A STUDY OF THE PLAYS OF SEAN O'CASEY

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A STUDY OF THE PLAYS OF SEAN O'CASEY

By

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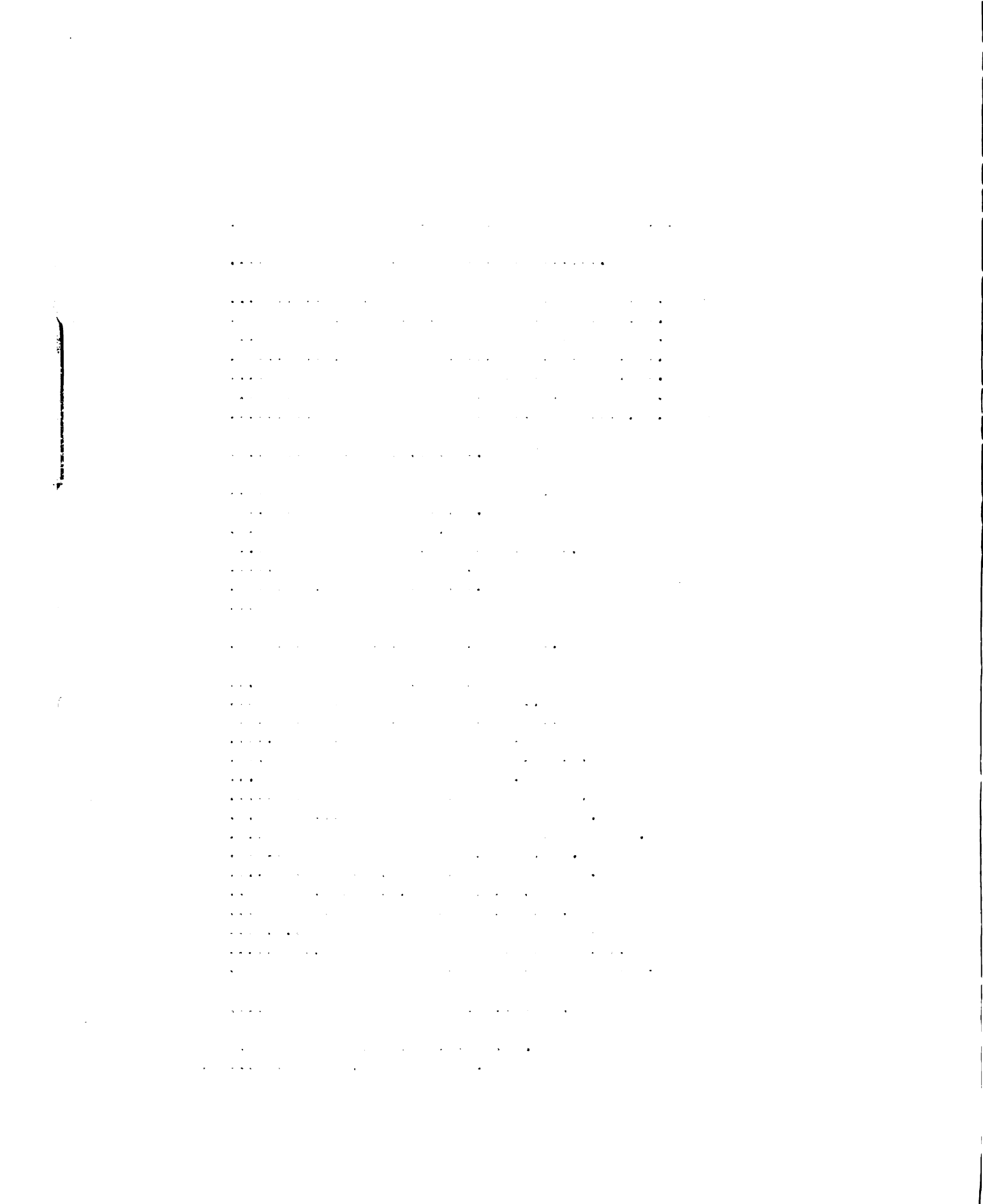

CHAPTER PAGE

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to study the plays that Sean O'Casey has written to date. This thesis is not intended to be a definitive work or a detailed analysis of each play; rather it is a compilation of what the critics have written about O'Casey's plays. It is hoped by the author that this thesis will provide a basis for further exploration of the plays of O'Casey and that it perhaps may be of some aid in providing a background for directors who may wish to stage O'Casey's plays.

In 1951, John Gassner wrote that the three giants of the English speaking theatre are Shaw, O'Neill and O'Casey.[1] Although there are numerous studies of Shaw and O'Neill little work has been done on O'Casey. This may be partially accounted for by the fact that his plays, especially the later ones, have received relatively few productions in recent years. In fact, there has not been a commercial Broadway production of a new O'Casey play since 1934, although there are occasional amateur productions of his plays. Despite this fact, there are many critics, such as George Jean Nathan and Brooks Atkinson who feel that O'Casey is one of the most important contemporary dramatists.

The thesis is divided into four chapters. Chapter I deals in a chronological fashion with a brief history of modern Ireland. Chapter II is a brief biography of Sean O'Casey. For purposes of clarity it is subdivided into subject headings which are individually treated in a chronological order. Chapter III is a study of the plays of O'Casey. Chapter IV is an evaluation of O'Casey's place in the theatre as seen in 1952.

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1 John Gassner, "The Prodigality of Sean O'Casey" Theatre Arts, 35:52, June, 1951.

CHAPTER I

In order to understand Sean O'Casey's life, and also to understand several of his plays, a understanding of certain events of modern Irish history is necessary. The purpose of this chapter will be to provide a brief, objective history of Ireland from 1800 to 1923 with special reference to periods and events which are important in O'Casey's life and in his plays. There have been many books written on this subject, but two works, Ireland, Past and Present[1] and Revolution In Ireland, 1909-1923,[2] both recommended as sources by the 14th edition of the Encyclopedia Britanica have been used in the preparation of this chapter.

1800-1850

Eighteen hundred was the date of the Parlimentary Union of Ireland with Great Britain and this date is chosen as a starting point because much of nineteenth and twentieth century Irish history is a result of this act of Union. One of the immediate reactions to this act of Union was a revolt in 1803 by a small group of Irish nationalists with Robert Emmett at their head. This revolt was quickly crushed.

During the Napoleonic Wars, Ireland prospered because of the great demand for it's agricultural products, but after the war a period of economic decline began in Ireland. Many of the Irish tenant farmers found

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1 Tom Ireland, Ireland, Past And Present, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1942) 1010 pp.

2 W. A. Phillips, Revolution In Ireland, 1909-1923, (London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1926) 348 pp.

that there was no longer a market for their produce and as a result they lost their farms since they were unable to keep up rental payments. Irish industry which was for the most part undeveloped also declined since it could not compete with the more mechanized English industry.

The Great Famine of 1845-1848 was an important factor in the alienation of the Irish and the British. The potato had become the national food of Ireland and the staple item in the diet of the poorer classes of society. The Irish peasant existed almost entirely upon potatoes in one form or another. Cattle and grain were also raised in Ireland, but only the wealthier class could afford these products. In 1845 the potato blight appeared in Ireland and by 1846 it had covered the entire country, ruining the potato crop. It was not until 1848 that the potato blight finally subsided.

Ireland's grain production possibly would have been sufficient to halt the famine and save the starving population if its exportation had been halted and it had been used for relief purposes. However, British political thought at this time held that nothing should be done by the government which could be done by private enterprise and consequently refused to stop exportation of the grain. Individuals and organizations attempted to provide relief and although some measure of relief was provided it was not nearly adequate enough. The Irish, seeing shiploads of grain leaving their ports while people were starving, blamed the British for much of their misery.

There were several important results of the Famine of 1845. The first was a large decline in the population of Ireland. Over a million

people were estimated to have died as a direct result of the famine. Secondly, there was a mass emigration of the Irish to the United States and Canada following the famine. Ireland's population of approximately eight million in 1845 dropped to approximately five million in 1881. Another important result of the famine was the almost complete destruction of the Gaelic tradition. Since the act of Union, English had tended more and more to replace Gaelic. The Gaelic tradition was upheld mainly in the more isolated farm regions among the peasant class, but as a result of the famine many of these peasants died thus virtually wiping out the Gaelic tradition.

Eighteen hundred forty-eight was a year of revolution all over Europe and Ireland was no exception. Extremists in a group known as the Young Irelanders rebelled against the rule of Great Britain. Although the rebellion was in actuality only a minor skirmish in which the young Irelanders were quickly defeated, it had an important effect upon Irish thought. The Irish people tended to martyrize the rebels and to condone their acts of violence rather than regard them as traitors. The rebellion of 1848 was an indication of the beginning of Irish nationalism.

1850-1900

The second half of the nineteenth century saw the furtherance of Irish nationalistic feelings and the beginnings of organized attempts to gain home rule. During this period, many secret societies and organizations sprang up.

In 1858, John O'Mahony founded a secret society in New York City called the Irish-American Brotherhood. The avowed purpose of this

organization was to free Ireland through force of arms and elaborate plans were laid for a war with Great Britain. A revolution in Ireland was to be accompanied by an attack upon the British in Canada by the Irish-Americans. In 1867, this organization was surpressed by the American government. Although there were a few minor skirmishes with the British in Ireland, no organized revolt took place.

Although there were those who advocated organized revolt as a means of gaining Irish independence, there were others who believed that this end could best be achieved through political maneuvering. In 1875, Parnell was elected to the House of Commons and in 1878 he became the head of the Irish Party in Parliment. Parnell, who was one of the greatest of Irish statesmen, believed that the British government could not be persuaded by logic to institute home rule, and so he used obstructionistic tactics and political maneuvering in his fight to gain Irish independence.

The introduction of Gladstone's First Bill for Home Rule in 1886 was a direct result of Parnell's political and parliamentary maneuverings. However, Parnell and his Irish Nationalist Party received a severe blow when the support of the Catholic Church was withdrawn from them. When Parnell's affair with Mrs. Kitty O'Shea came to light, the Catholic Church withdrew its support and although the Southern Protestants rallied around him, the opposition of the Catholic Church resulted in a serious split in the powerful Irish Nationalist Party.

The 1890's saw the establishment of another important organization in the struggle for Home Rule--Sinn Fein. Although at first this organization advocated passive resistance to Great Britain, such as non payment of taxes,

it soon despaired of gaining independence by any parliamentary means and began to advocate more direct methods to gain home rule.

In 1893, a second Home Rule Bill was introduced to Parliament but this bill was defeated. Opposition to home rule came not only from Great Britain but also from Ulster, the northern part of Ireland. This opposition was based partly on fear of Catholic domination and partly from a desire to retain its industrial position. Ulster's population was predominately Protestant and it feared domination by the Catholic influences of Southern Ireland. Although Ulster had originally opposed the Union of 1800, with the rapid growth of industry the state had profited under the Union.

Irish nationalism also made itself felt in other than political areas. In 1893 the Gaelic League was founded by Dr. Douglas Hyde and Eoin MacNeill. The purpose of the Gaelic League was to attempt to revive the Gaelic language and tradition. The founders of this organization believed that a national language was more important than a flag; that language was the true indication of nationality. Theoretically the organization was not political in nature, although many of its members leaned toward separation from Great Britain. Although the Gaelic League never became an especially important political faction, it was of great importance in keeping the spirit of Irish nationalism alive.

1900-1914

The years preceding World War I were restless years in Ireland. In addition to the strong nationalistic feelings, Irish labor also began to assert itself. The conditions of the workers in Dublin in the early 1900's

were as bad as any in Europe. In 1909, James Larkin founded the General Workers and Transport Union. In 1913 the transportation industry in Dublin struck for higher wages and better working conditions. The strike which paralyzed large segments of Dublin was marked by violence almost from the beginning. Soon the press, the Catholic Church, and many labor leaders made public their opposition to the strike and the strikers. Despite numerous brutalities by the police and strike breakers, the strike did not end until 1914.

Following the strike, the Citizen's Army was organized to protect the workers. Many people who had been shocked by the brutalities of the police during the strike joined this organization. Since the government had opposed the strikers, many people became convinced of the Socialists thesis that the government was not a neutral body to preserve law and order, but a weapon of force to be used, when necessary, against the workers.

The agitation for Home Rule grew so that by 1914 the measure seemed almost a certainty. Ulster continued to oppose any plan for Home Rule and determined to resist its operation by force if necessary. A Protestant army was formed in Ulster known as the Ulster Volunteers to accomplish this opposition.

As a reaction to the Ulster Volunteers, the Southern Irish formed an army known as the National Volunteers. This group was composed mainly of Sinn Feiners and was distinct from the Citizen's Army.

1914-1918

In addition to the controversy between Ulster and Southern Ireland over the question of Home Rule, the old religious disputes between Catholic

and Protestant began to flare-up and there were sporadic incidents along the border between Ulster and Southern Ireland.

With the beginning of World War I in 1914 these differences should have been subordinated to the more important and immediate problem of fighting the war, but this did not happen. John Redmond, the leader of the Irish Nationalist Party, pledged his support to Great Britain and attempted to unite Ireland in this common cause. Although his action was approved of by his own Nationalist Party and by the majority of the Irish people, there were elements in Ireland who felt that Ireland should support any enemy of Great Britain. Sinn Fein favored a neutral attitude toward "England's War". Some extremists favored aid to Germany and felt that this was Ireland's opportunity to strike for freedom.

Early in 1916, extreme elements of Sinn Fein and the Citizen's Army plus a few idealistic intellectuals planned an uprising against Great Britain. This group felt that with Great Britain engaged in a war with Germany, this was the ideal time to strike for freedom. Details of the plot were made known to the Germans who attempted to ship arms to the rebels, but the ship carrying the munitions was captured by the British before the arms could be landed.

On April 24, 1916 the rebellion began. The bulk of the fighting was centered in Dublin and, on the whole, the uprising was a relatively small affair with only about one thousand men taking an active part in the fighting. The rebellion took the form of guerilla warfare with a great deal of house to house fighting. In actuality, it was not a rebellion <u>of</u> Ireland, but a rebellion <u>in</u> Ireland since the majority of the people remained neutral.

In a military sense, the Easter Week Rebellion was only a minor incident since it was crushed within a week, but its effect upon Irish thought was more far reaching. Great Britain, although advised by John Redmond to treat the revolutionists with leniency, adopted a harsh policy toward the leaders. Seven men were executed under orders of a secret court-martial and hundreds of others were imprisoned or deported. This cold-blooded policy caused the Irish people who had remained neutral during the rebellion to look upon the rebels not as criminals but as martyrs and heroes.

The most important political revolt of the Easter Week Rebellion and Great Britain's policy of harshness was to put Sinn Fein in control of Ireland. Only Eamon De Valera of all the prominant political leaders escaped execution as a result of the abortive revolution. He escaped the fate of the others due to the fact that he was an American citizen. De Valera was sentenced to life imprisonment in Great Britain, but in 1917 he was released and upon his return to Dublin he was hailed as a hero by the people, who elected him to Parliament. He was also elected President of Sinn Fein and head of the Irish Volunteers which he began to organize into a large army.

Great Britain further alienated the Irish when in 1918 they attempted to conscript Irishmen into the British Army. Sinn Fein led in the opposition to this and was joined by the Constitutional Nationalists and the Catholic Church. The effect of this attempted conscription was to further unite the Irish.

1918-1920

The General Elections of 1918 saw the leadership of the Constitutional Nationalist Party swept away. Since the days of Parnell, when the solidarity of the party had been broken, its position of supremacy had gradually weakened. In 1918, Sinn Fein became the controlling political party in Ireland. The triumph of Sinn Fein represented a victory of its policy of physical violence over the Nationalists policy of constitutional revision in Ireland's attempt to gain independence

In 1918 an Irish Parliament, the Dail Eireann, was set up and in 1919 De Valera was elected President of this body. Soon the Dail began to carry on the functions of a sovereign state. The Dail Eireann set up its own courts, made its own laws, sent envoys to foreign lands, and levied taxes. The Irish Volunteers were reorganized and became the army of the New Irish Nation. Ireland hoped to gain recognition as a separate sovereign nation and thus force Great Britain to give them their independence. Thus for a time in Ireland there were two governments, the established government as provided for under the act of Union and the government of the Dail Eireann and Sinn Fein.

At first Great Britain did not take the Dail too seriously, but when its orders were given force and effect by the Irish Volunteers, Britain's attitude changed. In September of 1919 the Dail Eireann and the Sinn Fein Party were declared illegal by the British Government, but the attempted supression of the Dail merely drove it underground to continue many of its activities.

After the supression of the Dail Eireann, some two thousand Sinn Fein soldiers of the Irish Republican Army (also known as the Republicans) began to carry on a campaign of guerilla warfare against Great Britain. Since Great Britain depended largely upon the local Irish police to maintain the power of the crown, the police became the special targets for Republican attacks. The majority of the Irish supported the Republicans by giving them food and shelter and refusing to testify against them in British Courts. A jury of Irishment would seldom find another Irishman guilty of murdering a policeman, since most Irishmen believed that these killings were not murders but merely legal executions carried out under orders of the Dail Eireann.

The Home Rule question came up for consideration in Parliament in 1919. With the outbreak of World War I, the issue had been shelved for the duration with the understanding that it would be reopened within 12 months after the cessation of hostilities. Since Ulster's opposition to Home Rule was as inflexible in 1919 as it had been in 1914, David Lloyd-George produced a plan which attempted to provide a compromise between both Northern and Southern Ireland. Under this plan, both sections were to have Parliaments of their own, with both Parliaments under the control of Great Britain. This plan was rejected by Sinn Fein which refused to accept any plan short of a free and united Ireland.

1920-1922

In the summer of 1920 fighting broke out between the Royal Irish Constabulary (representing Great Britain) and the Sinn Feiners (representing Southern Ireland). Periodic fighting continued throughout the summer,

but in November the guerilla skirmishes flared into open hostility. On the morning of Sunday, November 21, 1920 or "bloody Sunday" as it later came to be called, fifteen British officers were shot down in their homes as spies. That afternoon in retaliation, the military opened fire on a crowd attending a football game killing fifteen innocent persons including a woman and a child. As a result of this act of violence, the moderate element of Sinn Fein which had been willing to come to some sort of a compromise with Great Britain joined with the extremists in resorting to open hostilities.

During the ensuing war with Great Britain, the main object of attack was at first the police, since most of the British forces stationed in Ireland were used primarily for guarding towns and railroads. As the situation increased in seriousness, however, Great Britain sent over a group of men allegedly composed of ex-officers and soldiers of World War I. This group was known as the Auxiliaries but because they were uniformed partially in kahki and partially in dark clothing they became popularly known as the Black and Tans.

Although the Black and Tans were sent over to subdue the Republicans and put a stop to the Sinn Fein terror, many of them were undisciplined and entered into a campaign of terror of their own. The majority of the Irish public, however, continued to support the Republicans and the Black and Tan terrors merely served to strengthen the resistance of the Irish people.

Early in 1921, Great Britain instituted a plan of officially authorizing reprisals for acts of Irish violence. On January 4, 1921 after an

attack upon British lories loaded with soldiers and police, the British officially ordered homes in the vicinity of the attack destroyed.

The non-combatants in Ireland were placed in a difficult position during this war. Looting and wanton destruction of property was quite common during this period. Not only was the civilian threatened with property destruction, but his life was often endangered. The British attempted to force civilians to give information concerning activities of the Republican Army. If the civilian refused, his home was destroyed. If, on the other hand, he did give information he became an "informer" and was liable to be shot by the Republicans as a traitor to the cause of Ireland.

By the middle of 1921, both sides were ready to declare a truce. Great Britain's policy in attempting to crush the rebellion caused widespread protest not only at home but throughout the world. This increased pressure of public opinion caused a re-evaluation of the Irish problem. Great Britain realized that it would be extremely difficult and costly to put down the type of guerilla warfare being waged by the Irish. The Irish, on the other hand, were ready to declare a truce since they were running short of arms.

On July 8, 1921 a truce was declared. The mere fact that a truce had been signed between the two contrasting parties established the fact that Great Britain and Ireland were distinct entities.

After extremely complex negotiations, a treaty between Ireland and Great Britain was signed in 1921. Neither Ireland nor Great Britain was strong enough to dictate terms at this time and so the treaty was a compromise between the two parties. The treaty was not entirely to

Sinn Fein's liking since it included as one of its provisions partition of Ulster, but Sinn Fein none the less signed it. The terms of the treaty were vague and inconclusive in many respects. For example, the position of the King Of England in relation to Ireland was not clearly stated and many interpretations of this clause of the treaty could be made.

The responsibility for Irish ratification of the treaty rested with the forces that had brought about the revolution--Sinn Fein, the Republican Army and the Dail Eireann, and within these organizations, there was a violent conflict of opinion. De Valera was the leader of these who opposed ratification of the treaty. His position was that it was dishonest to accept the terms since they provided no real solution to the problem. Arthur Griffith was the spokesman for those who favored acceptance of the treaty. His position was that the treaty should be accepted now and the Republic fought for later.

In an effort to clarify his position, De Valera issued a counter proposal called Document No. 2 in which he demanded substantially the same terms as the original treaty except that the King Of England was to be excluded from Ireland in theory as well as fact. The main difference in the two positions seems to have been a difference in opinion as to how far policy and expediency justified a compromise with principle.

