

QUARTZ

When I arrived in South West Scotland at the age of twelve, I had seldom if ever encountered anti Catholicism. Then I was plunged straight from the shelter of a girls' convent grammar school into the maelstrom of a mixed Catholic comprehensive in an area where "left footers" (presumably from the Catholic custom of genuflecting or bending the right knee!) were viewed with a certain amount of suspicion. Quartz is not just about that sense of bigotry however. It is about issues of magic and ways of seeing the world: but the insidious effects of anti-Catholicism and religious intolerance are part of the background of the play – part of what motivates the characters, particularly Teresa, who loves her son, and fears for him, and Michael who surely loves his mother, but is ultimately destroyed by her.

QUARTZ, SETTING AND OPENING SCENE

The play is set in a space that should lie somewhere between land and sea: - part cottage interior, part cave, part beach. It should have a magical, mystical quality to it with blues and whites and greys in the sky behind, layered like the interior of a stone. Besides that you should almost - or perhaps literally - be able to smell it. Just about everything in the scene comes from the sea: - even the furniture is made of driftwood. There are nets and floats and shells and fish boxes. In the "cottage" area, there is a hearth, with driftwood kindling. Among the things on stage, and in the cottage area, is a large object, woman sized and roughly female shaped, sea polished and apparently made of stone. It is deliberately placed upright, but surrounded by driftwood and other stones: a part of Michael's collection.

The light, which changes according to the time of day, is very important. Michael has been here a long time: - several years – and it is emphatically his place. This is a world which he has created, building up layers over the years that he has inhabited it. He has made this space for himself like a hermit crab decorating its borrowed shell, or like a small world within a world, which is what has happened within the

stones that he gathers and works with: the layers of agates are built up, and achieve their beauty and a kind of perfection under pressure.

Michael lives and works in this “Pebble House” as the local people call it, finding stones, polishing them and creating works of art with them, using rope and driftwood too. He is contented with his life. When we see Michael working at the beginning of the play he should be sure of himself, absorbed, confident. But as the play progresses even his working methods begin to disintegrate so that he is increasingly hesitant, and unsure of himself. Michael speaks with a Scottish accent but his mother may have a slight Irish quality to her voice. Throughout, to a greater or lesser extent, we should be aware of the constantly shifting sound of the sea.

Scene One.

Scene, as above. Springtime. Evening. Greyish light. It has been a cloudy day. Michael is in the cottage area. He is a youngish man, good looking. He appears strong and very self contained, very “grounded.” He looks like a fisherman or at least somebody who makes a living from the sea. There should be a kind of innocence about him. At the start of the play the “statue” is covered with a canvas or tarpaulin.

Teresa enters picking her way gingerly along the beach. She is a smart if conventionally dressed woman in her sixties. Sensible shoes, M and S pleated skirt, her hair neatly permed. She is carrying a shopping bag in her arms with some difficulty. She stands still for a moment looking towards the sea. Then, moves on towards the cottage, calling as she does so.

TERESA: Michael? Are you there Michael?

Michael moves over to his work desk and begins to sort through some small stones there as his mother approaches.

There are more stones here, and half-finished things. A box, perhaps, a mirror, other unidentifiable objects. Driftwood. Lots of stones and pebbles, big and small. There is water in a container, also shells and rope , a long sharp knife: - the tools of his craft

TERESA: There you are son.

MICHAEL: I'm working.

TERESA: So I see.

MICHAEL: If you find one there are sometimes more.

TERESA: One what?

MICHAEL: Agates. The storms always bring them in. The waves push them in.

TERESA: That was some storm. I thought the roof was coming off.

MICHAEL: You should have been down here. You should have seen the lightning on the sea....

TERESA: I'm scared of lightning....

MICHAEL: I used to be.

TERESA: I remember. I remember you...

MICHAEL: But not now.
Spring storms. Summer's coming.

TERESA: I suppose so. I don't know how you can stand it down here in winter. Catch your death one of these days.

MICHAEL: *(Searching in his bag.)*
Look. I found this today.
(He holds it out to her.)
White chalcedony. And blue chalcedony. And smoky quartz and carnelian.

TERESA: Very nice son.

MICHAEL: *(suddenly realising that this is his mother - he is always trying to interest her in what he does. It never quite works)* It will be. When I've polished it.

She sets down her bag.

TERESA: *(Trying hard)* What will you do with it then?

MICHAEL: *(Preoccupied with his stone)* What?

TERESA: I mean when you've polished it. What will you make with it?

