrades in arms of the men who fell, and fought shoulder to shoulder with them. You have a trust placed on you by those who are gone. (Pauses. Takes a drink of water.) Besides the immediate purpose for which they fought, they hoped that the two other fruits of good would follow from their effort when peace was won.

Europe is still an armed camp, the peace mind is still sadly lacking among the nations, and the spirit of fellowship and co-operation between the classes at home is still to seek. The older generation – my generation – has failed.

PATRSON – What do these places have to do with us.

FINLAYSON – Nice little honour. Congratulations

MARY – You shouldn't be so hard on yourself.

JESSIE – He's just doing it to save himself.

MACRAE – I only hope your right, with my whole heart.

we have been bought with a price, that of the lives that were laid down for us. To quote the words of Sophocles, 'the end will excuse any evil we have done'. To the memory of 148 former members of the Nicolson Institute who gave their lives in the Great War is now unveiled this tablet, its lasting bronze a symbol of the undying remembrance in which their names, their devotion to duty, and their self-sacrifice will be held by their old school.

(The screen shows the names of the 148 men on the screen who died and where they came from. Where possible, it should also reveal the age, place of origin and image of those who have died. As the names are shown, the Last Post is played; a young man from the audience coming forward to place the wreath below the plaque. The platform party bow their heads, a moment or two in silence. The petals of poppies shower the audience as a piper plays the tune 'Lochaber No More'.)