As a result of this conflict, De Valera resigned as President of the Dail Eireann and Arthur Griffith was elected to succeed him. On January 16, 1922, the treaty was ratified by the Dail Eireann although De Valera and his followers refused to attend the conference.

1922-1923

With the ratification of the treaty, Great Britain began to withdraw its military forces from Ireland. In withdrawing, a great deal of ammunition and military equipment was left behind and taken over by the Irish Republican Army which was in actual control of Ireland. The Republican Army, however, was a loosely knit organization which varied in policy from one part of Ireland to another. Both factions were bidding for the support of the army.

After the signing of the treaty, Griffith attempted to set up a Provisional Government in Ireland, but De Valera and his followers refused to recognize this government as legal. The De Valera faction set up headquarters in the Comeragh Mountains and announced the formation of an Irish Republic. As a result of this, disorders broke out in several districts of Ireland, but these were primarily local disturbances. The Provisional Government was unable to deal with these disturbances because it lacked the legal authority to do so and because it did not know how much it could count on the Irish Republican Army.

In March of 1922, a group of men from the Irish Republican Army captured a large block of buildings in Dublin known as the Four Courts. The group became known as Irregulars or Die-Hards.

What had begun as a conflict of opinions and ideals now threatened to engulf the young nation in a civil war. Elections were held in 1922 to determine whether or not the Free State Constitution should be accepted and the vote returned by the people was for acceptance. The real issue, however, was not the acceptance or rejection of the Free State Constitution by the people, but the acceptance or rejection of the treaty.

The next step taken by the Republicans was a declaration of war upon Great Britain. The ultimate aim of this group was to overthrow the Dail Eireann, the Provisional Government, the British Government and the Northern Government of Ulster, all of whom they believed to be opposed to the establishment of a unified Irish Republic.

The Provisional Government decided that steps must be taken to surpress the Republican movement. Their first move was to recapture the Four Courts in Dublin which was a Republican stronghold. The Four Courts had been elaborately mined and was destroyed by the retreating Irregulars before the building could be captured.

This act marked the beginning of a civil war in Ireland that was to continue for many months. As 1922 progressed, the civil war began to take on more and more of the characteristics of the war with Great Britain in 1920. Although the Republicans had been driven out of their stronghold in Dublin, they still controlled large sections of Ireland and were in a position to carry on a campaign of guerilla warfare similar to that which the Irish had used against Great Britain. The Provisional Government reinstated the use of court martials and executions, and the same acts of atrocity were again reported by both sides. Men who had fought side by side against Great Britain two years before now found themselves fighting each other.

In 1923, De Valera announced the impossibility of continuing the struggle and the fires of rebellion died down. Ireland, at least outwardly, achieved peace and out of the chaos that was the result of two wars, the Irish Free State was formed.

This, then, was the Ireland in which Sean O'Casey grew up and in which he spent his formative years. This was the Ireland about which he wrote in four of his plays, The Shadow Of A Gunman, Juno And The Paycock, The Plough And The Stars, and Red Roses For Me.

CHAPTER II

Since Sean O'Casey himself was involved in many of the political events of Ireland, Chapter I was concerned with an outline of Irish history during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The purpose of this chapter will be to provide a brief biographical study of O'Casey and to point out events in his life which have influenced him in the writing of his plays. As Jules Kuslow has pointed out, "...O'Casey, more than any other living dramatist, has exploited the events of his own life; his surroundings and the people he knew and observed."[1]

His Parents And Birth

In 1884, Sean O'Casey was born in the slums of Dublin to Sue and Michael Cassidе. He was the youngest of 13 children, only five of whom lived to reach maturity. He was christened John Cassidе over the objections of his mother who had already buried two other sons with the same name. When he became interested in the Gaelic revival and active in the Gaelic League in 1904, he took the name of Sean O'Casey. For purposes of simplicity and clarity he will be referred to as Sean O'Casey throughout this work.

Michael Cassidе died of cancer at the age of 46 when O'Casey was still quite young and consequently he did not have an opportunity to know his father well. Michael Cassidе had been born in Limerick, the youngest

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1 Jules Kuslow, The Green And The Red (New York: Arts Inc., 1950) p. 20.

of a fairly large family. O'Casey's paternal grandfather was a Catholic while his paternal grandmother a Protestant. Due to the death of his father, young Michael Casside was raised in the Protestant faith while his older brothers and sisters were raised in the Catholic faith. Their frequent quarrels over religion led to Michael's leaving Limerick for Dublin. In Dublin he met and married Sue Casside.

Of O'Casey's mother's family and background, little is recorded. Sue Casside was born, lived and died in the Dublin slums. She had little if any formal education, but she recognized the importance of education and was anxious that her children should enjoy its advantages. What Sue Casside lacked in education, she made up for in other qualities. She was possessed of great patience and sympathy, but at the same time was a practical woman. After her husband's death, she managed to keep the family together on a small pension and whatever her sons could earn. She accepted her lot and managed to find color and beauty even among the dull drabness of the slums. She possessed a great sense of humor and refused to be dragged down by the slums around her. O'Casey lived with his mother until her death in 1918. It was O'Casey's mother who patiently and understandingly guided his life during his youth.

As a child, O'Casey did not enjoy good health. In 1889, at the age of five, his eyes began to pain him and he began to dread the light. This was the first symptom of an eye affliction which was to permanently impair his sight and which was to cause him a great deal of pain. His mother patiently treated him with home remedies and patent medicines whenever the family could afford them. "Only his mother...with deep pity and unbreakable

patience, stood between him and the chance that his sight might go."[2] After a time he was taken to St. Mark's Opthalmic Hospital For Accidents and Disease Of The Eye and Ear for examination and treatment. After an examination by one of the doctors, he was told that he would probably not go blind providing proper care was taken of his eyes and he adhered to a proper diet.

All of O'Casey's early life was spent in the Dublin slums and he grew to know them intimately. The family subsisted on a small pension which his mother received and whatever his brothers could earn. Often there was not enough to eat and when there was it was only the cheapest foods which the family could afford. Meat was a rarity and a luxury to the family. Thus O'Casey became acquainted early with the evils and suffering which poverty entails.

His Education And Early Jobs

O'Casey's early schooling in a Protestant school rates nothing but bitter words from him.[3] Although advised by the doctors not to attend school because of his eyesight, his mother was prevailed upon by the Protestant rector, Reverend Hunter, to enroll him. His formal schooling ended after he had been severely flogged by his instructor and had retaliated by striking him across the head with a heavy ebony ruler.[4] The

2 Sean O'Casey, I Knock At The Door (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1939) p. 38.

3 O'Casey, op. cit., p. 132 ff.

4 Some of the older boys were playing cards in the schoolyard and O'Casey was told to act as lookout. His eyes began to pain him and he failed to see the approach of Mr. Slogan, his teacher. As a result all of the boys were apprehended, but only O'Casey was whipped. During prayers, he picked up a heavy ruler from the desk and struck the teacher across the top of the head and then ran home. Reverend Hunter attempted to persuade his mother to return him to school so that he might be flogged before the entire school as an example, but she refused to do this. O'Casey never returned to school. O'Casey, op. cit., p. 207 ff.

family, however, feared that he would grow up illiterate and so his sister Ella, who was a school teacher, found a book of English grammar for him to study. It was not until 1897, when O'Casey was thirteen years old, that he learned to read and write. His father had been a great lover of books and had surrounded himself with them. These books included many of the classics as well as books on Protestantism. As O'Casey grew older, he read not only his father's books, but began to buy second-hand books out of his small wages. Soon he possessed works by such widely divergent authors as Dickens, Scott, Balzac, Ruskin, Darwin, Dumas, Fenimore Cooper, Carlyle, Bunyon, Shelley, Keats, Goldsmith, Crabbe, Tennyson, Shakespeare, and Shaw. O'Casey's omniverous reading continued even after he was an established dramatist.

From approximately 1900 to 1905 O'Casey held several jobs, but his great independence of spirit prevented from holding down a position for any great length of time. He first worked as a stock room boy for the firm of Messrs. Hydim, Leadem and Company. From the stock room, he was promoted to a clerkship in the store. Here he discovered that there was a wide gap between the merchant-managerial class and the working class. He especially disliked the way the managers bestowed crumbs on the workers and in return demanded profuse thanks. "He soon came to hate the shops and the men who owned them."[5] He finally left this job after an argument with the manager over a fine he had incurred.[6] After a period of

5 Sean O'Casey, Pictures In The Hallway (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1942) p. 111.

6 O'Casey's religious convictions, or lack of them were indirectly responsible for the loss of this job. He had made an enemy of the manager because of his attitude toward the church. One evening as he was leaving work, the manager called to him and attempted to keep him overtime. O'Casey left without answering the man. When he received his pay at the end of the week he found that he had been fined two shillings for insolence and disobedience. When he protested, he was told either to accept the fine or leave the store. O'Casey quit the job rather than accept what he considered to be unjust treatment. Ibid., p. 186 ff.

unemployment, he found a job at Jason and Sons, wholesale news dealers. His work consisted of wrapping, sorting and stamping newspapers for sale in the suburbs. Once again O'Casey's independence of spirit was responsible for his losing of employment.[7] Another period of unemployment followed before he found employment in The Harmsworth Agency, a magazine distributing company. The Harmsworth Agency was a conservative company and the revolutionary O'Casey did not fit into it well. Consequently this job did not last too long.

Although O'Casey had been delicate as a child, around 1906 when he was in his twenties, he got a job on a railway gang digging sidings. At first the work was too much for him, but he stuck with it until he became strong enough to lift an anvil. Outdoor laboring appealed to O'Casey and he continued in this line of work until he began writing in earnest as a means of livlihood.

His Religious and Social Beliefs

After his early experiences with the church, O'Casey had shied away from taking an active part in religion. However, when the Casside family moved to a new home near St. Burnupus, a small Protestant church in Dublin, O'Casey came under the influence of Harry Fletcher, the Protestant minister. For a time O'Casey was active in church affairs, but his respect for

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7 O'Casey felt the same resentment against the employers at Jason and Sons that he had felt at Messrs. Hymdim, Leadem and Company. One of the regulations of the company was that everyone had to remove his cap when receiving his pay. O'Casey saw no reason to do this since he felt that he was being underpayed anyway. Since he had decided to quit the job, he refused to remove his cap one payday and was consequently fired. Ibid., p. 256 ff.

the church was weakened when Fletcher was forced to leave because he could not fight "...the deep-set emotions of an ignorant evangelism... preventing our poor people from seeing the truth in the Scriptures and in the church's tradition."[8] The new minister, Edward Griffen soon restored O'Casey's confidence in the church and the two men became fast friends. When internal conflict broke out in the congregation, O'Casey and several other members of the congregation led the fight for Griffen.[9]

Despite the influence of Fletcher and Griffen, O'Casey was gradually weaned away from the church. The Darwinian influence became stronger than the religious. "He no longer thought that God's right hand, or His left one either, had handed down the Bible out of Heaven...Darwin's flame of thought had burned away a lot of sacred straw and stubble...."[10] His reasons for forsaking the church seem to have been: (1) the teaching of the church which told the people in the slums that their condition was God's will and as such should be borne with patience until they got their reward in Heaven, and (2) his feelings that the church represented ignorance. "Not the first man, but the first question man asked, brought what the clergy call sin into the world, and all our woe. Better sin and better woe than woeful fear and bitter ignorance...Knowledge had been

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8 O'Casey, op. cit., p. 285.

9 Religious feelings in Ireland ran very high at this time. The conservative members of St. Burnupus objected to Fletcher and Griffen because of their attempt to introduce church ritual. Any church ritual or even decoration of the alter with flowers was considered by this group to be part of a Popish plot and any rector who attempted to introduce ritual was considered an agent of the Vatican. Ibid., p. 329 ff.

10 Sean O'Casey, Drums Under The Windows (New York: Macmillan and Company, 1946) p. 32.

hunting the earth and scouring the heavens for but one God, but has found none."[11]

O'Casey's interest in the church was replaced by his interest in the Gaelic League. O'Casey became a strong advocate of this organization and began to learn Gaelic himself.[12] By 1907, he was secretary of his local chapter. He worked in the Gaelic League for many years but he gradually became aware of aspects of it of which he did not approve. He felt that the Gaelic League had a tendency to become too esoteric and arty, but more important when it came to any kind of a showdown, the Gaelic League was too cowardly to stand up for its principles.[13]

With the influence of the church almost completely gone and the influence of the Gaelic League on the wane, O'Casey turned to Socialism and the Militant Labor Movement. His first introduction to Socialism had been around 1903 when he heard James Connoly, Secretary of the Irish Socialist party speak. Although O'Casey had been impressed by Connoly's speech, he did not begin to take an active part in the Irish Republican Brotherhood until around 1908 or 1909. While working in the Irish Republican

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11 Loc. cit.

12 O'Casey's constant efforts to enlist his fellow workers on the railroad gang into the Gaelic League caused him to be nicknamed "Irish Jack" by them. Ibid., p. 20.

13 This became apparent to O'Casey in the fight of Dr. Michael O'Hickey with the Catholic clergy. O'Hickey was a professor of Irish at Maymouth College and he led the fight to make the study of the Irish language an essential subject at the college. In doing this, he collided with some of the bishops who were on the board of directors and was dismissed from his post. The Gaelic League which had been supporting O'Hickey now backed down for fear of alienating the clergy. When O'Hickey decided to carry his fight to Rome, the Gaelic League "...to put something of a faint flush to their white cowardice..." helped defray some of his expenses. O'Hickey received no satisfaction in Rome and finally returned to Ireland where he died a few months later. This incident made a deep impression on O'Casey and served to further his distrust of organized religion. O'Casey, op. cit., p. 119 ff.

Brotherhood, he came into contact with James Larkin who was head of the labor movement in Dublin. O'Casey with his worker background decided that his place was with the workers. "Here in these houses of the purple of poverty and decay, dwelt his genuine brethern."[14] Around 1911 O'Casey joined the Irish Transport and General Worker's Union because he felt that the workers must organize if they were ever to attain their goals. "To fight well, there must be a crowd beside you and behind you to fight with you...The workers must be rallied to the fight."[15] During the bitter Dublin Transportation Strike of 1913, O'Casey served as a member of a committee to raise funds for the families of the strikers. Although the workers failed to gain their goals, O'Casey considered the strike a success since it was the first step in the freeing of the Irish workers.

One of the results of the 1913 Transportation Strike was the formation of the Citizen's Army in 1914 and O'Casey was influential in its organization and development by helping to write its constitution. The Citizen's Army strong nationalistic tendencies may be seen in the preamble which reads in part, "The Land and Air and Sea of Ireland for the People of Ireland--that is the gospel every Irish heart is secretly burning to embrace...The first and last principle of the Irish Citizen's Army is the avowal that the ownership of Ireland, moral and material, is vested of right in the people of Ireland."[16] Although O'Casey was active in the formation of the citizen's Army, a dispute with Countess Markievicz, an

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14 Ibid., p. 243.

15 Ibid., p. 247.

16 O'Casey, op. cit., p. 335.

Irish patriot who was also active in the organization, caused him to resign in 1915.[17] After his resignation, O'Casey ceased to take an active part in politics. Consequently he was able to view the Easter Week Rebellion of 1916, the war with Great Britain in 1920, and the Irish Civil War in 1922 with a certain degree of detachment.[18]

His Early Writings

O'Casey began to write around 1905. His first article to appear in print was published in The Irish Nation and was entitled Sound The Loud Trumpet. In this article he "...struck at the educational system Augustus Birrell was hanging around Ireland's neck."[19] His early writings were political in nature and were written for the numerous political periodicals that had sprung up in Ireland in the first half of the twentieth century. It was not until after 1916, however, that O'Casey began to turn seriously to writing. He was "...a political rebel first, and then a poet; a

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17 Opposition to the Citizen's Army was encountered in the other military organization of southern Ireland, the Irish Volunteers. Countess Markievicz was affiliated with both groups. O'Casey presented a motion that she be required to resign from one of these organizations, and when the motion was defeated, Countess Markievicz demanded an apology from him. Rather than do this, O'Casey resigned from the Citizen's Army.

18 O'Casey experienced these wars from the standpoint of a civilian. During Easter Week, he was taken from his home, stood up against a wall and searched by British soldiers. A disturbance at the end of the street distracted the soldiers and when they went to investigate, O'Casey escaped. He felt that he had come very close to being shot. Later he was made a political prisoner for the duration of the rebellion. O'Casey, though he had respect for the courage and idealism of the men who were fighting, felt that the manner in which the rebellion was carried out was foolish. During the war with Great Britain, the tenement in which he lived was raided by the Black and Tans. O'Casey, therefore, knew what it was to lie in the dark and wait for the knock to come at the door. O'Casey saw very little sense to the Irish Civil War since the Treaty and Document No. 2 seemed to him almost identical.

19 O'Casey, op. cit., p. 127.

participant in the Irish Labor and Independence movements long before his first play was produced."[20] The first publication for which he received payment was a book entitled The Story Of The Irish Citizen's Army in 1919. Of the fifteen pounds royalty which he received for this book, the majority of it was used to pay the burial expenses of his mothers funeral.[21]

O'Casey's interest in the theatre seems to stem from his childhood. His earliest encounters with the theatre were in the capacity of an actor. For a time he appeared with an amateur group known as The Townsend Dramatic Society and he also acted in the Mechanic's Theatre on Abbey Street.[22] In 1904, the Mechanic's Theatre became the home of the Abbey Theatre.

In 1901, O'Casey, at the age of seventeen, wrote his first play, The Frost In The Flowers. This play was submitted to an amateur group for production, but was rejected by them. O'Casey then turned to political writing, and there is no further mention of any plays by him until 1922. In 1922, he wrote a one-act play entitled The Robe of Rosheen which was published in the political periodical called The Plain People. The play passed unnoticed. During this time, however, O'Casey reached an important decision affecting his writing. "He had shifted away from the active Ireland, and was growing contentedly active in himself. Instead of trying to form Ireland's life, he would shape his own. He would splash his

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20 Kuslow, op. cit., p. 17.

21 Lady Gregory, Lady Gregory's Journals, edited by Lennox Robinson, (New York: Macmillan Company, 1947) p. 77.

22 One of O'Casey's early experiences in the theatre was his performance in Dion Bouccicault's The Shaugraun at the Mechanic's Theatre. His description of his feelings and reactions to this experience show an early love for the theatre. Sean O'Casey, Pictures In The Hallway, op. cit., p. 191 ff.

thoughts over what he had seen and heard; keep eyes open to see and hear what life did, what life had to say, and how life said it..."[23]

O'Casey and The Abbey Theatre

O'Casey now began to concentrate on playwriting and in an effort to get his works produced, he began submitting manuscripts to the Abbey Theatre. He submitted The Frost In The Flowers, The Harvest Festival and The Crimson In The Tri-Colour, all of which were rejected by the Abbey Board of Directors. O'Casey was, however, encouraged to continue with his writing since the members of the Abbey Board believed that he showed promise. In 1923, The Shadow Of A Gunman was accepted and produced by the Abbey. O'Casey next submitted a one-act work entitled The Cooing of Doves which the Abbey rejected, but which he eventually used to form the second act of The Plough And The Stars. In 1924 two one-act works--Cathleen Listens In and Nannie's Night Out were produced, but his big success was Juno And The Paycock produced the same year. In 1926, The Plough And The Stars was given a production by this group.

In order to understand O'Casey's place in the Abbey Theatre, a brief examination of the Abbey Theatre and its position in Irish drama is necessary. In the 1880's and 1890's began what has now come to be termed "The Irish Renaissance". The Irish and Gaelic tradition began to be revived through the activities of such groups as the Gaelic League and the Irish Literary Society. A part of this renaissance was the emergence of a national drama. Ireland's theatrical activity prior to this time was

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23 Sean O'Casey, Inishfallen, Fare Thee Well (New York: Macmillan and Company, 1949) p. 151-2.

similar to the theatrical activity in England prior to the Elizabethan period. But with the coming of the Irish Renaissance and with such examples as the Theatre Libre in France and the Frie Buhne in Germany, there was a blossoming of the Irish drama. In 1899, W. B. Yeats, Lady Gregory, Edward Martyn and George Moor banded together and formed a group known as the Irish Literary Theatre. Out of this organization grew the Abbey Theatre. In 1904, this group brought John Millington Synge into prominence with a production of Riders To The Sea. He continued to be the most important dramatist of this group until he died in 1910. This proved to be a severe loss to the Abbey, since there was no dramatist of sufficient stature to take his place. Not until the emergence of Sean O'Casey did the Abbey have another first rate dramatist writing for them. The Abbey Theatre was the most important theatre in Ireland in so far as the production of native Irish drama was concerned. Originally the playwrights favored Irish legend and folk lore as their source material. Yeat's plays fall into this category, as do some of Synge's, but Synge brought to the Abbey a picture of Irish rural life as it was lived by the peasants of Ireland in such plays as Riders To The Sea and The Playboy of The Western World. In contrast to this, O'Casey wrote of native urban life among the lower classes of society. O'Casey was the first major Irish dramatist to treat this theme.