MICHAEL: Oh - I'm going to make a necklace.

TERESA: You don't make jewellery.

MICHAEL: I'm making something for Claire.

TERESA: I see. I hope she's paying you well.

MICHAEL: I might not charge her anything.

TERESA: I see.

MICHAEL: Will you stop saying that?

TERESA: You'll never get rich that way son.

MICHAEL: I don't want to get rich.

TERESA: Just as well then.

TERESA: You let folk take advantage of you.

MICHAEL: Claire doesn't. She sells a lot of my stuff in the shop. Driftwood mirrors. Boxes.

TERESA: It's never what you would call busy. That shop. I don't think she tries very hard.

MICHAEL: I'm sure she does.

TERESA: Hm.

MICHAEL: Why? What's the matter with her?

TERESA: She's not a suitable friend for you. Not an appropriate friend.

MICHAEL: Why not?

TERESA: She's divorced for one thing.

MICHAEL: Shock horror.

TERESA: You may mock.

MICHAEL: I'm not planning to marry her mum.

TERESA: I should hope not.

MICHAEL: If it was up to me I wouldn't do anything else with them. Not mirrors, not boxes...I like them just as they are.

TERESA: Will I make you some supper son? You must be hungry.

MICHAEL: I've had something.

TERESA: I brought you a few groceries. Just one or two things. I know what you're like.

MICHAEL: I manage fine.

TERESA: You don't feed yourself properly.

MICHAEL: I don't look as if I'm starving do I?

Teresa begins to unpack the groceries: -. Tea, biscuits, cheese, basic stuff.

TERESA: You need a fridge. I wish you had a fridge.

MICHAEL: I manage fine.

TERESA: We could get you a fridge.

MICHAEL: Mum...

She takes out a packet of cream crackers.

MICHAEL: Why do you keep bringing me cream crackers?

TERESA: You love cream crackers.

MICHAEL: No I don't. I can't stand cream crackers. It was my dad who liked cream crackers.

TERESA: No he didn't.

MICHAEL: Yes he did. You used to keep them in that green coronation tin. He ate them every morning with his tea. Three buttered cream crackers. You used to make me eat them as well. But I never liked them. I can't stand them. I can't even stand the smell of them.

There is a pause while she absorbs and then decides to ignore this outburst.

TERESA: Well I wish you'd told me.

MICHAEL: I do keep telling you

TERESA: All you needed to do was tell me.

MICHAEL: You never bloody listen.

TERESA: And there's no call for swearing. Anyway you hang onto them. You never know. You might have visitors.

MICHAEL: I don't get many...

TERESA: Nice bit of mild cheddar and a cream cracker.

MICHAEL: I don't get many visitors.

TERESA: I brought you some beers. You'll not say no to those.

MICHAEL: No. I'll not say no to those mum.

She takes out a bag and begins to sort through a pile of clothes on the bed, pushing them into the bag.

MICHAEL: Let me do that.

TERESA: Don't you bother yourself son. I'll not be staying long. I'll just pack up your washing and go. There's a good film on the telly tonight. Don't you ever miss the telly Michael?

MICHAEL: No.

TERESA: I expect you've got used to doing without it now.

MICHAEL: I like to be quiet. The nights are quiet down here. When the wind isn't blowing! I can think.

TERESA: I was talking to Father Sweeney on Sunday.

Michael doesn't respond to this. She holds up a threadbare tee-shirt.

TERESA: This is just about done Michael.

MICHAEL: I like it.

TERESA: You like it. He was asking after you. How's Michael he said. Still polishing his pebbles? He's such a nice man. He's having a bit of trouble with his candles.

Michael picks away at one of the stones with the knife, chipping away sand and seaweed.

His mother finishes packing away his washing and then, reluctant to leave him, begins to tidy up the cottage a bit.

MICHAEL: What's wrong with his candles?

TERESA: Well you know how you could always go in there and light a candle at the altar of the Blessed Virgin?

MICHAEL: I remember.

TERESA: I light one every week for your daddy.

MICHAEL: *(surprised)* Do you?

TERESA: Only now Father Sweeney finds he can't get insurance if he has candles unattended in the church. Fire risk.

Michael looks at her but without really paying attention.

TERESA: A church with no candles. I ask you. What in the name of God do you do to your jeans Michael?

MICHAEL: Tar. I get tar on them.

TERESA: You get half the beach on them. I've got this great new bleach. Mild to the clothing but tough on stains.

MICHAEL: Was it advertised on the telly?

TERESA: It was.

