

The Bilko Rosary

Our friends would never call
at that time after tea,
terrified they might be brought inside
and made to wait, made to kneel with us
elbows resting on the dented seats
of the four dining chairs,
or lined awkwardly, shoulder to shoulder
along the front of the low settee,
forced to join us in our evening prayers.
We could hear them playing in the street,
the Gilmores, Bannans and McCanns
while our mother told us once again
'the family that prays together, stays together'.

Our twenty-three inch Bush TV
would be swivelled on its base
and turned to face the corner.
And there it stayed, volume down,
projecting on the patterned wall
a tantalizing shimmer and glow,
the early evening episodes
of *I Love Lucy* or *The Phil Silvers Show*
caught on the flowers and ferns
growing on our cheap wallpaper.

Our father who wanted none of it
took no part, retreated to the far armchair
for his solitary vigil with *The Irish News*,
reading it from the start to the final amen.
Sometimes, I'd see the paper slightly drop
as he twisted sideways in his seat,
stealing a sneaky peep over the top
to catch a sideways glimpse of Sergeant Bilko
miming on the silent screen.