O'Casey's prominence as a dramatist placed him in the company of Ireland's greats, but for the majority of them he had little respect. For AE (George Russell) he had nothing but scorn. For William Butler Yeats he had a grudging respect. Lady Gregory was the only person with whom he could feel at home. O'Casey still felt more at home with the workers

than he did with the intellectuals of Dublin. He was surprised and puzzled to discover the numerous cliques and factions at work against one another. He was also surprised when the intellectuals began to criticize his plays, "...for, innocent gaum that he was, he didn't realize then that these fellows didn't know what they were talking about."[24] His plays were said to resemble the cinema and musical revues. O'Casey knew little of the cinema and had never seen a revue. "They saw in Sean that of which they themselves were full--the cinema and the revue. Then began Sean's distrust of and contempt for, the Irish critics. Knowing all they knew nothing."[25]

O'Casey's Break With Ireland

In 1926, the year in which O'Casey received the Hawthorne Award for Juno And The Paycock, he decided to exile himself from Ireland and live in Great Britain. O'Casey became convinced that to continue writing he must escape from the "...cliques of Dublin...and all the crowdin rolipoli-holiness of the Pope's green island...."[26] In 1926, he left Ireland never to return again and settled in England. With him he took "...the moral courage and critical faculties of his father, and his love of good books; the gay humour and dogged resolution of his mother, and her love for, and understanding of the bright colours among dead, drab things; ...the love of his comrade workers, Catholic and Protestant, with whom he had fought

24 O'Casey, op. cit., p. 247.

25 Ibid., p. 248.

26 Sean O'Casey, op. cit., p. 249.

and starved and fought again; all the fair things he had learned during his sojurn with the Gaelic League...and, above all, a strict and determined confidence in himself...Jewels he could never sell; jewels that no thief, however cute, could take out of his hands."[27]

Two years later he married Eileen Carey, an actress whom he met when she was appearing in a production of Juno And The Paycock. He finished and submitted The Silver Tassie to the Abbey Theatre Board of Directors for production this same year. The play was rejected by Yeats and the Abbey Board of Directors and the manuscript was returned to O'Casey with a letter from Yeats suggesting that O'Casey make extensive revisions. O'Casey replied in a letter stating his position and refusing to rewrite the play. There followed an exchange of letters between the two men which, when published by the newspapers, created a furor in the literary world. With the rejection of The Silver Tassie, O'Casey broke with the Abbey Theatre and has had nothing further to do with them.

In 1930, O'Casey again became a controversial figure when he entered into a debate over aesthetics with AE (George Russell). AE wrote an article in his weekly journal, The Irish Statesman, making certain statements about painting with which O'Casey did not agree. There was an exchange of letters between AE and O'Casey which continued for some time. On February 6, 1930, the New York Times commented editorially on the debate,[28] and on March 6th of the same year the New York Times published a letter from O'Casey in which he stated his position and his belief that

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27 Ibid., p. 396.

28 Although the Times took a rather humerous view of the whole matter, it tended to side with Russell in the debate.

it was time "...to end the arrogent assumption of power and infalibility in things artistic and things literary by this Yeatsean and Russellian hand-picked group in Dublin."[29]

Sean O'Casey published a collection of verse, short stories and two one-act plays, The End Of The Beginning and A Pound On Demand in a book entitled Windfalls in 1934. However, O'Casey's important major contribution that year was Within The Gates which was produced in London. On September 17th of that year he arrived in the United States to attend the final rehearsals of Within The Gates and to witness the New York production of that play.

From 1934 to 1940 O'Casey produced two non-dramatic works. In 1937, he published The Flying Wasp, a book of dramatic criticism and commentary on the contemporary English theatre.[30] Two years later the first volume of O'Casey's autobiography, I Knock At The Door was published.

O'Casey's Conversion to Communism and His Later Work

O'Casey became a member of the editorial board of the Daily Worker, a position which he still holds at the time of this writing, in 1940. The Star Turns Red was published the same year, and these two events made public O'Casey's conversion to the Communistic philosophy.[31] From

29 From this letter, it would appear that O'Casey was still angry over the rejection of The Silver Tassie.

30 The author has found no statement that O'Casey ever joined the Communist Party, although he expounds the Communistic philosophy.

31 A large part of this book related to the debate O'Casey had with James Agate, the English critic, over Within The Gates. O'Casey also condemns the superficiality of the English theatre, especially the work of Noel Coward.

references in The Star Turns Red to the Spanish Civil War and to Hitler's seizure of power in Germany, it would seem that O'Casey was influenced in this action by events in Europe during the 1930's as well as by his own life and background.

The same year O'Casey also published Purple Dust, a comedy satirizing the British, which although it has been considered for production by Kermit Bloomgarden, has never been produced.

O'Casey's satirizing of the British and his expounding of the Communistic philosophy when Great Britain was engaged in a war with Germany and when Russia and Germany had signed a non-aggression pact did not endear him to the British public or critics.

After 1940, O'Casey continued to write, but less and less is written about him. In 1942, he published the second volume of his autobiography, Pictures In The Hallway. The following year saw the publication of a play, Red Roses For Me. Drums Under The Windows, the third volume of O'Casey's autobiography was published in 1946 as was a full length play Oak Leaves And Lavender. The fourth volume of O'Casey's autobiography, Inishfallen, Fare Thee Well was published in 1949. Cock-a-doodle Dandy was also published that year. Nineteen hundred fifty-one saw the publication of three one-act plays, Halls Of Healing, Bedtime Story, and Time To Go.

At present O'Casey is living at Trinright, Station Road, Totnes, Devon, England.

CHAPTER III

THE PLAYS OF SEAN O'CASEY

CHAPTER III

Chapters I and II of this thesis provided a background for a study of Sean O'Casey's plays. In this chapter, O'Casey's plays will be considered.

The Early Unproduced Plays

Sean O'Casey wrote several plays, before his first play was produced. These plays, with one exception, are unpublished and unproduced. However, there is a little information available about them.

O'Casey's first play, The Frost In The Flowers, was written when he was seventeen years of age. The play was rejected by a little theatre group to which O'Casey submitted it. In 1922, he submitted the play to the Abbey Theatre, but the Abbey also rejected it. The Frost In The Flowers dealt "...with a young man, a lay teacher in a Christian Brothers' School, who though full of confidence on gigantic questions he was never called upon to touch, was timid as a new-born mouse over simple questions concerning himself. He got a very small salary from the Brothers, paid to him quarterly, mostly in sixpenny pieces and three-penny bits. A teachership in elementary mathematics and elementary English fell vacant in a Technical School, the gift of a Dublin Council Committee, and Sean's timid friend, certain he hadn't a chance of getting it, applied for the job. To his frightened dismay, he was elected by a fine vote, and everyone in the parish brought him all kinds of books to help him for the work he would have to do. Though he had the ability, he hadn't the willpower;

and the play ended in the midst of a party given in his honour, at which it became known that he had resigned from the job, to become the scorn of his family and the joke of the parish."[1]

In 1922, O'Casey wrote a one-act play, The Robe of Rosheen, which was published in a periodical called The Plain People.[2] This is the only of the early unproduced plays to receive any publication. Written just prior to the Irish Civil War, the play was concerned with "...satirising the contesting parties and putting official Labour against the wall for its stupid and selfish pursuit of jobs, instead of flinging themselves between the opposing guns, calling out the question of which of you will fire first!"[3] The play passed unnoticed. It was not submitted to the Abbey Theatre for production.

The second play which O'Casey submitted to the Abbey Board of Directors was The Harvest Festival. This play "...dealt with the efforts of militant members of the unskilled unions to put more of the fibre of resistance to evil conditions of pay and life into the hearts and minds of the members of the Craft unions whose gospel was that what was good enough for the fathers was good enough for the sons. The action took place in the busy preparations made by a church for holding the annual harvest festival, which the Anglo-catholics sneeringly called the Feast of Saint Pumpkin and all Vegetables."[4] The Abbey rejected the play, saying that it was well conceived, but badly executed.

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1 Sean O'Casey, Inishfallen, Fare Thee Well, (New York: Macmillan and Company, 1949) pp. 152-3.

2 Not available in any library in the United States.

3 O'Casey, op. cit., p. 151.

4 O'Casey, op. cit., p. 153.

"There had been a good chance of his third play, The Crimson In The Tri-Colour, being produced, for Lady Gregory had written that the author had something in him; that Mrs. Rosebud was a delightful character and Mr. Rosebud was a fine foil to her. A play that was somewhat confused, but one of ideas must be made from it."[5] The play was concerned with the antagonism between Labour and Sinn Fein. Lady Gregory had wanted to produce the play since she felt that it would aid O'Casey in his further writing to see the play performed, but Yeats had opposed the production. The play was never produced.

The Shadow Of A Gunman

In 1923, The Shadow Of A Gunman was produced by the Abbey Theatre. The reaction to the play was so favorable that O'Casey became famous overnight.[6] O'Casey attended the opening in his everyday clothes. He wore his cap throughout the entire performance, which was the custom of the Irish working class when attending indoor entertainments.[7] Although O'Casey had hoped to make a great deal of money from the play, his royalties totaled only four pounds. The play was also produced in Great Britain and the United States.

The action of The Shadow Of A Gunman is laid in the Dublin slums in 1920. This was the year of the war with Great Britain and of the Sinn

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5 O'Casey, op. cit., p. 155.

6 George Freedley and John Reeves, A History Of The Theatre (New York: Crown, 1941) p. 491.

7 Peter Kavanagh, The Story Of The Abbey Theatre (New York: Devin Adair, 1950) p. 131-32. Kavanagh contrasts this with the conduct of Yeats who attended the opening in full evening dress. To Kavanagh this symbolizes a new spirit in the Abbey Theatre.

Fein Terrors and the Black and Tan Terrors. The setting of the play is a room in one of the tenements located on Dublin's north side. During the eighteen century, many large mansions were built in this area by the upper classes of Dublin. With the passage of time, however, these mansions were converted into tenements. Walter Starkie sees symbolic significance in this choice of setting, since it "...combines the squalor of the present with the glories of the past... [and] the poor folk inhabiting those tenements have all the weaknesses of the rich people...."[8]

Although there is fighting in Dublin, everyday life must continue. In a room in a tenement the most immediate problem of Seumas Shields, a pedlar, is the fact that he has overslept and is late in starting his rounds. His partner, Maguire, arrives hours late and informs Seumas that he cannot work that day. Living with Seumas is a young poet, Donal Davoren, whom everyone in the neighborhood believes to be a gunman in hiding. In reality, Donal, although he talks much about Ireland's freedom, stays far away from any actual fighting. Minnie Powell, a young girl living in the building, is fascinated by the idea that Donal is a gunman on the run and since Donal is flattered by her obvious admiration, he leads her to believe that he actually is a member of the Irish Republican Army. That night the house is raided by the Black-and-Tans. Seumas and Donal discover that Maguire's pack is filled with bombs. Minnie appears and in an effort to save Donel, takes the bombs to her own room. She is taken prisoner and during the resulting fighting is killed.

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8 Lennox Robinson, editor, The Irish Theatre (London: Macmillan and Company, 1939) pp. 152-3. This book is a compilation of several lectures. The article on Sean O'Casey was written by Walter Starkie.

In The Shadow Of A Gunman, Sean O'Casey has written a play which shows warfare from the point of view of the non-belligerent slum dwellers. Innocent victims are sacrificed to a war in which they have no active part. The innocent members of society are goaded to destruction by the speechmakers and poets who present war in a highly romaticised fashion, but balk at the thought of taking an active part in the fighting. In this play, O'Casey attempts to expose the pretensions and posturings of those who talk while others fight and die. He reveals the Irishman "...as a creature whose imagination is too vivid to cope with ruthless fact."[9] According to Ivor Brown, the play shows "...nationalism as the last refuge of poltroons."[10]

In addition to presenting the effect of war on the slum dwellers, O'Casey has also presented a portrait of life in the Dublin slums. Although fighting goes on in the streets outside, everyday life with its daily intrigues and problems continues inside the tenements. "Life has become intense because death is present on all sides."[11]

O'Casey's mixture of comedy and tragedy in this play has called forth considerable comment from the critics. O'Casey's viewpoint in this play is definitely ironic. It is the loud mouthed romanticists who cause the tragic waste of life while clinging to their own self esteem. Much of the surface humor contains cruelly ironic undertones. The play is not merely

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9 Herbert Farjohn, "The London Stage" The Graphic 116:441, June 11, 1927.

10 Ivor Brown, "The Theatre" The Saturday Review 143:939, June 18, 1927.

11 Robinson, op. cit., p. 154.

funny; it is also terrible in its import. Farjohn has summed up this characteristic when he writes that the play is "...terribly funny...,"[12] using the word terrible as a synonym for horrible.

In addition to the ironic comedy, there are also elements of farce in The Shadow Of A Gunman. Ivor Brown believes that this mixture of the farcial with the frightful is detrimental to the play. In commenting on this aspect of the play, Brown compares the play with Shakespeare's works. Shakespeare used comic relief in his plays, but he gave his clowns definite scenes and then got rid of them.[13] With O'Casey this distinction is not made. The farcial elements are mingled with the tragic.

The characters in The Shadow Of A Gunman have been described as mere puppets[14] and as vivid real people.[15] It is generally agreed, however, that the characterization is one of the strongest elements of this play.

Minnie Powell is the strongest character in the play and she often dominates the action. She is fearless of physical death and though her body may be broken, her spirit cannot be. Minnie is the innocent character who suffers for the boastfulness and cowardice of Davoren and Seumas. O'Casey's sympathy clearly lies with her, since she is presented as the only character in the play with any real integrity and courage.

Davoren and Seumas are typical of those big talkers whose words are hollow. One critic contends that these two characters represent two

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12 Farjohn, loc. cit.

13 Brown, op. cit., p. 939.

14 P. S. O'Hagerty, "A Dramatist Of New Born Ireland" North American Review, 224:315, June-August, 1927.

15 John Gassner, Masters Of The Drama, (New York: Dover, 1945) p. 568.

forces struggling in O'Casey's mind at the time he was writing the play. Davoren represents the idealistic and poetic side of O'Casey, while Seumas represents the author's disillusionment.[16]

In this play, which is realitively short, O'Casey seems to be feeling his way and gaining technique. The story is meager, occasionally elusive and it tends to ramble. But although it moves slowly toward its painful climax, "...it already embodied his characteristically pungent artistry."[17] Ivor Brown calls it an "...odd, immature play..."[18] while Francis Birrill believes that there is "...a lot of undigested Tchekov and some unsuccessful Dostoevsky...."[19] in The Shadow Of A Gunman.

It has been said that the fundamental weakness of this play is that it was written for its own age and country and thus is incapable of gaining any lasting importance. A. E. Malone says that it is "...merely a melodrama which must inevitably lose its significance with the passage of time."[20] Francis Birrill writes that "Mr. O'Casey is...provincial, and that art cannot by its nature be."[21]

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16 Robinson, op. cit., p. 154.

17 Gassner, op. cit., p. 568.

18 Brown, op. cit., p. 939.

19.Francis Birrill, "The Drama" The Nation And Athenaeum, 41:304, June 4, 1927.

20 A. E. Malone, The Irish Drama (London: Constable and Company 1929) p. 213.

21 Birrill, loc. cit.

Cathleen Listens In, The Cooing of Doves, Nannie's Night Out

O'Casey next submitted two one-act plays, Cathleen Listens In and The Cooing Of Doves to the Abbey for production. The Cooing Of Doves was rejected and later used by O'Casey to form the second act of The Plough And The Stars. Cathleen Listens In was "...a jovial sardonic sketch on the various parties in conflict over Irish politics--Sinn Fein, Free State, and Labour."[22] It was produced after a longer play and met with instant failure--in fact, no one in the audience even applauded.

In 1924 another one-act, Nannie's Night Out "...a play no-one liked except A. E., otherwise known as George Russell, who thought it O'Casey's best work..."[23] Although both Cathleen Listens In and Nannie's Night Out were both produced, neither play has ever been published.

Juno And The Paycock

In 1924, Juno And The Paycock received a successful production at the Abbey Theatre. The play was also produced in Great Britain and was one of the plays chosen by the Abbey Theatre for its American tour. In 1940 it was revived in New York with Sara Allgood as Juno, Barry Fitzgerald as the Paycock, Arthur Shields as Joxer and Harry Young as Johnny. In 1930, the play was filmed in a sound version with many members of the original cast under the direction of Alfred Hitchcock.[24]

22 O'Casey, op. cit., p. 230.

23 O'Casey, op. cit., p. 234.

24 For a discussion of the film version see: Celia Simpson, "The Cinema" The Spectator 144:363, March 8, 1930 and Herbert Farjohn, "Commotion Pictures" The Graphic, 127:386, March 8, 1930.

The action of Juno And The Paycock, like the action of The Shadow Of A Gunman, takes place in the Dublin slums. The time of the play is 1922 when the war between the Free-Staters and the Republican Die-Hards was raging. Like The Shadow Of A Gunman, this play is a picture of the life of the slum dwellers under wartime conditions. One critic in discussing the setting of this play says, "These children, these parents are what they are because we are in Dublin in 1922 under the stress, between Free Staters and Republican Die-Hards, of that charming virtue, patriotism. You can not de-localize them, and in this case the atmosphere is the play."[25] P. S. O'Hagerty takes a somewhat different view. He believes that the Civil War is mere background for Juno And The Paycock and that the plight of Juno and others like her is the most important element of the play.[26]

Juno And The Paycock is a picture of a down-at-the-heel family held together only by the courageous Juno whose husband, Captain Jack Boyle, spends his time drinking with his boon companion Joxer. The daughter, Mary, is on strike protesting the mistreatment of a fellow worker, and the son, Johnny, has been crippled as a result of a wound sustained during the Easter Week Rebellion and the loss of an arm during the Irish Civil War. A streak of unexpected luck comes to the family in the form of a supposed bequest and the gamily begins to refurnish the house on credit; Jack Boyle gets a new suit, the family buys a gramaphone and Mary acquires a new suitor in Charlie Bentham, a school teacher and budding lawyer. But the bequest proves to be a mistake, Mary is abandoned by her suitor and is

25 R. J. "The Theatre" The Spectator, 35:923, November 21, 1925.

26 O'Hagerty, op. cit., p. 317.

pregnant, and Johnny who has betrayed one of his comrades is executed as a traitor.

Once again O'Casey is concerned with the problem of the innocent victim caught up in a war. O'Casey sees no glory in war and no sense to it when poverty and slum conditions remain. Ireland is loved as an abstraction, but Juno who is a reality is forced to live in the slums and her plight is ignored. "Even her own son will fight for an abstraction instead of working for his mother."[27] O'Casey believes that people are fighting a senseless war while ignoring vital practical issues. John Gassner in commanting on this point says that the Irish are not only afflicted with circumstances in general, but are making a frightful mess of their lives by their own perversities and that innocent people are the victims of this flaw.[28]

In addition to this, O'Casey has provided a picture of the Irish character and its weaknesses. Ivor Brown writes, "Mr. O'Casey has set down once and for all the weakness of a nation which has been cosseted with the idea that its members are all saints and martyrs. So Captain Boyle can stop in his tippling to boom away about the flories of Irish history...while his fellow soak 'Joxer' is never able to pay for a drink but always able to fetch up a quotation from the poets. His English parallel would find his pence for a pint, but would be totally incapable of citing a verse...."[29] Joseph Wood Krutch writes that O'Casey has shown

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27 Malone, op. cit., p. 216.

28 Gassner, op. cit., p. 568.

29 Quoted in John Gassner, Masters Of The Drama (New York: Dover, 1945) p. 568.

Ireland as "...the eternal Pagliacci at whose antics the world laughs, while the clown's heart breaks."[30] The Irish have achieved an amused smile, but lost the respect of the world. Even the idealism of the Irish has turned to either sentimental effusions or to a fanaticism that causes brother to murder brother. Krutch concludes that "England has played the villan's part, but Ireland has played the opposite in the fool's role and all in all it is a sorry farce."[31]

One writer saw Juno And The Paycock as a kind of moral tragedy about the evils that can strike at a happy-go-lucky family. Catastrophe is clearly written on the walls in Act L, but the family refuses to look at it only to find that they finally must face it. To this writer the theme of the play was expressed in Juno's line, "What can God do agen the stupidity of man?"[32]

Most of the critics agree that this play represents an advance in O'Casey's power of characterization. O'Casey has drawn the characters from his own background and put them on the stage. Walter Starkie in recalling a talk with O'Casey, quotes him as saying "...that those characters are definite types whom he knew in the slums, and that in some cases the names are the same."[33]

As in The Shadow Of A Gunman, O'Casey's sympathies lie with the women and especially with Juno who emerges as the strongest character in

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30 Joseph Wood Krutch, "Drama" The Nation 122:348, March 31, 1926.