MICHAEL: If it'll shift beach tar it'll shift anything.
You don't need to iron my socks mum.

TERESA: But I always iron socks.

MICHAEL: And I don't know why you iron my underwear.

TERESA: It's more comfortable. And things last longer when you iron them. It's a well-known fact. It smoothes all the fibres in the right way.
Anyway I was telling you about Father Sweeney...

MICHAEL: And his candles.

TERESA: Well, there's wee gas lamp things he could get where you put a coin in the box and up comes the flame.

MICHAEL: Gas lamps?

TERESA: For the altar of the Blessed Virgin.

MICHAEL: Oh.

TERESA: Only it's not the same, is it, and anyway there's no gas supply to the church. Mind you I suppose you could get those cylinders. Well it's either that or wee candle shaped electric lights.

But it isn't the same is it?

MICHAEL: What isn't the same?

TERESA: An electric light. Not the same as a living flame.

MICHAEL: No. I suppose not.

He is sifting through pebbles, repeating the names of the stones with pleasure. She begins tidying up round him, and moves the knife.

MICHAEL: Mind yourself. That's sharp. Mum, will you leave my stuff alone!

TERESA: Alright, alright. Anyway he was asking about you.

MICHAEL: Chalcedony...amethyst...jasper...

TERESA: Enquiring after you so he was.

MICHAEL: ...carnelian... onyx... serpentine... moonstone...This is a moonstone.

TERESA: Very nice.

MICHAEL: Have you ever seen a moonstone?

TERESA: He wondered why you wouldn't come home. With me all on my own.

MICHAEL: You're not on your own Mum.

TERESA: I am so.

MICHAEL: Deirdre phones you whenever she can. And Assumpta comes home once a month....

TERESA: Which isn't very often.

MICHAEL: She's busy. She works long hours.

TERESA: Time she settled down....

MICHAEL: She's very settled. She just hasn't got herself a man yet.

TERESA: Oh well.

MICHAEL: You've got the Mother's Union, you've got the Rural and your sewing group...

TERESA: I don't like to think of you all alone down here. Have you not been down here for long enough Michael?

MICHAEL: What do you mean long enough?

TERESA: When you first said you wanted to live down here...oh son...I never imagined... I mean I thought it would be just for a few weeks. Just till you got yourself sorted out....

MICHAEL: I am sorted out. I can work here. I'm happy.

TERESA: But I never thought it would be years Michael.

MICHAEL: I like it here.

TERESA: Anyway, he said he might come down to see you.

MICHAEL: Who?

TERESA: Father Sweeney.

MICHAEL: Why would he want to do that?

TERESA: Why not? It's what he does. Visit his parishioners.

MICHAEL: But why would he come to see me when I haven't set foot inside a church in years?

TERESA: That's what I said. I said Father, the roof would fall in on him if he came to church now.

MICHAEL: *(Turning back to the pebbles)* Carnelian, Jasper, a piece of flint. Why would you get flint here I wonder?

TERESA: But there's always hope Teresa, that's what he said to me.

MICHAEL: This is a moss agate. Polished, it'll be beautiful. But not as fine as this one. These are scenic agates.

TERESA: Very nice.

MICHAEL: This one looks like a landscape. Here's the sky and here's the sea and here's the mouth of the cave. You're looking at the sea through the mouth of a cave.

TERESA: Oh yes.

MICHAEL: It's winter. The sky's white and bright and cold. One of those wintry days when the sea is grey and heavy. Heavier than in summer. Like molten lead. It's a wee world inside a world. Just think of all those layers built up over the years.

TERESA: What are you saying?

MICHAEL: Millions of years. Like a kind of blueprint for everything. *(He holds the stone out to her again.)* A code. Like something secret.

TERESA: So will I tell him to come and see you? Father Sweeney I mean.

MICHAEL: If he wants to.

TERESA: You'd like him. You really would. You could do with more friends of your own age.

Michael shrugs.

TERESA: He said to me, he said Mrs Flynn what the lad needs is a girlfriend. Someone to take him out of himself.

Michael looks up at this and laughs

TERESA: I know, I know. I told him. I know that, Father, but where is he to find the love of a good woman in this pagan wee town?

Och he said, there are plenty of bonnie lassies in this place. Aye, but are they bonnie Protestant lassies or are they bonnie Catholic lassies, I said. Ah well, Mrs Flynn, he told me, we're all ecumenical now aren't we?

MICHAEL: Oh aye?