31 Loc. cit.

32 Euphemia Wyatt "The Drama" Catholic World 100;730, March, 1940.

33 Robinson, op. cit., p. 157.

the play. Juno has been described as "...one of the finest characters in the whole Irish theatre..."[34] and her struggle "...magnificant in its intensity."[35] Part of the inspiration for Juno probably came from the character of O'Casey's mother for whom he had a great deal of love and admiration. Juno has been called the universal mother who represents the essential decency of the poor.[36]

"Captain" Jack Boyle, the Paycock, draws his nickname from a dialectal expression for the word peacock---a bird with a gorgeous plumage, but little else.[37] "Captain" Jack takes the title "Captain" by virtue of the fact that he once took a short sea trip. The Paycock with his pretensions and his failure to provide a living for his family personifies the unreasoning shiftlessness of the Irish. He is constantly shifting the blame for his situation from himself to the world which he believes is in "...a terrible state of chassis." "Captain" Boyle may be a drunken, shiftless man, but he is not essentially an evil parent.[38] The Paycock provides much of the humor in the play and is not the tragic figure that Juno is. "It is proof of O'Casey's real power that his paycock should remain comic from start to finish."[39]

Joxer provides a perfect foil to the Paycock. Joxer also represents the unreasoning shiftlessness of the Irish, but in addition to this he is

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34 Ibid., p. 159.

35 Loc. cit.

36 Freedly and Reeves, op. cit., p. 492.

37 Edward Alden Jewell "Drama" The Nation, 118:617-19, May 28, 1924.

38 O'Hagerty, op. cit., p. 319.

39 "Theatre" Time 35:36, January 29, 1940.

a paraitic character. Joxer continually builds up the Paycock's ego and together the two men convince each other of their worth. Whatever the "Captain's" mood or belief, Joxer is able to adjust to it.

Through the character of Johnny, O'Casey has brought the terror of the war directly into the household. In any production of the play, the acting of Johnny is important to the over-all effect. The anguish of Johnny in the first scene must sound the note of tragedy to come. "On his shoulders rests the hard task of preparing the laughing playgoer for the tragedy which is to come."[40] The neurosis of Johnny provides an effective theatrical contrast to the humor of the other characters in the play.[41] He stands for the hopelessness and fear which breeds poverty.[42]

The story of lowly folk who receive a bequest is ammenable to many different treatments. In this play, different critics saw different things. The play has been called "...a mordant tragedy of the Dublin slums, balanced with comic scenes in the best Irish tradition."[43] It has also been called a play which "...starts off as a comedy, jumps suddenly into tragedy, and ends up in a second rate farce...."[44] Starkie believes that O'Casey's power in this play lies in the fact that he never allows it to fall into commonplace melodrama.[45] Several critics believe, however, that the

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40 "Juno And The Paycock" Theatre Arts 24:162, March, 1940.

41 John Mason Brown, "The Rush Hour On Broadway" Theatre Arts 10:286, March, 1926.

42 Freedly and Reeves, op. cit., p. 492.

43 Loc. cit.

44 Russell Gregory "Theatre Notes" The Saturday Review 157:774, June 30, 1934.

45 Robinson, op. cit., p. 159.

introduction of melodramatic elements into the third act spoils the effect of the play. In particular, O'Hagerty cites the seduction of Mary as an element that mars the total effect of the play.[46] Ivor Brown sums it up well when he says that it is not a shapely play, that its stage effects are intermittent and that the action meanders occasionally when it should be marching.[47] Although it may not be a smooth play, it does represent an advance in technique over The Shadow Of A Gunman. Starkie believes it to be more mature and that the architecture is more solid.[48]

O'Casey's mixture of tragic and comic scenes has been commented on by many critics. Some contend that this mixture does not come off and is theatrically ineffective. George Jean Nathan is quoted as saying that he "...so segregates comedy and tragedy that one kills the effect of the other."[49] Starkie explains the sudden shifts between comedy and tragedy in this way: one of the characteristics of the Irish people is that their mood can change from the sunniest of dispositions to bleak dispair in a very short time.[50] Thus it is possible for the stark tragedy of Act III to come "...like a thunderbolt out of a perfect riot of comedy"[51] and still be consistent with the rest of the play.

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46 O'Hagerty, op. cit., p. 319.

47 Ivor Brown "The Theatre" The Saturday Review 140:594, November 21, 1925.

48 Gassner, op. cit., p. 568.

49 Quoted in Gassner, op. cit., p. 568.

50 Robinson, op. cit., p. 159.

51 Omicron "From Alpha To Omega" The Nation And Athenaeum 38:320-1, November 28, 1925.

The comedy in Juno And The Paycock has undertones of pathos and brutality.[52] One critic states that the play "...proves nothing beyond the dramatist's power to present the face of brutality leering out from the mask of vehement comedy."[53] Starkie calls the comedy savage in its pessimism.[54] In commenting on the opening of Act II, he says that the scene is covered with "...a gaiety that is like a thin layer covering over and concealing the huge load of misery and dispair."[55]

In any consideration of this aspect of Juno And The Paycock, the audience witnessing the production must be taken into account. One critic writes that "only a Russian or an Irishman could so pile on the horrors and keep a straight face."[56] St. John Ervine is quoted as saying, "I doubt if any people, except perhaps Russians, will be able to witness this play without being made to laugh at passages which an Irishman can only observe with poignance...."[57]

Juno And The Paycock has been compared to other plays, and O'Casey's writing in this play has been compared to those of other authors. Yates said that the play reminded him of Tolstoy,[58] while Starkie attributes to O'Casey the same ability that Chekov had for painting the grey lives of

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52 David Carb "Seen On The Stage" Vogue 67:98, May 15, 1926.

53 Brown, Ivor, op. cit., p. 594.

54 Robinson, op. cit., p. 155.

55 Ibid., p. 157.

56 "The New Yorker" Bookman 63:343-4, March, 1926.

57 Quoted in John W. Cunliffe, Modern English Playwrights (New York: Harpers, 1927) p. 240.

58 Kavanagh, op. cit., p. 123.

those destined to be failures.[59] Cunliffe calls the play Russian in its bitterness, Elizabethan in its mingling of the pitiful and the comic, but Irish "...in its recollection of the spark of beauty to be found even in the heart of dispairs."[60] R. Dana Skinner wrote an article in which he compared O'Casey to O'Neill on the basis of Juno And The Paycock. In his opinion O'Casey is overrated as a tragic writer and underrated as a creator of character comedy. The chief thing that O'Casey shared with O'Neill was the strict refusal to admit any gleam of creative power in the suffering and misery of the world.[61]

Whatever its faults and virtues, and the latter certainly outweigh the former, Juno And The Paycock is an important addition to world drama as well as Irish drama. John Gassner says that "Juno And The Paycock may rightly be considered the masterpiece of modern urban realism."[62]

The Plough And The Stars

February 8, 1926 marked the first production of The Plough And The Stars. The opening night was quite successful, but on the second night a riot broke out in the theatre. O'Casey describes it in this way:

> The police were summoned, and the play began again--two, in fact: one on the stage and the other in the auditorium. Yeats tore down the staris, and rushed onto the stage to hold the fort till the constables came. The whole place became a mass of moving, roaring people, and Yeats roared louder than any of them. Rowdy, clenching, but well-groomed hands reached up to drag down the

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59 Robinson, op. cit., p. 157.

60 Cunliffe, loc. cit.

61 R. Dana Skinner, "From Triumph To Illusion" The Independent 116:58, May 15, 1926.

62 Gassner, op. cit., p. 569.

> fading black and gold front curtain; others, snarling curiously, tried to tug up the very chairs from their roots in the auditorium; while some, in frenzy, pushed at the stout walls to force them down...The high, hysterical, distorted voices of women kept squealing that Irish girls were noted over the whole world for their modesty, and that Ireland's name was holy; that the Republican flag had never seen the inside of a public house; that this slander of the Irish race would mean the end of the Abbey Theatre; ...Up in the balcony, a section was busily bawling out The Soldier's Song, while a tall fellow frantically beat time on the balcony rail with a walking stick. Barry Fitzgerald became a genuine Fluther Good, and fought as Fluther himself would fight, sending an enemy, who had climbed on to the stage, flying into the stalls with a flutherian punch to the jaw. And in the midst of the fume, the fighting, the stench, the shouting, Yeats as mad as the maddest there...conjured up a vision for them of O'Casey on a cloud, with Fluther on his right hand and Rosie Redmond on his left, rising upwards to Olympus to get from the waiting gods and goddesses a triumphant apotheosis for a work well done."[63]

Denis Johnston adds a few facts when he writes, "Women screamed and sang songs, two young flappers blew a whistle violently until--most unfortunately--they blew the pea out and no amount of frantic repairing could restore the instrument to working order. A red haired damsel in the gallery removed her shoes and flung them heatedly into the melee beneath."[64]

In 1936, the play was filmed in Hollywood with Barbara Stanwyck in the role of Nora. Although O'Casey at first opposed filming the play, he granted permission when he found that the same production team that had filmed The Informer would film The Plough And The Stars.[65] In the film version, O'Casey allowed the ending of the play to be changed so that Jack and Nora were reunited. It is reported that O'Casey agreed that he now thought this better than the original ending he had given the play.[66]

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63 O'Casey, op. cit., p. 243.

64 Denis Johnston, "Sean O'Casey: An Appreciation" The Living Age 229:161-3, April 17, 1926.

65 "Entertainment" Newsweek 9:30, January 23, 1937.

66 "Irish Tragedy" Literary Digest 123:30, January 16, 1937.

Like The Shadow Of A Gunman and Juno And The Paycock, the play is set in the slums of Dublin. The time of the play is prior to and during the Easter Week Rebellion of 1916. Acts I and II occur during November, 1915, but are used as preparation for Acts III and IV which take place during the Easter Week Uprising. The action takes place in a tenement except in Act II which takes place in a bar frequented by the lower classes.

The story of The Plough And The Stars is rather slight. The immediate tragedy of the play is that of the fear-crazed Nora who loses the idealistic Jack to a cause that does not touch the ever present realities of her life. Jack Clitheroe is a member of the Irish Citizen's Army and despite his pregnant wife's objections, he joins in the fighting during the Easter Week Rebellion. The child is born dead and Nora upon learning of the death of her husband goes mad.

As in his previous plays, O'Casey is concerned with the problem of the individual during wartime. In this play he raises several questions about the reactions of various people, who live in close contact, to the Rebellion. What are the feelings of Bessie Burgess, a loyalist woman with a son fighting in Belgium? What is the reaction of Fluther Good, a big talker who lacks the courage to fight? What are the reactions of the Young Covey, a Socialist? How do the British Tommys feel about the situation? These are all questions which O'Casey raises and the answers to them in terms of what the characters say and do forms a major portion of the play. O'Casey has gathered these various characters together under the roof of a single tenement.

The play has been criticized for its kaleidoscopic nature and lack of structure. One critic says that it is "...not so much of a play at all as four pictures of low Dublin life during the blackest chapter of Anglo-Irish history."[67] Joseph Wood Krutch complains that the play lacks form, lacks movement, and in the last analysis lacks any informing purpose.[68] Malone also complains that the play is little better than a series of disconnected plays with the fighting as a background.[69] Starkie calls it a chronological play with a loose connection between the various scenes. In particular he finds that Act II does not further the story since neither Jack nor Nora appear in it.[70] One critic explains this seeming formlessness by saying that during the first three acts the play appears as a jumble with each of the characters going in their own separate direction, but in the last act, when the bypaths converge, the meaning becomes deafeningly clear.[71] George Jean Nathan recognizes this fact, but feels that O'Casey spends too much time with character and then belatedly adds action.[72]

O'Casey's position in The Plough And The Stars is essentially the same as it was in Juno And The Paycock and The Shadow Of A Gunman. Once

67 E. S. A. "Mr. O'Casey Again" The Spectator, 136:904, May 29, 1926.

68 Joseph Wood Krutch, "Poet Laureate" The Nation, 125:718, December, 21, 1927.

69 Malone, op. cit., p. 216.

70 Robinson, op. cit., p. 160.

71 John Mason Brown, "The Laughter Of The Gods" Theatre Arts 12:91-3, February, 1928.

72 George Jean Nathan, "The Theatre" The American Mercury 9:245-6, October, 1926.

again the play exposes the valiants in words but laggards in war.[73] O'Casey recognizes the "...nobility and courage of the rebels, but resents their intoxication with romantic and superficial objectives...."[74] He criticizes them for neglecting the immediate problems of poverty and the social evils of the slums. "Here in the slums, O'Casey seems to imply, is the real evil men must conquer, and every other cause should be secondary to this problem."[75] The play "...rends the pretensions of nationalism and patriotism when they clash with the elemental feelings of everyday life."[76] A. E. Malone states this theme a little differently when he says that the play shows "the shattering of dreams and the survival of communities...."[77]

One of the most striking things in The Plough And The Stars is that the external events are shown only by their effect upon the characters in the play.[78] Thus characterization is an important element in this play. Nathan believes that all of the characters are well drawn and that some of them are superbly drawn.[79]

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73 Ivor Brown, "The Theatre" The Saturday Review 141:473, April 10, 1926.

74 Gassner, op. cit. p. 569.

75 Ibid., p. 570.

76 W. M. C. "The Plough And The Stars" Queens Quarterly, 34:420-9, April-June, 1927.

77 Malone, op. cit., p. 216.

78 W. M. C. op. cit., p. 424.

79 Nathan, op. cit., p. 245.

Walter Starkie believes that the character of Fluther Good with his wide fund of human experience is the character who unifys the play since he appears in every scene. Starkie calls him the ironical mouthpiece of the author.[80] O'Casey himself wrote that he was nearer to Fluther than he was to the poets and writers of Dublin.[81] Ivor Brown says that Fluther is "...Falstaffian in the depth and range of his humbug and Falstaffian also in his power to command affection, however well we may be able to distinguish the mask from the face."[82]

Ivor Brown continues his Shakespearean comparisons when he calls Rosie Redmond "...Doll Tearsheet writ small and speaking with a brogue."[83] He concludes by saying that the termagant women and pot-house politicals of The Plough And The Stars are "...knaves as absolute as the great clowns in Shakespeare."[84]

The Young Covey is an interesting character since he is the first in O'Casey's plays to expound the Socialistic thesis. Although the over-all impression of the Young Covey is that of a rather weak and ineffectual character, his speeches often ring with sincerity.[85] Nathan says of this

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80 Robinson, op. cit., p. 160.

81 O'Casey, op. cit., p. 376.

82 Brown, Ivor, op. cit., p. 473.

83 Ivor Brown, "The Theatre" The Saturday Review, 141:614, May 22, 1926.

84 Ivor Brown, "The Theatre" The Saturday Review, 141:473, April 10, 1926.

85 Jules Kuslow, The Green And The Red (New York: Arts, Inc., 1950) p. 40.

character, "There is the young Irish liberal and dreamer, constantly mouthing an ill-assimilated amount of sociological information."[86]

One critic calls the dialogue "...cumbersome..."[87] and another speaks of O'Casey's extraordinary gift for dialogue.[88] A. E. Malone complains that the characters have a tendency to talk "literary" which makes them seem stilted.[89] This point has been explained by another critic when he writes that in The Plough And The Stars "...we have instances of uneducated people trying to use language which the newspapers have made them familiar with, although they do not comprehend it."[90]

The comedy of this play is similar to that of The Shadow Of A Gunman and Juno And The Paycock. John Mason Brown speaks of O'Casey's bitter, brutal irony that in spite of the wit and comedy of the play scorches and bruises the spectator.[91] Horror and desolation are mixed with a satirico-comic spirit in this play.[92] Denis Johnston calls the play "...an immense, heart-wrenching satire upon the folly of war and bloodshed."[93] George Jean Nathan believes that the play shows "...the tragic ridiculousness of a nation of eternal children playing politics with loud nursery rattles

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86 Nathan, op. cit., p. 245.

87 E. S. A. op. cit., p. 904.

88 Krutch, op. cit., p. 178.

89 Malone, op. cit., p. 216.

90 W. M. C. op. cit., p. 425.

91 Brown, John Mason, op. cit., p. 92.

92 W. M. C. loc. cit.

93 Johnston, op. cit., p. 161.

and playing soldiers with pop-guns."[94] Amusing to be sure, but with undertones of irony and satire. Gilbert Seldes has compared the comedy in The Plough And The Stars to the comedy of Moliere. He writes "...the comedy is in character and situation as it is in Moliere, is often as simple as Moliere."[95] Seldes continues by saying that although the character drawing is rough, the characters are full blooded and exist as human beings.

Although the irony of The Plough And The Stars may be "...crude and hideous, the brutality quite unmitigated...one knows that it is true."[96] Just as in his preceding two plays, O'Casey's honesty and sincerity in this play is apparent, even if the Abbey Theatre's audience did not recognize this fact. In fact, some critics have criticized the play because they are not able to discover where the author's sympathies lie.[97] If any confusion exists it is because O'Casey has attempted to present a picture of the Irish who, it has been observed, are not a consistent people. George Jean Nathan writes, "As a surgical picture of the Irish, I know of nothing in drama or literature that comes near this play."[98] He continues by saying that although this clinical portrait of the Irish is one of the most vicious things in modern literature, it is a viciousness of deep understanding and profound critical love. Ivor Brown says that if

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94 Nathan, loc. cit.

95 Gilbert Seldes "The Theatre" Dial, 84:259, March, 1928.

96 S. R. Littlewood "Isles Of Drama" The Bookman (London) 70:128-30, May, 1926.

97 Krutch, op. cit., p. 178.

98 Nathan, op. cit., p. 245.

O'Casey is pessimistic, it is not the aloof, sardonic kind of pessimism. "If he dispairs of Fluther, Young Covey and Flyn, he does not hate them. He seems to say there they are...the stuff of Ireland...."[99] Thus although O'Casey may be painfully truthful, he is honest and sincere in his writing and is not writing out of mere malice.[100]

Ivor Brown's comparison of this play with the plays of Shakespeare has already been mentioned. He raises an interesting point, however, when he speaks of the universality of the characters in The Plough And The Stars. He says "...you can always relate Mr. O'Casey's character to the outer world and find that in their fineness or in their more frequent failings to be fine they achieve something that is universal."[101] Starkie in commenting on this point writes, "we feel that the tragedy has become transcendental, and that we are watching, not the drama of individuals, but the tragedy of a whole race."[102]

The Plough And The Stars is generally considered the finest example of urban slum drama. Maxwell Anderson in 1937 called the play "...the finest drama of the twentieth century..."[103] The English critic,

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99 Ivor Brown, "The Theatre" The Saturday Review 141:614, May 22, 1926.

100 One critic disagrees with this position when he writes, "Mr. O'Casey, like Swift or Joyce, feeds his misanthropy on the spectacle of human degradation and appears to regard his countrymen with contempt unqualified by affection." Omicron, "Plays And Pictures" The Nation And Athenaeum, 47:347-8, June 14, 1930.

101 Ivor Brown, "The Theatre" The Saturday Review, 141:473, April 10, 1926.

102 Robinson, op. cit., p. 163.

103 Quoted in "Entertainment" Newsweek 9:30, January 23, 1937.

James Agate, says of this play, "the word masterpiece should be sparingly used. The play is more. It is a blazing masterpiece."[104]

The Silver Tassie

O'Casey got the idea for his next play, The Silver Tassie, from an old folk song lyric:

> Gae bring to me a pint of wine,
> And fill it in a silver tassie;
> That I may drink before I go,
> A service to my bonnie lassie.[105]

Although the play was written in England, O'Casey submitted the manuscript to the Abbey Theatre for production. The play was rejected by Yeats and the majority of the board of Abbey Directors. Yeats wrote O'Casey that although he thought the first act was the best thing that O'Casey had written, the other three acts were bad. Yeats felt that O'Casey had no theme; that he was aware of World War I, but not really interested in it. O'Casey replied that, "I was and am interested in the great war...I'm afraid your statement...is not only an ignorant one, but it is a silly statement too."[106] Yeats replied that O'Casey had "...never stood on its battlefields or walked in its hospitals, and so write out of your own opinions."[107] To this O'Casey replied that just because one isn't in a war does not mean that one should not or could not write about it. To support this position, O'Casey asked if Shakespeare was at Actium or

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104 James Agate The Amazing Theatre (London: George G. Harrap and Sons, 1939) p. 278.

105 Ruth Woodbury Sedgwick "O'Casey" Stage, 12:28, November, 1934.

106 Robinson, op. cit., pp. 170-1.

107 Ibid., p. 171.

Phillipi or if Shaw was with the French or in the forts with the British during Saint Joan's time. As to being in the hospitals, O'Casey wrote, "I've been with the legless, the blind, the gassed, and the shell-shocked."[108]

Yeats next turned to the structure of the play. He wrote O'Casey, "There is no dominating action; neither psychological unity nor unity of action."[109] O'Casey replied that Yeats' statements about unities "...are to me, glib, glib ghosts."[110] Yeats also objected to the fact that there was no dominating character in The Silver Tassie. He felt that the greatness of World War I had thwarted O'Casey. The war had refused to become mere background for the play and had obtruded on the stage "...as so much deadwood that will not burn with the dramatic fire. Dramatic action is a fire that must burn up everything but itself...the whole history of the world must be reduced to wall paper, in front of which the characters must pose and speak,"[111] wrote Yeats. O'Casey called this last remark of Yeats' "...the pretentious bigness of a pretentious phrase."[112] The play was not produced by the Abbey Theatre until 1935. Sean O'Faolain in that year wrote an open letter to O'Casey urging him to return to Ireland. O'Faolain believed that all that arose was the lack of seriousness of the Abbey as opposed to the deadly seriousness of O'Casey.[113]

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108 Loc cit.

109 Ibid., p. 172.

110 Ibid., p. 173.

111 Robinson, op. cit., p. 172.

112 Ibid., p. 173.

113 Sean O'Faolain "The Case of Sean O'Casey", Commonweal, 22:577-8, October 11, 1935.

The play received its first production at the Appollo Theatre in London in 1929. Charles Laughton, Beatrix Lehman and Barry Fitzgerald were members of the original cast. The chanting in the second act was directed by Raymond Massey and the second act setting was designed by Augustus Johns. Charles Cochran, the producer of the play, in recalling his production believes The Silver Tassie to be the finest play by one of the greatest of living playwrights.[114]

The Silver Tassie opens in one of the Dublin tenements during World War I. The men are home on leave, but must return to France that day. Harry Heegan enters the room flushed with victory. He has just won the silver tassie for his club for his athletic prowess and out of it he drinks a toast to his sweetheart, Jessie Tate. Their leave up, the men return to the army to sail for France. In the second act, O'Casey presents an expressionistic picture of life in the battle zone in France. The third act takes place in a hospital ward in France where we find Harry crippled and relegated to a life in a wheelchair. In the fourth act Harry in his wheelchair is attending a dance at the Avondale Football Club, the club for which he won the silver tassie. The athletic, lusty Harry is now forced to watch Barney Bagnal, the man who saved his life when he lay wounded in France, make love to Jessie. All that Harry can do is rage impotently from his wheelchair. Just before he leaves he says:

> "Dear God, this crippled form is still your child (To Mrs. Heegan) Dear mother, this helpless thing is still your son. Harry Heegan, me, who, on the football field could crash a twelve-stone flyer off his feet. For this dear Club three times I won the Cup, and

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114 Charles B. Cochran, I Had Almost Forgotten (London: Hutchinson and Company, 1933) p. 289.

> grieve in reason I was just too weak this year to play again. And now, before I go, I give you all the Cup, the Silver Tassie, to have and to hold for ever, evermore. (From his chair he takes the Cup with the two sides hammered close together and holds it out to them.) Mangled and bruised as I am bruised and mangled. Hammered free from all its comely shape. Look, there is Jessie writ, and here is Harry, the one name safely separated from the other. (He flings it on the floor) Treat it kindly. With care it may be opened out, for Barney there to drink to Jess, and Jessie there to drink to Barney."

The Silver Tassie, which has been called one of the most trenchant pacifist dramas of our generation,[115] is a play about the privations and sufferings of World War I. "It is a violent protest against organized murder; it is a militant pacifist's indictment of a society that would sanction and defend that murder."[116] At no time does O'Casey discuss the rightness or wrongness of the opposing forces in the war. He does not deal with either the merits or demerits of the Allies or the Central powers. "It is not that O'Casey is not interested in this phase of the war, but that the human wreckage resulting from war makes the moral position of both sides indefensible."[117] Partisan politics mean nothing when compared to the suffering and death that takes place during a war. In this respect The Silver Tassie is similar to The Shadow Of A Gunman, Juno And The Paycock, and The Plough And The Stars, but there is a difference in O'Casey's approach. In the first three plays mentioned he merely delineated the forces at work, but in The Silver Tassie he condemns these forces. "...O'Casey is not didactic, but...the very vigor of his attack,

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115 Gassner, op. cit., p. 804.

116 Kuslow, op. cit., p. 50.

117 Kuslow, op. cit., p. 56.

couched in brilliant dramatic terms, can leave but one impression--condemnation of the social forces that bring on and defend war."[118] Thus there is a shift from "...subjective pacifism to militant objective pacifism..."[119]

This play is a departure from O'Casey's previous plays in several ways. One of the most important of these is the diminishing importance of Irish life and background. All of the scenes in O'Casey's early plays were laid in the Dublin slums. In The Silver Tassie, although Act I is laid in a slum and Act IV at the football club, the second and third acts are laid in France. O'Casey also uses characters of non-Irish extraction, although the major figures are all Irish. The depiction of slum life is not the most important aspect of this play as it was in O'Casey's previous plays. Act I shows O'Casey to be the master of "...wry and racy tenement comedy..."[120] and although he could have played safe and continued to write this kind of play he wished to expand his horizons. Irish national politics which were very important in O'Casey's previous plays are ignored in this play.

One of the most important differences between this play and O'Casey's earlier plays is his use of the expressionistic technique in Act II. In 1926, Denis Johnston, one of Ireland's leading exponents of expressionism, wrote "...it is becoming more and more clear that as a realist, he (O'Casey) is an imposter...His dialogue is becoming a series of word-poems in

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118 Loc. cit.

119 Ibid., p. 51.

120 Ivor Brown, "Cup Of Unkindness" The Saturday Review, 148:446, October 19, 1929.

dialect; his plots are disappearing and giving place to a form of undisguised expressionism under the stress of a genius that is much too insistent and far too pregnant with meaning to be bound by the four dismal walls of orthodox realism."[121] The Silver Tassie proved Johnston's ideas prophetic.

O'Casey's use of the expressionistic technique grew out of his basic purpose in writing The Silver Tassie which was to portray the effect of war on society. In the second act, O'Casey uses nameless characters and symbols rather than individual characters to carry out this intention. "He was concerned not with this or that individual, but with the mass."[122] Modern war has turned the individual into a mass to be swallowed by the machine. Yeats complained that there was no central character in The Silver Tassie, but O'Casey did not abolish the individual, war did that. O'Casey wrote that "...in The Silver Tassie, you have a unique work that dominates all the characters in the play."[123] "...if the dramatic action is to center around no particular individual but society as a whole, or in other words, if society is to be the hero, then other dramatic forms may have to be used."[124] Ivor Brown believes that O'Casey found war time realism too common to be effective, "So Mr. O'Casey attempts a gun powder sonata, which shall be both a litany of the damned and an outline of all human agony in a silouetted cartoon."[125]

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121 Johnston, op. cit., p. 163.

122 Kuslow, op. cit., p. 57.

123 Quoted in "A Dublin Tempest" Literary Digest 98:24, August 4, 1928.

124 Kuslow, op. cit., p. 58.

125 Brown, Ivor, op. cit., p. 446.

In the second act which has been called "...a queer fantastic scene that recalls slightly the dream play in Man And The Masses by Toller."[126] all of the characters are unidentified and symbols of abstract human qualities. The soldiers chant the dialogue which is not realistic. O'Casey in the stage directions indicates that the scenery is to be distorted. O'Casey stage directions for the second act curtain are an indication of the general nature of the whole scene,

> The Soldiers hurry to their places led by the Staff-Wallah to the gun. The gun swings around and points to the horizon; a shell is swung into the breech and a flash indicates the firing of the gun, searchlights move over the red glare of the sky; the scene darkens, stabbed with distant flashes and by the more vivid flash of the gun which the Soldiers load and fire with rhythmical movements while the scene is closing. Only flashes are seen; no noise is heard.

Reactions to O'Casey's use of the expressionistic technique vary. Allardyce Nicoll has called the second act of The Silver Tassie the greatest English achievement in Expressionism.[127] The typical critical reaction was, however, not nearly so favorable. Some critics did not like the "...rather flayboyant expressionism..."[128] of Act II. At least one critic found it tedious and believed that it had nothing to do with the rest of the play.[129] Ivor Brown considers the second act wild and woolly, suggesting that it seems like the writings of an "...expressionist with a headache."[130]

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126 Robinson, op. cit., p. 167.

127 Allardyce Nicoll, British Drama (London: Harrup and Company, 1947) p. 484.

128 E. H. G. "The Playhouse" The Illustrated London News 175:696, October 19, 1929.

129 Herbert Farjohn, "The London Stage" The Graphic 126:176, October 26, 1929.

130 Ivor Brown "Two More War Plays" The Saturday Review 145:801-2, June 23, 1928.

In the first three plays, many of the critics objected to O'Casey's mixture of comic and tragic scenes. In this play there was objection to O'Casey's mixture of the realistic and expressionistic techniques. Ivor Brown, while recognizing the fact that the play is in some ways clumsy and jerky, believes that it was O'Casey's intention to keep it this way since "...the formlessness and the changes of character without explanation conform to the nightmarish quality of the whole."[131] Matthew Norgate explains this mixture of realism and expressionism in the following fashion. In his opinion, O'Casey has used two distinct methods in writing the play; the first is purely symbolic, while the second "...though superficially realistic, (is) symbolic in terms of realism..."[132] In Act I, he believes that certain lines of Mrs. Heegan symbolizes, in a highly ironical fashion, the attitude of women toward man fighting. He considers Act II to be the core of the play. "...what is outstandingly successful, is its cumulative effect; its direct appeal to the emotions, not deferring to reason, never for an instant suggesting a need for versimilitude, often using words for their abstract sound rather than their meaning."[133] Acts III and IV, while on the surface realistic are actually symbolic, since O'Casey's interest is in showing the effect of war on the masses rather than on the individual says Norgate.[134] Charles Cochran tends to agree with this point of view. He considers the last act by no means

131 Brown, Ivor, "Cup Of Unkindness" op. cit., p. 446.

132 Matthew Norgate "The Drama" The Nation And Athenaeum, 46:138-9, October 26, 1929.

133 Norgate, op. cit., p. 138.

134 Ibid., p. 139.

sheer realism. The men return home as spokesmen for a new order, voicing different social or moral concepts than ordinary Irishmen.[135]

Religion, which has hitherto played only a minor part in O'Casey's plays, becomes important in this play. In the second act, O'Casey has the soldiers pray to the gun, suggesting that modern war has swallowed the masses so completely that even God is consumed by it. Intermingled with the chants of the soldiers in the second act is the chanting of the Kyrie from a nearby monastery. Whether or not the chant of the soldiers is meant as a satire on the chanting of the Kyrie is not ascernable, but it is a possibility.[136]

It was perhaps inevitable that The Silver Tassie should be compared with Journey's End. This was done in two cases with widely different conclusions drawn by the respective critics. Richard Jennings says, "His (O'Casey's) impressionism is outdone by any photograph--say a scene from Journey's End."[137] Reynold's concludes that the play was "...a much finer comment on war than the much acclaimed Journey's End."[138]

Critical evaluation of the play as a whole ranges from that of Allardyce Nicoll who considers it a great play[139] to that of Richard Jennings who considers the play "...a lugubrious blunder, almost

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135 Cochran, op. cit., p. 289.

136 Stark Young, "Sean O'Casey and Victor Chenkin" The New Republic, 61:17-8, October 27, 1929. See also Rev. T. L. Connolly, "The Case of Sean O'Casey" Commonweal, 23:442, February 14, 1936.

137 Richard Jennings "The Theatre" Spectator 143:523, October 19, 1929.

138 E. Reynolds Modern English Drama (London: Harrup and Sons, 1950) p. 155.

139 Nicoll, op. cit., p. 484.

incredibly crude in its emotional emphasis; painful in no profitable sense, with its rubbing in of points presented by the dreadful theme of a wounded body derided by its surviving rivals in health and strength; proceeding in a mixture of styles, between forced poetic exaltation and commonplace comic relief, to a sort of 'criticism of life' that depends on caricature."[140] The majority of the critics take a position similar to that of John Mason Brown who believes that the play is "...brilliant though scattered...(and) a brave failure in a fine cause..."[141]

The End Of The Beginning

The End Of The Beginning is a one-act comedy which was staged by the Theatre de l'Oeuvre in Paris in May, 1939. George Jean Nathan refers to a planned production of the play which failed to reach New York.[142]

O'Casey takes as his basic idea the reversal of positions of the sexes. Darry Berrill after an argument with his wife, Lizzie, as to which of them does the most work, decides to prove that he works harder by having his wife mow the hay while he does the housework. With the aid of his nearsighted friend, Barry Derrill, he succeeds in making a shambles of the house before the return of his wife who has finished mowing the hay.

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140 Jennings, loc. cit.

141 John Mason Brown, Two On The Aisle (New York: Norton and Company, 1938) p. 127. Stark Young says that his impression of O'Casey's plays is that of a gift streaked with genius; unequal, willful, bold and not always interesting. Young finds it more striking and tormented than memorable or important. Stark Young, op. cit., p. 18.

142 George Jean Nathan, The Theatre Book Of The Year, 1946-47 (New York: Knopf and Company, 1947) p. 234.

Very little has been written about this play. George Jean Nathan calls the play "...a coup in slapstick...."[143] He believes that this farce is superior to most, "...the difference is the interpretation of character through the slat rather than the slat for its own sake."[144]

A Pound On Demand

A Pound On Demand is another minor effort of O'Casey written at about the same time as The End Of The Beginning. It was produced in 1946 by the American Repertory Company in New York as a curtain raiser to Shaw's Androcles And The Lion with Victor Jory as director.

A Pound On Demand finds "Fluther and Joxer in another scrape...."[145] Jerry brings his friend Sammy into a post office so that Sammy can draw a pound out of his postal savings account. Jerry is so intoxicated that he can hardly stand up, but Jerry is determined that Sammy shall sign the form and get the pound. After several false starts and a great deal of trouble, Sammy signs the form, but his signature fails to match that on his credit book and he is refused the money. The two men leave, vowing never to bank their money with the government again.

Nathan found the play "...highly comical..."[146] while another critic found it "...inoffensive entertainment and funny enough to pass the time..."[147]

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143 Nathan, op. cit., p. 234

144 Loc. cit.

145 Ibid., p. 232.

146 Nathan, op. cit., p. 232.

147 "Theatre" Newsweek 28:71, December 30, 1946.

Within The Gates

Before Within The Gates was produced, Sean O'Casey sent a manuscript copy to George Jean Nathan with this notation, "Here is Within The Gates. It may not be a fine play; it may not even be a good play, but I'm sure it is an interesting play."[148] After reading the play, Mr. Nathan wrote that O'Casey was wrong in doubting the excellence of his work, "It is a fine play--a damned fine play."[149] Whether or not one agrees with Nathan's opinion of the play, O'Casey was certainly correct when he wrote that it was an interesting play. Even those critics who did not find it as noteworthy as Nathan had found it felt that it was an interesting experiment in theatre.[150]

Within The Gates has been called "...a symphony in cyclic style...."[151] "...a dramatic poem...."[152] "...a bewildering mixture of symbolism, expressionism, and naturalism...."[153] "...a twentieth century morality

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148 George Jean Nathan "The Theatre" Vanity Fair, 41:421, January, 1934.

149 Loc. cit.

150 Nathan, who was a staunch supporter of Within The Gates and helped arrange the American production of the play, wrote an article in which he decried the fact that the critics had watched so much rubbish that when a play affording an opportunity for real criticism appeared they did not know what to do. He then quoted from various other critics reviews and then proceeded to refute them. George Jean Nathan "The Theatre" Vanity Fair, 43:31, January, 1935.

151 Robinson, op. cit., p. 175.

152 "Not Good Enough for Ireland" Literary Digest, 118:26, October 27, 1934.

153 "The Theatre" The Illustrated London News, 184:264, February 17, 1934.

play...."[154] "...a symphonic poem...."[155] "...a grandiose mixture of blatant sentiment and heart-dampening unreality...."[156] and "...pretentious rubbish...."[157] Within The Gates is a play in which different people saw different things. The play "...has the power to offend or defend, depending upon one's point of view."[158]

Within The Gates takes as its theme all of modern life. "The play contains optomism and pessimism, beauty and ugliness, comedy and tragedy. It both lifts to the heavens and crashes down to earth man's ideas about himself, he fellow man, and society at large."[159] The play "...deals in an unhappy subjective way with Life, very much with a capital L. To him, (O'Casey) we are all 'Within The Gates', talking, loving, living, but never finding even a small doorway into the sould of our neighbor. We go blindly in a set path cut by circumstances over which we had no control, ignorant of the wherefores, unacquainted with the ways of others, unaware of our destiny until in the end we join in the dust of the world--a gruesome, faceless procession of the Down and Outs."[160] Hyde Park is really the subject of the play and to it come all the lusts, religions

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154 Derek Verschoyle, "The Theatre" The Spectator, 152:235, February 16, 1934.

155 Ruth Woodbury Sedgwick, "Within The Gates" Stage, 12:18-9, December, 1934.

156 Desmond MacCarthy, "Hyde Park" The New Statesman And Nation, 7:226-7, February 17, 1934.

157 James Agate, quoted by Kuslow, op. cit., p. 61.

158 Ibid., p. 62.

159 Loc. cit.

160 Prince Nicholas Galitzine, "The Theatre" The Saturday Review, 157:219, February 24, 1934.

and politics of modern life. The characters are only living parts, fragments of a microcosm of modern life which is Hyde Park.[161]

To Hyde Park comes, among other people, the Young Whore, who has left the home of her step-father, the Atheist. The Young Whore is the illegitimate daughter of the Bishop, although neither of them are aware of the fact. She begs the Bishop for help and guidance but he is unable to advise her. When her mother appears and begins to beat the girl it is the Dreamer and not the Bishop who rescues the Young Whore. After a few months the Young Whore, realizing that she is about to die, returns to the park to die in the arms of the Dreamer.

This play is a continuation of the non-realistic style of writing which O'Casey used in The Silver Tassie. Grein in commenting on the form of the drama says that "the qualities of form are creative, for they are the inevitable expression of the thing conceived."[162] He believes that this is what gives distinction to Within The Gates. He further believes that if O'Casey's ideas had "...not passed through the sieve of a creative mind, it would have ended in a pamphlet or exhortation."[163] He concludes by saying that Within The Gates is "...a drama woven from the stuff of life, expressing itself vitally and significantly in a form that is essentially part of its theme."[164] George Freedley says that O'Casey has

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161 MacCarthy, loc. cit.

162 J. T. Grein "The World Of The Theatre" The Illustrated London News 184:320, March 3, 1934.

163 Loc. cit.

164 Loc. cit.

used the expressionistic method to produce a symbolic allegory.[165] Whether or not the play is an example of expressionism or not is a question that is open to discussion, but all the critics agree that O'Casey makes a vivid use of symbolism in this play.

O'Casey's use of symbolism is one of the major problems in gaining an understanding of Within The Gates since many of his sumbols embody ideas. The symbolism is not the "...pale, delicate plaiting of the French Decadents, but rough, red, raging, symbolism."[166]

The play is divided into four acts, each of which takes place during a different season of the year; spring, summer, autumn and winter. This division is symbolic in itself. During the season of spring, life is re-awakening symbolizing hope for mankind. During summer, there is still hope, but with autumn hope is on the wane. When it is winter, hope is dead except for those few who are still able to dream of a new spring.[167] Thus the song of the Chorus in Act I may be taken as the promise of beauty and joy that life can hold for mankind; while the final chorus of the Down-and-Outs in Act IV "...may well mean the betrayal of that promise."[168]

Since the characters are all symbolic, an understanding of what the symbols represents is essential to an understanding of the play and its ideas. Fortunately, O'Casey has written an explanation of what he

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165 Freedley and Reeves, op. cit., p. 492.

166 Horace Reynolds "Sean O'Casey's Symbolic Drama" The Saturday Review of Literature, 10:519, March 3, 1934.

167 Kuslow, op. cit., p. 70.

168 Ibid., p. 72.

intended his characters to represent and express. This has been reprinted and since it is the most concise explanation and the most exact statement of the author's intentions in writing the play, it is being reproduced here:

> The Dreamer--a symbol of a noble restlessness and discontent; of the stir of life that brings to birth new things and greater things than those that were before; of the power realizing that the urge of life is above the level of conventional morality; of ruthlessness to get near to the things that matter, and sanctify them with intelligence, energy, gracefulness and song; of rebellion against stupidity; and of the rising intelligence in man that will no longer stand, nor venerate, nor shelter those whom poverty of spirit has emptied of all that is worthwhile in life.
>
> The Atheist--a symbol of those who, trying to get rid of God, plant Him more firmly on His throne.
>
> The Young Whore--a symbol of those young women full of life and a fine energy, gracious and kind, to whom life fails to respond, and who are determined to be wicked rather than virtuous out of conformity or fear.
>
> The Chair Attendants--symbols of life's wreckage who, with the Evangelists, are wasting life by living it.
>
> The Evangelists--symbols of those preachers who daub the glories of God with mockeries.
>
> The Scarlet Woman--a symbol of those young women who think their legs are the pillars of the world and wisdom, who giving, give not, and who live far away from life.
>
> The Young Man In Plus-Fours--a symbol of those young and old men whose whole life is an interest in the surface of women.
>
> The Gardner--a symbol of the multitude mind moving on head down, shrinking from thought, and finding inspiration in all things cheap and everything easy. Seeking the things that present no risk and leave no risk behind them.
>
> The Old Woman--a symbol of those who stand still, think the little world around was born to serve them, and that when they die, life dies too.
>
> The Police Woman--a symbol of women dressed in a little brief authority.

The Young Salvation Army Officers--symbols of the colored sob-stuff in organized religion that reflects no gleam from the mind of God, and brings to gleam to the mind of man.

The Disputants--symbols of those who hear and give great argument, but are none the wiser for it all.

Nursemaids and Guardsmen--symbols of those simple souls who take life as they find it, and without much effort, make the best of it.

The Choruses--symbol of the energy and stir of life.