TERESA: ...and I said you try telling that to Hughie MacNeill when he thumps away on that drum every year at the Orange Walk. You try telling that to Big Shug MacNeill. It sets my blood aflame the way they march past the chapel and you know I'm not a violent woman.

MICHAEL: No mum. You're not a violent women.

TERESA: Dark night has come down on this rough spoken world Father. That's what I told him. And the banners of darkness are boldly unfurled....

MICHAEL: And the tempest-tossed church, all her eyes are on thee. We look to thy shining, sweet star of the sea.

TERESA: Sweet star of the sea.

She has been glancing curiously at the statue, from time to time, covered by its tarpaulin. Now she moves it and looks beneath.

MICHAEL: *(sings)* "Hail queen of heaven, the ocean star, guide of the wanderer here below *(His mother's gaze remains on the statue, fascinated)*
(In an effort to distract her) Do you remember we used to sing "Hail glorious Saint Patrick, dear saint of our isle"? I thought they meant this isle. Bloody stupid.

TERESA: Don't swear.

MICHAEL: No but, I thought they meant Scotland.

TERESA: *(But her eyes are still on the statue. Whenever she touches it, Michael flinches slightly)* Why shouldn't they mean Scotland? We're as much children of Patrick as they are over the water. Did our Assumpta not nearly win the Rose of Tralee contest one year?

MICHAEL: Not nearly.

TERESA: Well. She nearly made the final. *(momentarily distracted)* Oh it was a lovely photograph that one we sent in. I have it framed and sitting up on the bureau to this day.

MICHAEL: Aye well...

TERESA: Will you come for your tea on Friday?

MICHAEL: No. I don't think I can mum.

TERESA: But it's ages since you came up for your tea. I've got fish fingers. Haddock not cod. I've never liked cod.

MICHAEL: What have you got against cod?

TERESA: You get these great huge worms in cod. I remember reading about them...

MICHAEL: Worms?

TERESA: Fish worms. Harmless to humans but all the same...

MICHAEL: So these fish fingers are haddock are they?

TERESA: They are.

MICHAEL: And haddock don't get worms?

TERESA: I never heard that they did. Anyway, they were two packs for the price of one in Safeways. I couldn't leave them.

MICHAEL: I don't suppose you could leave them. You always like a bargain don't you mum?

TERESA: There's no call for insolence Michael

MICHAEL: Will you stop treating me like a kid?

TERESA: I will when you stop behaving like one.

MICHAEL: For Christ's sake, alright, alright, I'll come for my tea. OK?

TERESA: Don't take the Lord's name in vain.

MICHAEL: Do you want me to come or not?

TERESA: What's wrong with you today?

MICHAEL: Nothing's wrong with me. I'm just trying to work.

TERESA: Michael, what is this?

MICHAEL: I found her on the shore.

TERESA: It looks very heavy.

MICHAEL: She's stone.

TERESA: It's very...big isn't it?
So...where did it come from? Michael? Where can it
have come from?

*At last Michael responds to her interest, gets up and
goes over to the statue, running his hand over it, laying
claim to it.*

*The setting sun comes out from behind a bank of
clouds and casts a luminous golden light on the object.
Both Michael and the object are bathed in this glorious
light. . This should be a magical moment.*

MICHAEL: I told you. The sea brought her to me.

TERESA: So how did you manage to bring it in here? You could
have killed yourself!

MICHAEL: I had to use ropes and things.

TERESA: It looks like....

MICHAEL: Stone. But she must have come in on the tide...
Lying on the sand, wee pink shells all around her, a
piece of seaweed draped over her. She looked so...I
had to have her.

TERESA: Like a miracle....

MICHAEL: The sea brought her. She feels...

TERESA: Smooth.

MICHAEL: And warm. She's really warm for stone. She's lovely.

TERESA: It looks exactly like....

MICHAEL: A woman.

TERESA: No. Well yes but there's something...

MICHAEL: Special about her.

TERESA: Oh yes. There's something special about it for sure.
I mean there's something really....

MICHAEL: Magical about her.

TERESA: Magical? No.

MICHAEL: Yes. Yes. Magical. The sea transforms things in time.
Changes everything. Now there's something....

TERESA: No, not magical but...
Holy about it.

MICHAEL: Well not exactly holy. No.

TERESA: But she looks....

MICHAEL: Beautiful.

TERESA: She is. She is indeed.
I don't know. I don't know what to think Michael.
Who is she?

MICHAEL: Who is she that cometh forth as the morning rising?

She leaves, reluctantly. He heaves a sigh of relief to see her go.

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