Down-and-Outs--symbol of all who are dead to courage, fortitude, and the will to power; of those to whom a new idea brings terror and dismay; of those who turn the struggle of life into a whine; of those, young and old, rich or poor, who in thought, word, and deed, give nothing to life, and so are outcasts from life as they live; even so.[169]

O'Casey in reply to James Agate's assertion that the Bishop was intended to be an oily scoundrel gave this explanation of the Bishop, "The Bishop was never contemplated by me as either oily or a scoundrel. He is good-natured, well-intentioned, religious and sincere; but he is timid, mistaking good nature for the fire of the Holy Ghost, and life has passed him by."[170]

John Gassner, who considers the author's explanation of his symbolic characters obscure and open to question, provides another explanation. The Young Whore represents the misery of the world's outcasts. The Bishop represents the hypocrisy of the master class and the church. The Chorus of the Down-and-Outs represents the impoverished spirit of the people, while The Dreamer represents the upsurgence of the human will.[171]

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169 O'Casey, quoted in Kuslow, op. cit., pp. 70-1.

170 Sean O'Casey, The Flying Wasp (London: Macmillan and Company, 1937) p. 49.

171 Gassner, op. cit., p. 579.

With the use of these symbols, O'Casey through dialogue and action, presents his view of the modern world and its institutions. One critic says that O'Casey takes a rather neutral position. He makes the point that the world has been upset since the war; that capitalism can offer no security; and that in a crisis, the Church is discovered to be humbug.[172]

A large part of the play is concerned with the place of organized religion and the church in modern life. O'Casey believes that the church has become a place of gloom rather than a place of joy and light. The Bishop's attempt to get close to the common people indicates that the church has strayed from its purpose of serving the common man and now is attempting to find its way back to him, but is incapable of doing it. O'Casey feels that the church has been too eager to welcome the good, solid, respectable citizens into its fold, rather than the less refined, less stable and less socially illustrious members of society.[173] Kuslow believes that "O'Casey does not attack God or religion, as such, but insists that organized religion embodied in the church has lost its way."[174] Horace Reynold's believes that the play is born of O'Casey's fear of being deceived and that this explains O'Casey's hatred of religion, for to him religion is the great deceiver.[175]

The yellow press is exposed not only as a cheapening influence, but also as a reflection of a society that has become degenerate and

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172 "The Theatre" Time, 24:30, November 5, 1934.

173 Kuslow, op. cit., p. 72.

174 Ibid., p. 73.

175 Reynolds, op. cit., p. 519.

decadent. One critic says that this play shows the hollowness of a society which tacitly condones organized hypocrisies of organized religion and which absorbs itself in the shallow and sensation mongering press.[176]

O'Casey, however, is presenting not only a picture of what he considers modern life to be, but he is also pointing toward a solution. O'Casey says that life is worth living and can be full of hope and splendor, but one must really live. He is not concerned with offering a new heaven and earth to man, he wants to restore the one he already has. In Within The Gates he has presented a pageant of today's living: his indictment of society, politics, organized religion, his comment and his solution. The Dreamer is O'Casey's ultimate solution, although he is "...no more than a finger pointing to the fundamental qualities which will make men who can find the way out."[177] Verschoyle sees it this way: "It is both proletarian and propogandist--by which I do not imply that its objective is political proselytism; I mean, in the first place, that it considers and criticizes society from the point of view of the disestablished and, in the second, that it points toward a new regimentation of the society satirized, based on a new and integral faith in life. The absence of that faith, I take to be Mr. O'Casey's theme."[178] Kuslow believes that "In the very depiction of the lack of faith that exists in the modern world, Within The Gates emerges as a powerful cry for a revived and vigorous faith in man and life."[179]

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176 Loc. cit.

177 Sedgwick, op. cit., p. 18.

178 Verschoyle, op. cit., p. 235.

179 Kuslow, op. cit., p. 74.

One of the main objections to this play is that its effects are scattered and often vague. MacCarthy believes that O'Casey has made a mistake in believing that everyone will understand all the subtleties in his characters. "Mr. O'Casey is a man who cares so little for the effect on the public of his work and so entirely for that work itself, that he is in danger of ignoring problems of communication."[180] Another critic believes that O'Casey has tried to combine elements of drama to produce a single effect, but this idea has not worked out too well since the play contains "...no unity of expression."[181] John Gassner writes, "if its effects are scattered, this is the intrinsic fault of the expressionistic medium."[182] Kuslow says, "it is the confusion of modern life, however, and not the confusion of O'Casey that the play presents."[183]

Joseph Wood Krutch believes that the play goes nowhere. To him, O'Casey is merely repeating things that everyone has said about life at one time or another. That "...spring is mighty, love is sweet...That youth knows the secret which age has forgotten, that priests are cowards and that prudent men are dumb cattle---this and all the rest that goes with it may be either a romantic notion or it may be, as I do solomnly believe, the greatest and most important truth."[184] Krutch concludes

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180 MacCarthy, op. cit., p. 226.

181 Verschoyle, loc. cit.

182 Gassner, op. cit., p. 570.

183 Kuslow, op. cit., p. 69.

184 Joseph Wood Krutch, "Mr. O'Casey's Charade" The Nation 139;546, November 7, 1934.

that "the purpose is laudable...but Mr. O'Casey does not so much say the things he has to say as say that he wants to say them."[185]

Verschoyle believes that O'Casey has attempted to write a twentieth century morality play in Within The Gates. He believes that it is an attempt to transcend the naturalism of the common world as Aescyulus and Euripides did and as O'Neill tried to do, "...by raising the moral and social problems of the individual and group to a universal, almost mythological plane."[186] Clifton Fadiman agrees with this idea, but raises serious objections to the morality of the play. In Fadiman's opinion it is dangerous for a writer to start praising life without first establishing points of reference. "Not morality without metaphysic should be the rule"[187] says Fadiman. In examining O'Casey's points of reference he finds them dismayingly simple. "...Life is better than Death, Candor than Hypocrisy, Courage than Cowardice, Love than Lust, Gallant Sin than Conventional Virtue"[188] are O'Casey's points. Fadiman asks if these medieval concepts of morality are applicable to the twentieth century and its problems. He believes that O'Casey's basic problem is an aesthetic one. "Is it possible to generate a transformation formula which will re-establish the old Morality Play on a new set of modern postulates?"[189]

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185 Loc. cit.

186 Verschoyle, op. cit. p. 235

187 Clifton Fadiman, "Murder In The Library" Stage, 12:13, December, 1934.

188 Loc. cit.

189 Fadiman, op. cit., p. 13.

Fadiman believes that the answer to this question is no. If the answer is yes, O'Casey has not found it in Within The Gates. In his opinion O'Casey is attempting to symbolize modern life in terms that are largely irrelevant to the twentieth century. The great problems of the twentieth century are not problems of religion and sin, but the problems of wealth, poverty and suffering. O'Casey's symbols do not touch the heart of the matter, they are holdovers from the nineteenth century that "...reek of Bradlaugh and Ingersoll and debased Neitzsche."[190] He concludes that although O'Casey's intentions are noble, but that more than noble intentions are needed. The Dreamer must rebel against more than stupidity and hypocrisy. John Gassner in commenting on this point says that Within The Gates lacks "...a conclusiveness which is particularly indispensable in a morality play."[191]

The story of Within The Gates is slight. The unifying factor of the play is Hyde Park--the place to which all of the characters come and where all of the action takes place. Reynold's sees in the story, "...the great Father-Child theme of the 'Odyssey' and its modern analogue, Joyce's 'Ulysses!'"[192]

The characters which O'Casey uses have already been commented on. Galitizine says that the play is peopled with symbolic characters that all have their troubles, but none "...a redeeming excuse for existence, except for a vague furtherance of a slender story that runs through the general

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190 Loc. cit.

191 Gassner, op. cit., p. 570.

192 Reynolds, op. cit., p. 519.

depression."[193] John Gassner also misses the robust characterizations which O'Casey had used in his first three plays.[194] Kuslow, however, believes that the characters are an unusual combination of individuals and symbols. "...individuals in that they have the flesh and blood reactions of human beings; symbols in that they represent defined segments of society."[195]

O'Casey's language has been commented on by several critics. Some like it; others do not. Joseph Wood Krutch believes that O'Casey's has completely lost "...all distinction of language..."[196] Another critic says that the play has "...moments of sensuous beauty, but that's about all."[197] George Freedly, on the other hand, believes that some of O'Casey's best writing is to be found in Within The Gates.[198] Starkie says that this play contains all the amazing gift for words seen in O'Casey's early plays, and in addition "...there is a lyrical imaginative power tugging at the author to make him break away from his moorings and escape into a golden dream-life of eternal freedom."[199] The dialogue of the play is written on several levels; common speech, poetic prose, and verse. At least two critics have commented on the rhythm of O'Casey's language.

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193 Galitizine, op. cit., p. 219.

194 Gassner, op. cit., p. 570.

195 Kuslow, op. cit., p. 61.

196 Krutch, op. cit., p. 546.

197 "The Theatre" Time, 24:30, November 5, 1934.

198 Freedly and Reeves, op. cit., p. 492.

199 Robinson, op. cit., p. 175.

Verschoyle says that although O'Casey gives some of his characters cockney accents, the cadances are always those of Irish speech."[200] Walter Starkie in commenting on this aspect of the play says that O'Casey is one of the few dramatists who gives the impression of always writing with a rhythm in his head.[201]

O'Casey's use of music began in The Silver Tassie and this use of music is continued in Within The Gates. In production, the use of music seems to have been dramatically effective. George Freedly found the music "...theatrically stirring..."[202] Another critic found "...real beauty in the writing and the music...."[203]

Within The Gates has been compared to the work of several other authors. It has also been compared to a musical composition. These comparisons serve to point up certain aspects of the play and to place in relation to other works.

One critic compares Within The Gates to Eugene O'Neill's play Days Without End. This author believes that many playwrights who have tired of negativism have tried to write a play establishing a sincere creed of hope. According to this critic, O'Neill attempted to do this in Days Without End but failed, while O'Casey, forsaking granite realism has "...moved magnificently into spiritual affirmation."[204]

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200 Verschoyle, op. cit., p. 235.

201 Robinson, op. cit., p. 175.

202 Freedly and Reeves, op. cit., p. 492.

203 "Theatre" The Illustrated London News, 184:264, February 17, 1934.

204 Sedgwick, op. cit., p. 18.

Desmond MacCarthy says that some of his collegues tried to compare the technique O'Casey used in Within The Gates to the technique used by Strindberg in The Spook Sonata. MacCarthy believes that this comparison is incorrect. "What is peculiar about it is that he has endeavored to use the technique of musical comedy to express philosophic tragedy."[205]

Horace Reynolds compares Within The Gates to an Elizabethan play. He says that "...it is a powerful play, Elizabethan in its youthfulness, integrity, language, and, to some extent, its structure."[206] Stark Young also believes that O'Casey has returned to the Gothic barbarism that the Elizabethan's used. "...it has the confusion of turbulence, the clipped transitions of heated themes, and will to sonority in the ear, the glimpses of the moon, that Shakespeare, to take the top of them, followed."[207] Young believes that the chief difference between O'Casey and Shakespeare is cerebral, not generic. Within The Gates lacks the basic relevancy and importance that Shakespeare's plays possess. "...its comic talent is almost as good as Shakespeare's...(but) its final sum, taken seriously is likely to be adolescent where Shakespeare is ripe, solid and significant."[208]

Ruth Sedgwick compares the play to a symphony. "Going back to the Elizabethans for vigor and song, to the Greeks for form, he has composed, not a play, but a symphonic poem; symbolizing life, its stupidity and pain,

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205 MacCarthy op. cit., p. 226.

206 Reynolds, op. cit., p. 519.

207 Stark Young, "Theatre Gates" The New Republic, 80:369, November 7, 1934.

208 Loc. cit. O'Casey says that there is "...more humor (attempts at humor, if you like) than Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth, or Richard III." Sean O'Casey, The Flying Wasp op. cit., p. 49.

its greed and silliness, its beauty and its promise, its reason and its reward."[209] He has done this with word themes, melodies and music. To symphonic form he has added human symbols to act as counterpoint. By superimposing one theme upon others, he expresses the complex harmonics and dissonances of the world. George Jean Nathan agrees with this point of view when he says "...the play is really a philosophical musical composition...the church, the state, politics, passion, avarice, charity, the woes and joys of all mankind--these notes are struck and many more. Romance and irony, the beat of a heart and the lust of the flesh, tragedy and comedy, venom and gentleness are intermingled....It is a play that lays hold of silver poetry and gross low humor, of music and song and dancing, of the hot coals of drama and the cold ashes of romances, and out of them fashions a symphony that plays its deep melody in the mind for days afterwards."[210]

Perhaps the best way to summarize this discussion of Within The Gates is with a quotation from Stark Young. "The theatre needs just this spiritual oddment of his, this explosion and variety, this sweep from mood to mood, quality to quality, style to style, this dilation and pressing emotion, this insistence on stress, that Mr. O'Casey provides throughout Within The Gates. Good or bad, his play is theatre."[211]

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209 Sedgwick, op. cit., p. 18.

210 George Jean Nathan, "The Theatre" Vanity Fair 41:42, January, 1934.

211 Young, op. cit., p. 369.

Purple Dust

By 1940, O'Casey had spent more than 12 years of voluntary exile in Great Britain. Having had ample opportunity to study the English and drawing upon his knowledge of the Irish, he wrote a light farcial comedy on the differences between the two peoples. George Bernard Shaw had written a play along the same lines several years earlier in John Bull's Other Island and although O'Casey knew this play and had been somewhat influenced by Shaw's writings while living in Ireland, there is little resemblance between the two plays.

The play is as yet unproduced. Purple Dust was written while England was in the midst of World War II and because of its satire on the English it was not produced for fear that it would give aid and comfort to the enemy and "...strengthen the hands of certain persons in America who wished to place England in the most unfavorable possible light."[212] James Agate, the English critic, who was very angry at O'Casey for his lack of respect and support for the British when they were fighting for their very existence calls the play "...a witless lampoon at the expense of the English (who are) too busy fighting for freedom to answer back."[213]

The story of Purple Dust is the story of two Englishmen, Cyril Poges and Basil Stoke who are attempting to rejuvinate an old Tudor house in Ireland. They desire to recapture the glory of the past and consequently are having the house repaired and put back into shape. They are outwitted,

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212 Barrett Clark and George Freedley, editors, A History of Modern Drama, (New York: Appleton and Company, 1947) p. 229.

213 James Agate quoted in Kuslow, op. cit., p. 79.

however, on every hand by their Irish mistresses, Souhaun and Avril, and by the Irish workmen especially the foreman, O'Killigain. After all kinds of trouble including breaking of furniture, a wall knocked down, and a cow mistakenly shot as a bull, Poges exclaims,

> "Oh, what a terrible country to have anything to do with! My precious vase is gone, my beautiful bowl is broken; a wall's demolished, and an innocent animal's shot dead; what an awful country to be living in! A no-man's land; a waste land; a wilderness!

The final blow comes to the two men when their mistresses run off with the Irish workmen just before the entire house is flooded. O'Killigain before leaving tells the two men,

> "You have had your day, like every dog. Your Tudors have had their day, and they are gone; and th' little heaps of purple dust they left behind them will vanish away in th' flow of the river."

However the play is more than mere invective directed against the English. O'Casey sees the conflict between the Irish and the English as a "...clash not only of politics, but in fundamental ways of living."[214] Brooks Atkinson writes, "under the robustiousness of the satric comedy and behind the occasional scenes of fantasy, there is a tangible problem to deal with and recognizable people to fool with."[215] Atkinson sees as the theme of this play, "...Mr. O'Casey's contempt for solemn humbug and his relish for the human delights of living."[216] This is not a new theme to O'Casey; he has used it in several other plays, notably Within The Gates.

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214 L. A. G. Strong, "'Airrt' In The Theatre" The Spectator 166:70, January 17, 1941.

215 The New York Times, September 16, 1951.

216 Loc. cit.

Although much of the play is broad comedy, O'Casey has interjected trenchant observations on the Irish and English way of life. He has, however, stacked the cards against the English by his selection of types of characters, the class positions of the Irish and the English, and the situations in which he places them.

The English are bourgoise and display all the worst features of that class. They are presented as matter-of-fact people relying on planned authority and tradition.[217] The English reveal traits that have been described by many writers; importance of family background, loyalty to the king, steadiness, efficiency and imperialism; traits of which O'Casey does not approve.

The Irish, on the other hand, are of the working class and display the best features of that class. The Irish are presented as receptive, initiatory, and living in a realm of timeless imagination where the forces of the past work powerfully within the present.[218] They have the zest and joy for living which O'Casey has always approved. Kuslow believes that there is an implied criticism in the unbridled passion of the Irish characters for the past which makes them lose sight of the present.[219]

The play takes place after most of Ireland is free from the rule of Great Britain, but most of the old hatreds are still present. The Irish have no regard for the British and the British have no regard for the Irish. The fierce pride of the men of Erin for their cultural traditions

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217 Strong, loc. cit.

218 Strong, op. cit., p. 70.

219 Kuslow, op. cit., p. 79.

as well as their habit of never allowing anyone to forget them is underscored by O'Casey.

Strong believes that the English are unconsciously attracted to the Irish way of life, but they are unable to attain it because they can not relax or shed their prejudices.[220] This seems to be borne out in the play. The English are attempting to return to the past, but they are unable to do it and gain the same tranquillity that the Irish possess.

There are comments on religion, politics and economics in the play, but O'Casey's position on these is the same as in his other plays. These elements are not particularly stressed.

The few critics who have reviewed this play in its published form agree that it is an excellent play. Strong says that it is "...'airrt' in that it pays little head to the conventions of the commercial theatre, but the writing is so sure and lively that the patrons of the theatre could enjoy it at its face value as a comedy of relationships."[221] He calls it a play of remarkable brilliance and charm. George Jean Nathan calls it "...a completely original, richly imaginative and beautifully written fanciful farce-comedy..."[222]

The Star Turns Red

In 1940, when Great Britain was fighting for its very existence, The Star Turns Red was produced. At least one of the reasons for its

220 Strong, loc. cit.

221 Strong, op. cit., p. 70.

222 George Jean Nathan quoted by Kuslow, op. cit., p. 78.

unpopularity was its acceptance of Communism at a time when Germany and Russia had just signed a non-aggression pact. There is no record of the play ever having been performed in America.

The Star Turns Red takes place during the last few hours of a Christmas Eve "tomorrow, or the next day". Two brothers, Jack and Kian, find themselves aligned with different groups who are sworn to fight each other. Kian is a member of the Fascistic Saffron Shirts while Jack is aligned with the workers. The workers are striking and the Saffron Shirts are determined to end the strike and break the power of the workers. Aligned with the Saffron Shirts is the Purple Priest representing the power of the church. When Jack's sweetheart, Julia, slaps the leader of the Saffron Shirts, the leader orders her beaten. Her father in protesting, is shot down by Kian. The scene shifts to the headquarters of the union where Caheer, Brallain, Sheasker and Eglish, four union officials, are plotting with the Purple Priest to betray Red Jim, the leader of the union. Red Jim is warned by the Brown Priest of the poor, who although he does not agree with all of Red Jim's policies, tends to support his cause. The four conspirators are taken prisoner by the union army which remains loyal to Red Jim. At the funeral of Michael, Red Jim faces the Purple Priest. The Purple Priest wants to give Michael a church funeral, but Julia wants her father to be buried with and by his comrades-in-arms. The scene ends with Red Jim's assertion that the workers are going to strike for their freedom. The fighting begins and Jack is one of the first to be killed. When Kian, the Purple Priest, and the Brown Priest order Red Jim to surrender, he refuses. The Brown Priest finally decides

to remain with the workers; and Kian, seeing the dead body of his brother, also decides to stay. The play ends with the playing and singing of the Internationale growing louder and louder while the Red Star begins to grow larger and burn brighter.

The political aspects of life have always been important in O'Casey's plays, but in The Star Turns Red politics with its economic, social, religious and personal ramifications are of paramount importance. In the play, "the dynamic issues of Communism, Fascism, Trade Unionism; the role of the state in religion in politics, and the individual as a political being are presented in sharp and decisive terms."[223] The world in The Star Turns Red is a world of diametrically opposed concepts with no compromise possible. O'Casey believes that in the fight for political supremacy between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat only one party can emerge victorious. O'Casey believes that the proletariat will win, but all members of society must align themselves with one side or the other--no middle way is possible. Thus in this play, the primary conflict is between Left and Right.

O'Casey's choice of this highly political theme may be at least partially accounted for by a consideration of his life and the events in Europe during the 1930's. Events and influences in O'Casey's life which might have influenced him in this choice of theme includes; his interest in Socialism, his activities in workers' organizations and unions, his years as an unskilled laborer, his years of slum dwelling, and his understanding of, and sympathy for, the problems of the poor. From internal

223 Kuslow, op. cit., p. 87.

references in the play it may be assumed that several political events during the 1930's also influenced him in this choice of this theme. The Nazi seizure of power in Germany is mirrored in the characters and organizations of the Saffron Shirts. There are also references to the Spanish Civil War. The alignment of the Catholic Church with the Franco forces in Spain finds its parallel in the alignment of the Catholic Church with the Saffron Shirts in The Star Turns Red.[224] It would appear that these events plus O'Casey's background pushed him more and more to the left until he had "...forsaken the green of Irish National Politics, brown of the soldier's tunic, the gray of the Dublin slums, and the yellow of the primrose and has concentrated on the red of the Communists and the black of the Fascist."[225]

O'Casey's sympathies clearly lie with the Communists. He sees in certain of the Communist ideals an identity of interest with his own, but it is the movement that O'Casey is interested in rather than the Communist Party as such. O'Casey's "...confession of faith..."[226] in Communism has called forth wide comment from the critics. George Jean Nathan, his champion in America, refused to follow him into Communism. Ashley Dukes believes that O'Casey has "...lost himself politically...."[227] George Freedly attempts to put O'Casey in more respectable company when

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224 Ibid., p. 90.

225 Kuslow, op. cit., p. 93.

226 George Jean Nathan, "O'Casey Turns Red" Newsweek 13:25, June 26, 1939.

227 Ashley Dukes, "Social Basis" Theatre Arts, 24:410, June, 1940.

he says that he can find no reason for the violent reaction of several critics to what they believe to be the "...implicit Communism..."[228] in the play. Freedly believes that the play is merely "...left liberal..."[229] Stephan Spender says that "...Mr. O'Casey is not a Communist at all really, but a Christian Socialist...."[230]

The pacifism of the early plays is gone. In The Silver Tassie O'Casey opposed war because of the human wreckage and suffering which resulted. In The Star Turns Red, O'Casey takes the position that struggle must bring sacrifice and that that sacrifice may be death. The death of one or one thousand therefore becomes a necessary, if undesirable, step toward the realization of political goals.

O'Casey makes a "...bold use of symbolism..."[231] in presenting this play. The characters are styalized symbols used to put across the authors ideas. Benjamin Brooks who considers this styalization of character one of the main problems of the play compares O'Casey's styalization with that of Yeats. While Yeats' styalization tended to move toward the mysterious, O'Casey presents a modern, popular, materialization of types.[232] Stephan Spender believes that in The Star Turns Red, the characters exist merely to expound a morality. "Three views of life are represented by three sets of human symbols--the Catholic, the Fascist, and the Communist."[233]

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228 Clark and Freedley, op. cit., p. 228

229 Loc. cit.

230 Stephan Spender, "A Morality Play With No Morals" The New Statesman And Nation, 19:363, March 16, 1940.

231 Clark and Freedly, op. cit., p. 228.

232 Benjamin Brooks "The Irish Theatre" 19th Century, 128:196-200, August, 1940.

233 Spender, op. cit., p. 363.

The Catholic is represented by the Purple Priest who aligns himself with the Saffron Shirts and the Brown Priest of the poor who aligns himself with the workers. Thus there is a possible choice for the church, but that choice must be made. The Brown Priest of the poor attempts to follow a middle road but finds that he must choose one side or the other. O'Casey hates the church because he believes that the majority of its leaders have aligned themselves against the Communists and with the Fascists. He believes that "...it has not given the poor the equality which Christ and the Brown Priest of his play represent for him."[234] For O'Casey, the Star of Bethlehem is turning red and the organized church can not stop it.

The Saffron Shirts and the Purple Priest represent all that is evil.

Although Spender believes that O'Casey is confused politically, he does believe that the characters are "types" in the sense that they may be labelled and numbered to fit into a Communistic scheme of morality which "...grades people only according to their usefulness to a cause."[235] In elaborating on this idea he attempts to place the various characters into a mathematical formula based on this morality. His suggestions are as follows: the Saffron Shirts' leader is represented by the symbol b (for badness). Thus the Purple Priest who aligns himself with the Saffron Shirts is represented by b^2 because he combines the evils of reaction along with the opium of religion. The symbol a represents Communist virtue. The Brown Priest of the poor, who sympathizes with the people, but believes

234 Spender, op. cit., p. 363.

235 Loc. cit.

in God is represented by b+a-, a symbol of purely sentimental value. The trade union leader may be represented with the symbol a--. Thus, according to Spender, a spectator who knows the formula and sees the play knows that the Communists are bound to win.[236]

Commenting on O'Casey's characterization of the Communists, Spender says that Communism by its very nature makes individual characterization difficult. "Every psychological peculiarity is irrelevant to the purposes of Communism."[237] This fact makes it difficult to show good Communists who are also human beings so "Mr. O'Casey does what all Party Writers do here, he plays safe by making his Communists as pure as whole meal bread."[238] Thus the Communists become at once pleasure-loving and puritanical.

One other group of characters should be commented on. These are the union labor leaders, many of whom O'Casey believes have lost interest in the problems of the workers now that they have soft union jobs. However just as he symbolizes warring ideologies in the case of the Church, O'Casey provides a contrast to these men in the character of Red Jim, who is pictured as strong, determined in speech and action, and a great leader of men.

O'Casey's language was not mentioned frequently by the critics. Brooks calls his poetry a "...mixture of journalistic or Whitmanesque rhythm and doggerel rhythm."[239] Spender concludes that although O'Casey sympathizes most with the Communists, it is the Catholic that he understands best and that the most exalted imagery and language in the play is

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236 Loc. cit.

237 Spender, op. cit., p. 363.

238 Loc. cit.

239 Brooks, op. cit., p. 198.

taken from the Church thus saturating the play with "...Catholic ideas and Catholic imagery."[240] He acknowledges O'Casey's great gift for language and concludes that even if the play is a failure from the standpoint of ideas, it is always well written.

Whether or not the play is propaganda is not too clear. One critic says that it is not clear whether The Star Turns Red is, (1) militant propaganda for the left, or (2) a prophetic warning that unless every demand of the workers is granted, ruin will result.[241] This critic considers the play propaganda. The characters are the creation not of a dramatist, but of a pamphleteer with a "...revolutionary temperament and an academic concept of life."[242] He concludes that the plot serves more or less as a vehicle for the propaganda content. Ashley Dukes, however, says that the play has one major virtue in that "...it exhibits a vision and not a view of life."[243] He concludes that the play is "...Christian-Communist, fantastic and Elizabethan...."[244]

Kuslow in comparing The Star Turns Red to The Silver Tassie arrives at some interesting conclusions. He says that although O'Casey is primarily concerned in this play with the struggle between the Right and Left, "...he leaves the impression that he is also concerned with the problem of the individual and the mechanized mass, the forces driving man into conformity,

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240 Spender, loc. cit.

241 D. V. "A Pamphlet For The Stage" The Spectator 164:388, March 15, 1940.

242 Loc. cit.

243 Dukes, op. cit., p. 410.

244 Loc. cit.

and the exclusion of the middle way."[245] In The Silver Tassie, O'Casey was concerned with the problem of man caught up in the military machine. In The Star Turns Red, the political machine has replaced the military machine and is swallowing up the individual in the same way. Compared to The Silver Tassie, the lines of The Star Turns Red are different, the settings are different, and the actors have changed costume, "Yet, at the final curtain, the impression remains somewhat the same--people are but robots crushed down by mechanical forces."[246]

O'Casey's sincerity in the writing of the play has not been questioned by any of the critics. The play was written when any pro-Communist sentiment was extremely unpopular in Great Britain. Despite this fact he wrote the play. Ashley Dukes perhaps sums it up best when he says that O'Casey meant to speak from the heart, but that his head betrayed him.[247]

Red Roses For Me

Red Roses For Me received its premiere in Dublin in 1943. The following year it was produced in the United States by the Tributary Theatre of Boston under the direction of Eliot Duvey. The play was produced professionally by Bronson Albery in London in 1946.

The first act of Red Roses For Me takes place in the tenement home of Ayamonn Breydon, a young worker. The union of which Ayamonn is a member is preparing to go on strike, and Ayamonn is rehearsing a scene from Richard III which is to be presented at a minstrel show to raise funds

245 Kuslow, op. cit., p. 94.

246 Ibid., p. 95.

247 Dukes, op. cit., p. 410.

for the union. Ayamonn's sweetheart, Sheila Moorneen, opposes his interest in the union and attempts to persuade him to renounce his affiliation with it, but Ayamonn believes that his place is with the workers. Both Sheila and Reverand Clinton warn Ayamonn that the strike will be opposed by the authorities but he is determined to stand firm on his principles. The third act of Red Roses For Me takes place on a street near the River Liffey in Dublin. In this symbolic scene which has little relation to the rest of the play, O'Casey presents a picture of Ireland as it exists and then presents a vision of what it could become. The fourth act takes place outside St. Burnupus Church. Several of the parishoners are accusing the Protestant Reverend Clinton of harboring Popish tendencies when they are interrupted by the sound of gunfire. The strike has begun and as anticipated, it has been opposed by the authorities. The body of Ayamonn, killed in the fighting, is brought on the stage.

In one sense, Red Roses For Me is a combination of the old O'Casey and the new. In this play there is a continuation of O'Casey's Communistic ideas, but there is also a return to a study of the problems of Ireland which O'Casey had not treated since Juno And The Paycock.

Although O'Casey expounds many of the same ideas which he expounded in The Star Turns Red, the tone is milder. The lines between the workers and the bourgeoisie are not so tightly or strictly drawn, nor are the ideologies of Communism and Fascism presented in hard uncompromising terms. The world of The Star Turns Red is a world of blacks and whites, but the world of Red Roses For Me admits the possibility of various shades of grey.

But in addition to this theme, O'Casey also presents his views on Ireland. One critic says that it tells of "...present day Ireland's

poverty, bigotry and bleakness as well as of her 'hidden splendor'...."[248] Kuslow says that it is the most complete presentation of O'Casey's ideas on Ireland and its problems.[249]

O'Casey combines these two themes in Red Roses For Me. One author says that the "play is a presentation of the poetic soul of Ireland, crossed by dogmatic and economic battles which fill Irish hearts with bitterness."[250] Aickman says that O'Casey's deepest grievance is political rather than economic, but that he merges in hatred the "...Saxon and the capitalist...."[251]

"Red Roses For Me is made out of exactly the same stuff as the second volume of O'Casey's autobiography, (Pictures In The Hallway) 'memory and reminiscence'"[252] says one author. O'Casey has used his own background and experiences as the basic material for this play. The time of the play, "a little while ago", is the time of the Dublin Transportation Strike of 1913.[253] O'Casey recreates the general atmosphere of the struggle as well as the almost fantastic idealism of the striking workers. Many of the characters are also drawn from the author's background. Ayamonn Braydon is to a large extent patterned after O'Casey himself.[254] There

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248 George Mayberry, "The Most Distressful Country" New Republic, 110:217-8, February 14, 1944.

249 Kuslow, op. cit., p. 102.

250 "Theatre Arts Bookshelf" Theatre Arts, 28:256, April, 1944.

251 Robert F. Aickman "Mr. Sean O'Casey And The Striker", 19th Century, 149:72-5, April, 1946.

252 James Kelleher, "O'Casey In Boston" New Republic, 110:380 March, 20, 1944.

253 John Gassner, "The Prodigality of Sean O'Casey" Theatre Arts, 35:52, June, 1951.

254 Kuslow, op. cit., p. 96.

are many elements of O'Casey's own mother in the character of Ayamonn's mother. The rector, Reverend Clinton, is a composite portrait of Harry Fletcher and Edward Griffith, both rectors of St. Burnupus, the church to which O'Casey belonged at one time. O'Casey uses St. Burnupus itself as the setting for the fourth act of Red Roses For Me. The character of Sheila is based on Nora Creena, a girl with whom O'Casey was once in love.[255] O'Casey broke with Nora because of the difference in their religious convictions just as Ayamonn breaks with Sheila over his union affiliations in Red Roses For Me. The final incident in which the two men accuse Clinton of harboring Popish ideas is also an incident taken from the author's background.[256]

The characters of The Star Turns Red were for the most part abstractions, and while the characters of Red Roses For Me are still marked with the labels of abstraction, they have a flesh and blood existence as well.[257] The human element is important in this play.

Ayamonn emerges as one of the greatest of all of O'Casey's characters. He is the first male character of heroic proportions which O'Casey has created.[258] Ayamonn is the young Protestant worker, eager for knowledge, absorbed in Shakespeare, active in the labor movement, disturbed by the conflicts between Catholicism and Protestantism, religion and atheism

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255 Sean O'Casey, Inishfallen, Fare Thee Well (New York: Macmillan and Company, 1949) p. 229 ff.

256 Sean O'Casey, Pictures In The Hallway (New York: Macmillan and Company, 1942) p. 299 ff.

257 Mayberry, op. cit., p. 217.

258 Kuslow, op. cit., p. 96.

and devoted to truth and beauty. All of these are characteristics which O'Casey himself possessed. He has all of the warmth, fortitude and humanity that Juno has plus a burning faith in mankind and a deep dynamic drive to bring to this earth truth and justice.[259] Ayamonn suffers and dies just as Jack does in The Star Turns Red, but Ayamonn's "...death is enshrouded with his love for humanity; Jack's death is but a symbol of sacrifice for a cause...Ayamonn like Prometheus is willing to suffer as long as humanity gains thereby."[260]

Ayamonn believes that his place is with the workers and he is willing to sacrifice Sheila's love rather than desert them. Sheila emerges as a rather small person when compared to Ayamonn. A comparison has been drawn between Sheila and Nora in The Plough And The Stars. The critic comparing these two characters believes that Nora emerges as the nobler character.[261] Sheila, however, redeems herself in the final scene outside the church. The impression that O'Casey leaves is that she understands Ayamonn's actions.

Through the characters of Eeada, Dympna and Finnoola, O'Casey vividly portrays the abject poverty and suffering of the slum dwellers. O'Casey shows a definite growth in technique in Red Roses For Me. Mayberry says that the "...symbolic passages grow naturally and precisely out of the earth of reality."[262] Stonier says, "here for the first time he has

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259 Loc. cit.

260 Loc. cit.

261 Kuslow, op. cit., p. 96.

262 Mayberry, op. cit., p. 217.

succeeded in writing a play on the poetic level in which eloquence and everyday speech, characters and visions, and symbols meet. Those awkward abstract wastes, lit up by expressionistic flares which failed to move spectators of The Silver Tassie and Within The Gates have become part and parcel of a new technique...technically at any rate, O'Casey has found his new poetic medium...."[263] According to Richard Watts, the first two acts are straightforward drama, while the third and fourth acts are symbolic.[264] Another critic calls it half mystic and half melodrama and says that it does not seem to have any recognizable theatrical pattern.[265]

The symbolism is contained mainly in the vision scene. In this scene O'Casey shows what Ireland is and what it could become. He also demonstrates what he believes the slum dwellers could become, if given an opportunity. One critic sees in the hero's love for pictures, a symbol of Communism and culture going hand in hand.[266] O'Casey also uses a modification of a technique he first used in The Silver Tassie. The strikers and their sympathizers form a kind of chorus of unidividualized figures who move and talk in unison.[267]

In commenting on the language of the play, James Redfern writes that the "...language of Shakespeare in the mouth of the Dublin workers... (provides a) rare combination of eloquence, passionate sincerity and

263 G. W. Stonier, "Mr. O'Casey's New Play" New Statesman And Nation, 24:324, November 14, 1942.

264 Richard Watts quoted by Clark and Freedly, op. cit., p. 229.

265 "Theatre Arts Bookshelf", Theatre Arts, 28:256, April, 1944.

266 Aickman, op. cit., p. 173.

267 W. A. D'Arlington, "Sean O'Casey Is Boxoffice Again" Stage Pictorial, 3:6, July, 1946.

intelligent humour."[268] The same critic in commenting on the author's use of songs says that the "...songs are not only delightful in themselves, but dramatically effective...."[269]

In O'Casey's early plays on Ireland, The Shadow Of A Gunman, Juno And The Paycock, and The Plough And The Stars, he offered no hope for the future--no positive faith. "His early plays more than satisfied the public because his disbelief in the motives of the official war coincided exactly with the post-revolutionary reaction in Ireland and the post-war disillusionment elsewhere. The positive faith that he put in them was obscured by his disappointment."[270] But in Red Roses For Me there is a change in O'Casey's attitude. The world is no longer in "a state of chassis", O'Casey has "...acquired a faith...(that is) a compound of humanism, religion and politics."[271] Another critic says, "...O'Casey is not telling us about what a patriotic thing it would be...to have faith in the human spirit, he is telling us about the faith."[272] In addition to presenting O'Casey's political and social idealism, this play also presents the problems of Ireland and its people, but"when he adds to this picture a vision of hope on the horizon, red though it be, the play ceases to be only a picture of an Ireland of bygone days but also becomes a prophecy of what he believes the future holds for Ireland."[273]

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268 James Redfern, "The Theatre" The Spectator, 176:224, March 8, 1946.

269 Loc. cit.

270 Kelleher, op. cit., p. 380.

271 Stonier, op. cit., p. 234.

272 Kelleher, op. cit., p. 380.

273 Kuslow, op. cit., p. 104.

Oak Leaves And Lavender

Oak Leaves And Lavender takes place during the battle of Britain in World War II. The action of the play is laid in an old manor house owned by Dame Heatherleigh. The play opens with a prelude in which the spirit of those long dead are seen to be dancing. An old legend says that when the smell of lavender is in the air, and the ghostly couples are seen dancing, death is near. After the prelude, the play begins with the preparations being made to protect the house in the case of bombing or invasion. Two young men, Edgar, the son of Dame Heatherleigh and the sweetheart of Jennie, and Drishogue, the son of the Irish butler, Feelim O'Moorigun and the lover of Monica, are awaiting commissions as flyers in the R. A. F. Present in the house are Mrs. Deeda Tutting, a Fascist sympathizer, Mr. Constant a man eager to flee to America, and Popjoy, a conscientious objector. Impending disaster is symbolized by the constant scent of lavender in the air and the appearance of the spectral dancers to Feelim and Dame Heatherleigh. Both Drishogue and Edgar are killed in a plane crash. Jennie in attempting to reach Edgar also dies in the burning plane. Monica reveals that she is carrying Drishogue's child. The play ends with a reappearance of the ghostly dancers.

Oak Leaves And Lavender has been called "...a sort of Heartbreak House about the war just ended (World War II), but of course in Mr. O'Casey's own manner."[274] Through the characters of Drishogue, a young Communist, Mr. Constant, a man eager to flee to America, Mrs. Deeda Tutting, a

274 G. W. Stonier, "Poetry And The Theatre" New Statesman And Nation, 31:380, May 25, 1946.

Fascist sympathizer, and Popboy, a conscientious objector, O'Casey introduces us to a discussion of pacifism, patriotism and political ideologies.

The struggle against Fascism in World War II brought together classes and countries whose basic interests and ideologies were not always identical. Thus, Communists and Conservative fought side by side against the common enemy. It is this temporary reconciliation of differing political opinions that forms the background of Oak Leaves And Lavender. O'Casey's sympathy was clearly on the side of the British during World War II, not necessarily because he approved of British policy, but because of his great hatred of Fascism. From the numerous Communist utterances, O'Casey makes it clear that this reconciliation is only temporary.

There is still the mixture of moods and ideas that characterizes O'Casey's other plays. The whole world is engaged in a desperate struggle in which O'Casey is passionately interested, but he still has included moments of superb comedy. The height of the comedy comes when Dame Heatherleigh preaches the doctrine of British Israel to her Irish butler, who leads her on while laughing at her behind her back.

O'Casey still tends to see his characters in terms of black and white as he did in The Star Turns Red. Drishogue, the young Communist, is presented as a sincere, clever young man, the best that Ireland could produce. The native eloquence of Drishogue places his utterances on a much higher level than those of the rabid Fascist, Lady Tutting, but they remain editorializing for O'Casey's position. Lady Tutting in contrast to Drishogue is presented as an evil, narrow, bigoted person. The Irish are characters superior to the British as in O'Casey's other plays.

As in The Star Turns Red, O'Casey uses his characters to expound a political philosophy.

O'Casey's ideas on pacifism are similar in Oak Leaves And Lavender to his ideas on that subject in The Star Turns Red. Kuslow says that O'Casey now believes that "...pacifism means surrender to slavery, and the loss of life for some assures the continuation of life for many."[275] To express this attitude, O'Casey's uses the character of Popjoy, the conscientious objector. Popjoy is treated with scorn by the other characters in the play. This attitude toward war is different from O'Casey's attitude in The Shadow Of A Gunman, Juno And The Paycock, The Plough And The Stars and The Silver Tassie. O'Casey opposed World War I and the wars in Ireland because he did not believe that they solved any of the basic problems facing the common man. With O'Casey's conversion to Communism, however, he believed that he had found a cause which would help the common man and thus was worth fighting for.

O'Casey still believes that love is one of the great things of life. In wartime the value of love is intensified. "Life is a dangerous game in time of war; the scent of lavender (a symbol of death) is always near, and death unconcernedly takes both the 'princes and the pick-louses'. War is a sharpening of the violence that is all about us; security of person is an illusion; struggle is the staff of life. Wounds must be the the result of sacrifice, and sacrifice itself places man close to God. The living must squeeze the last ounce of joy from life; the joy of man and woman beautifully united as one; the joy of free men defending their freedom against the death-hand of slavery."[276]

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275 Kuslow, op. cit., p. 113.

276 Ibid.

O'Casey's viewpoint in this play is basically the same as it was in The Star Turns Red. Although he temporarily calls a truce, just as the various nations called a truce to fight the common enemy, "...through Drishogue, we realize that O'Casey's red horizon is still there, a red horizon toward which he would have the people of the entire world march."[277]

Cock-a-doodle Dandy

There is only one recorded production of this play, that of Margo Jones in Dallas, Texas in 1950.

Cock-a-doodle Dandy is a mixture of realism, fantasy and symbolism. Brooks Atkinson calls it a "...fantastic comedy with some of the form of ballet and some of the properties of a magic show."[278]

O'Casey first wrote of rural Ireland in Purple Dust and in this play he writes again of rural Ireland. Purple Dust was a light farcical comedy, while Cock-a-doodle Dandy is an attempt to picture some of Ireland's problems. Although O'Casey does not specify a time for the play, it is safe to assume from references in the play such as the reference to Bing Crosby and his singing of "Tooral ooral ooral, tooral ooral ay" that the play takes place in present day Ireland.

The play opens with the Cock dancing across the backyard of the home of Michael Marthraun in which live Michael, his second wife Lorna, his daughter by his first marriage, Loreleen and the maid, Marion. Just as the Cock disappears, Michael and Sailor Mahan enter to discuss the price

277 Loc. cit.

278 The New York Times, April 2, 1950.

that Michael will charge for hauling turf for the Sailor. Michael confides that he fears the women of the house are bewitched since whenever they pass holy pictures or objects in the house, the objects turn toward the wall. In the midst of their discussion they are interrupted by the entrance of Shanar, an old holy man. Suddenly cups and saucers come flying out of the windows followed by Marion who screams that the Cock is loose in the house and is destroying all the holy pictures. Shanaar begins chanting Latin and warns the men to take no notice. In the midst of all the furor, the Messenger enters with a telegram for Michael. The Mesaenger calmly enters the house and a few moments later emerges leading the docile Cock. He explains that the Cock is merely a gay bird, a bit unruly at times, but controllable by the right persons, and exits leading him away. Later that day the two men are informed by a police sergeant that the Cock is loose in the neighborhood and has put the entire countryside in a state of panic. The Messenger reappears playing on an accordian and soon the Sergeant, Michael and Sailor Mahan are dancing with the three women. They are interrupted by Father Domineer who has come to order Sailor Mahan to fire one of his workers for living without benefit of clergy with a woman of the village. When the lorry driver in question appears, Father Domineer in a burst of anger strikes and kills the man. The evening of the same day, the whole village is out searching for the Cock when it suddenly reappears at Michael's home. Father Domineer is carried off by the Cock, but he manages to escape. The Cock is so furious that he raises a violent wind by the beating of his wings. Suddenly a strong wind sweeps through the yard knocking down the flagpole upon which

the Irish Tri-Colour is flying and sending Michael and Mahan flying head over heels. The women, however, are not affected by it. Father Domineer appears with the news that the Cock has finally been driven off and while he is talking to the men, Loreleen is dragged in by two of the villagers and thrown in front of Father Domineer. Loreleen has been caught in the car of a married man who was trying to put his arm around her waist and for this she is to be damned. After a severe tongue lashing by the priest, one of the men holding her twists her arm. At this the Messenger steps forward and orders her released. The three women leave with the Messenger to a land "Where life resembles life more than it does here" while the rest of the characters remain behind.

In Purple Dust, O'Casey wrote of Ireland with certain nostalgic traces; in Red Roses For Me he presented a vision of what he believed Ireland might become; but in Cock-a-doodle Dandy he dispairs of Ireland. O'Casey still had faith in the ability of Ireland to achieve greatness when he wrote Red Roses For Me, but in Cock-a-doodle Dandy "he has no faith in her ability to loosen the heavy hand of the clergy which has narrowed the vision and life of her people."[279] O'Casey believes that the church-state of Ireland is too powerful to be defeated and too stubborn to be changed. Therefore any individuals who wish to live a joyful and free life must escape to another land, just as O'Casey himself did.

O'Casey's attitude toward religion is extremely important in this play since he considers that much of the trouble in present day Ireland is due to the dominant position of the clergy. O'Casey pictures the Catholic

279 Kuslow, op. cit., p. 114.

Church as medieval in its belief in the supernatural and witchcraft, intolerant of the fire that attracts the opposite sexes, enmeshed in ritual and dogma, and opposed to man's artistic creations which widen his horizons and move men "...away from the mesmerizing influences of uncomprehending Latin chants."[280] What O'Casey wants instead is a "...church of joy and laughter instead of a church of sorrow and penance."[281]

This attitude toward the church is similar to the attitude toward that institution which O'Casey took in Within The Gates. It seems that even after fifteen years, O'Casey felt compelled to reaffirm his distaste for the merchants of gloom and to align himself against the forces of sorrow and fear. As he did in Within The Gates, he calls for a full, ripe, youthful and joyful life revolving about laughter and the open, unashamed vibrant love of man for woman and woman for man. There is a great deal of resemblance between Loreleen in Cock-a-doodle Dandy and the Young Whore in Within The Gates. There is also similarity between the Messenger and The Dreamer.

In comparison to the characters in Purple Dust, the characters in Cock-a-doodle Dandy are much less forward looking. The men of all classes are fear-filled and inescapably tied to the church and its doctrine. There are no shrewd and sharp proletarians filled with native wit and a zest for living as there were in Purple Dust; instead there are merely sheep-like men who follow blindly the course that is laid down for them and hurl abuse at anyone who dares to live differently than they do.

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280 Kuslow, op. cit., p. 118.

281 Loc. cit.

"It is the women, again, who are the hope and the light, brave, bright, youthful souls who face life head on, giving reign to love and love's delight."[282] The only man in the play who is not fettered by fear is the Messenger. Father Domineer exemplifies the Church and all that O'Casey believes it stands for.

The Cock is the most important symbol which O'Casey uses in the play. The Cock is a "...symbol of proud, vibrant living, the dawn of a new day, the very rhythm of universal life, a cynical mocker of those human beings who would shy away from life and bury themselves in the dark and gloomy recesses of ignorance and superstition, (who) parades, flutters and crashes his way through the Marthraun household and the adjacent neighborhood."[283] The very presence of the Cock is sufficient to throw the entire neighborhood into a panic.

In the final act, O'Casey provides a sweep-clean wind which is symbolic of things to come. The sweep-clean wind throws consternation and terror into the stupidly pious, but holds no threat for the Messenger, Loreleen or Marion. It is also symbolic that the flagpole upon which the Irish Tri-Colour flies is blown down by the wind. O'Casey seems to be saying that one day the church and its hypocrisies will be swept away. If Ireland is not careful, she too may be swept away.

The combination of light fantasy, slapstick comedy and "Joxerian dialogue"[284] which O'Casey uses in this play all combine to make it an

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282 Loc. cit.

283 Kuslow, op. cit., p. 115.

284 John Gassner, "The Prodigality Of Sean O'Casey" Theatre Arts, 35:52, June, 1951.

hilarious comedy which Gassner says has more dramatic sinew and vitality than anything written by O'Casey since The Plough And The Stars. But Cock-a-doodle Dandy despite its whimsical humor "...is a burning indictment of Irish puritanism and is chuck-full of political and social satire; it is a call for man to live the full life replete with love and understanding."[285]

Although O'Casey criticizes Ireland severely in this play, there is a note of sadness in the criticism. "For although the play is lively and full of fun, there is a Pagliaccian motif throughout. O'Casey laughs, but he cannot hide his tears. His first love was Cathleen ni Houlihan and scourge her as he will, he is faithful to her in his fashion.[286]

Halls Of Healing

Halls Of Healing was first published in 1951. At this time there is no record of any production of the play, nor has there been any commentary on it by the critics.

Halls Of Healing, a "Sincerious Farce In One Scene" takes place in the waiting room of the Parish Dispensary in Dublin on a winter's day. The caretaker, called Alleluia because of the fact that he is constantly dunning the patients for contributions to the church, is sweeping out the waiting room. An old woman attempts to find refuge from the storm, but is put out by Alleluia. A moment later she returns accompanied by Red Muffler, a young man of about twenty-five. Alleluia once again ejects the

285 Kuslow, op. cit., p. 119.

286 Ibid., p. 114.

old woman, but after seeing that the Red Muffler is in no mood for foolishness, leaves him alone. Finally the doctor enters with a hangover. Alleluia opens the doors and lets in the patients; the Old Woman, the Young Woman, Black Muffler and Green Muffler. The Red Muffler wants the Doctor to come and see his child who is ill, but the Doctor tells him that he must wait his turn. The patients are admitted one by one with the exception of the Green Muffler who does not have a bottle in which to put his prescription. Alleluia refuses to admit him unless he has at least three bottles. The Green Muffler goes out and buys three bottles only to learn after examination by the Doctor that he does not need them. After the Doctor has seen all the patients, the Red Muffler attempts to get him to come with him to see his child. Once again the Doctor refuses and at this point, the Grey Shawl, the Red Muffler's wife, arrives with the news that the child is dead. The Red Muffler tells the Doctor what he thinks of his kind and then leaves. The play ends with Alleluia once again sweeping out the room.

O'Casey with his constant eye affliction was well aware of the workings of public dispensarys. This play seems to have been based on a specific incident in O'Casey's life. Lady Gregory, when she was under treatment in a Dublin hospital, wrote the following:

> "On Sunday Sister Baptist had come and sat beside my bed. She asked a great deal about Sean O'Casey. He had come to their dispensary just about the time his first play was being rehearsed, Shadow Of A Gunman, for some remedy for his eyes. He had brought a bottle for it. And he was vexed when some poor woman came for some stuff she wanted, and the Sister said No, she had not brought a bottle, she had been told before that they give the medicine free but that they don't supply bottles. Sean was vexed, and then he and the Sister went to the store where empty bottles are kept and they found one for her."[287]

287 Lennox Robinson, editor, Lady Gregory's Journals (Macmillan and Company, 1947) p. 320.

Halls Of Healing is primarily a comedy, but it also has serious undertones. O'Casey has used a doctor as a character in only one other play, The Silver Tassie. There was little commentary on the medical profession as such in that play. In Halls Of Healing, O'Casey presents an indictment of the medical services for the poor. The essance of what O'Casey has to say in this play is contained in the final speech of the Red Muffler to the Doctor and Alleluia,

> "...Death has sometimes a kindlier touch than many a human hand. The pair of yous can go home now, an' snore away some other buddin' life! Yous are afraid to fight these things. That's what's th' matter--we're all afraid to fight.!"

Bedtime Story

Bedtime Story was first published in 1951. As yet there is no record of its being produced nor is there any critical commentary on the play. The same general situation was used by O'Casey in his short story, I Want A Woman, published in Windfalls in 1934.

Bedtime Story, "An Anatole Burlesque in One Act" takes place in the sitting room of John Jo Mulligan's bachelor flat at four o'clock in the morning. John Jo, a "constitutionally frightened chap, never able to take the gayer needs of life in his stride" is trying to get Angelia, a girl of about twenty-seven who is "far and away too good a companion of an hour, a year or a life, for a fellow like Mulligan", with whom he has spent the night, to leave before the return of his room mate. Angelia finally leaves, but not until she has extracted a good deal of money, a wallet and an umbrella from the nervous John Jo. When John Jo realizes that he has been taken, he rushes from the room in his stocking feet in

an effort to find Angelia. He awakens Miss Mossie, the housekeeper and his friend, Daniel Halibut, by his wild flight. Miss Mossie and Daniel are sure that John Jo has gone suddenly mad and Daniel is to hold John Jo in his room when he returns while Miss Mossie gets the police. The nervous Daniel arms himself with a curtain rod in case John Jo gets violent. John Jo returns after having seen Miss Mossie running hatless down the street and is convinced that she has gone mad. After talking to Halibut he soon becomes convinced that Halibut too is mad. John Jo in a rather futile attempt tries to hypnotize Halibut and finally makes a grab for the curtain rod. Miss Mossie interrupts the two men when she returns with a policeman and a doctor to take John Jo away.

In this play, O'Casey once again reaffirms his distaste for the narrow fear-filled view of life that John Jo represents. John Jo, religious outwardly makes of love a dirty thing rather than a thing of joy. Indirectly it is another attack upon the church and its hypocritical attitude toward life.

Time To Go

The third one-act play published by O'Casey in 1951 is Time To Go. Like Bedtime Story and Halls Of Healing the play has received no production as yet, nor has there been any critical commentary on it at this time. The play is a reiteration, in the main of the ideas expressed by O'Casey in Cock-a-doodle Dandy. The technique which O'Casey uses in this play is also similar to that he used in Cock-a-doodle Dandy; a mixture of realism, fantasy and symbolism.

Time To Go is laid on the edge of a country town in Ireland a day or two after the local fair has ended. On the stage are seen the outside of Flagonson's Tavern and Bull Farell's General Store. The owners of these respective establishment are outside talking about the position of the clergy in Ireland. Both men agree that the clergy possesses too much power and both decry the fact that they are forced to contribute too much money to the church. Onto the scene comes Widda Machree, an old woman who is searching for a man named Kelly to whom she has sold a cow on the day of the fair. Widda Machree believes that she has committed a sin by overcharging the man. The Widda Machree continues on her way and a few moments later Kelly enters searching for the Widda. Kelly believes that he did not pay the Widda the true worth of the cow and is now searching for her to pay her more money. Kelly and the Widda finally meet, but they are arrested by a police sergeant who has a warrant for their arrest. It seems that wherever the Widda and Kelly have appeared, the populace has begun fighting among themselves over the truth of what they said. On these grounds they are to be arrested for disturbing the peace. The Sergeant leads them out, but returns almost immediately with the news that they have escaped. Suddenly the two barren trees in the background begin to blossom and bear fruit. The men fall to their knees in awe of this miracle and realize that Widda and Kelly are saints. Mrs. Flagonson enters and taking no notice of what has happened, prods her husband in the back with her forefinger. As soon as she does this, the trees return to their barren state and things return to normal.

In this play, O'Casey is saying the same thing he said in Cock-a-doodle Dandy. Ireland is now so overrun with the clergy and the

materialistic spirit that it is barren of hope. The clear-sighted persons realize that it is time to go from this land. Although occasionally its inhabitants may be aware of another way of life, they are too steeped in their present state to do anything about it. O'Casey believes that Ireland is now completely deserted by the true spirit of God. Only the clergy is left.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMATION AND EVALUATION

CHAPTER IV

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a summation and evaluation of the plays of Sean O'Casey. It is extremely difficult to evaluate the works of an author who is still living and is capable of further contributions to the theatre. Therefore any evaluation of O'Casey's plays must, at best, be only tentative and should be prefaced by the statement that this evaluation is written in 1952 and should not be regarded as final.

O'Casey's technique of writing seems to have passed through at least four recognizably different phases. The first of these includes, The Shadow Of A Gunman, Juno And The Paycock, and The Plough And The Stars, which were written primarily in the naturalistic vein. The second group of plays, The Silver Tassie and Within The Gates may be labeled O'Casey's experimental period. The third group of plays includes The Star Turns Red, Purple Dust, Red Roses For Me, Oak Leaves And Lavender, Cock-a-doodle Dandy, Time To Go and Halls Of Healing. The fourth group includes three one acts which were written as popular pieces of theatre, A Pound On Demand, The End Of The Beginning, and Bedtime Story. These plays are farces which are not major works of O'Casey.

O'Casey As A Naturalist

The Shadow Of A Gunman, Juno And The Paycock, and The Plough And The Stars, or the "Dublin plays" as they are sometimes called, are concerned with presenting an accurate picture of life in the Dublin slums under the pressures of war. One of the tenets of naturalism is that man is controlled

by his external environment. In the case of the Dublin plays, this is true. The individuals are caught up in circumstances over which they have no control.

Naturalism also attempts to present a slice of life rather than an elaborate well-made plot. This is also true of O'Casey's Dublin plays. O'Casey is much more concerned with characters and events than he is with story. The Shadow Of A Gunman is actually little more than an expanded incident; Juno And The Paycock has more story than any of the Dublin plays but the story is not of prime importance. Perhaps the best example of the use of the naturalistic technique is The Plough And The Stars. The second act of this play takes place in a bar and consists of the conversations of the various people who enter and leave the bar. During the entire scene, the voice of a political speaker addressing the crowd is heard through the open door. The orator's speech is actually part of an address by Pearse and thus is as naturalistic as possible.

A third feature of most naturalistic plays is that most of the characters are from the lower classes. In the Dublin plays all of the scenes are laid in the Dublin slums, and all of the characters, with the exception of Charlie Bentham in Juno And The Paycock and the English soldiers in The Shadow Of A Gunman and The Plough And The Stars, are of the Irish lower classes. All of the characters are based on actual people which O'Casey knew in the slums. It should also be noted that the characters are in worse circumstances at the end of the play than they were at the opening of the play.

O'Casey is the outstanding exponent of naturalism in Irish drama. His concern with Irish national politics makes the naturalism of this play peculiarly Irish, although it is possible to place these plays in relation to naturalism as a form of world drama. These plays have been compared to the Russian naturalistic plays such as Maxim Gorki's The Lower Depths and the dramas of Tolstoy. Street Scene by the American Elmer Rice is also of the same school of writing.

O'Casey's Experimental Period

Sean O'Casey has never been an exponent of any single style of writing, rather he lets the subject matter dictate the technique which he uses. In an effort to find new fields of dramatic expressions to express his ideas he turned to other techniques.

The Silver Tassie is indicative of this transition. The manner of the first act of this play is similar to the naturalism of the Dublin plays, but in the second act, O'Casey turns to expressionism. In Act II, he uses nameless characters in a distorted setting. The expressionism of The Silver Tassie is however not the type of which the German's Wedekind and Kaisar were the exponents. There is no attempt at the elaborate symbolism and telegraphic style of dialogue used by this school of dramatists. It is more like the modified expressionism which Eugene O'Neill used in The Hairy Ape. This is a further indication that O'Casey did not turn from school to school as his mood changed, rather he let the subject dictate the method.

One of the interesting features about The Silver Tassie is that its mixture of styles foreshadows such plays as Arthur Miller's Death Of A Salesman and Thornton Wilder's The Skin Of Our Teeth. At the time of its writing, the play shocked many people because of its mixture of styles although today this is accepted by audiences.

The most important Irish exponent of expressionism in Ireland is Denis Johnston who has collaborated with Ernst Tollar on several plays. Johnston tends to write in the style of the German expressionists in such plays as The Old Lady Says No, although this play deals with Irish politics and problems. O'Casey must be evaluated in terms of expressionism as a form of world drama rather than in terms of national drama.

Expressionism never proved as popular in the English speaking countries as it did in Germany. Comparatively few English speaking dramatists did much writing in this style. Eugene O'Neill used the form in The Hairy Ape and in The Emperor Jones, Paul Green and Kurt Weill used a modified expressionistic technique in the pacifistic Johnny Johnston, but probably the best known play in this style is Elmer Rice's The Adding Machine. In relation to these plays, O'Casey's ranks with the best of them.

Within The Gates also belongs in this classification since it is O'Casey's first attempt to write an entire play in the symbolic form and since he modified his use of this technique in his later plays. O'Casey in his attempt to use the whole of modern society as his theme felt that he needed to use symbolism to achieve that purpose. This symbolism, however, tends to be realistic as opposed to the more abstract symbolism

such as Strindberg uses in The Dream Play or The Spook Sonata. O'Casey's characters, although symbols, are also possessed of more or less human and realistic motivations in the majority of cases.

O'Casey's Symbolic-realistic Plays

In O'Casey's later plays, O'Casey seems to have combined the symbolic and realistic methods of writing. In Purple Dust, O'Casey uses a predominately realistic technique, while in The Star Turns Red, O'Casey stylizes and symbolizes to carry out his intentions. In Red Roses For Me and Oak Leaves And Lavender, O'Casey combines the two methods. In Red Roses For Me, he includes a symbolic vision scene in the midst of a realistic play, while in Oak Leaves And Lavender he begins and ends the play with a scene in which fantasy and symbolism predominates. Cock-a-doodle Dandy and Time To Go are almost a complete synthesis of these techniques. In the midst of a realistic scene, O'Casey presents a symbolic scene. The two techniques are combined in a unique fashion in these two plays. It is difficult to find comparisons for these plays since each is unique.

Another method of summarizing O'Casey's plays is to consider and evaluate his major ideas and attitudes. For this reason, the following topics will be considered; O'Casey On Ireland, O'Casey as a Sociologist and Political Playwright, O'Casey on Religion, O'Casey as a Pacifist, and O'Casey as an Idealist.

O'Casey On Ireland

O'Casey's attitude toward Ireland is one of the most important elements in his plays. The Dublin plays are directly concerned with Ireland

and its problems, but in The Silver Tassie and Within The Gates O'Casey breaks with Ireland. It should be noted, however, that O'Casey returns to Irish settings in Purple Dust, Red Roses For Me, Cock-a-doodle Dandy, Time To Go and Halls of Healing; six of his last eight plays.

The Dublin plays are a naturalistic examination of life in urban Ireland during Ireland's wars. In these plays, O'Casey is concerned with Irish national politics and problems. His sympathies are clearly with the Irish nation as a whole regardless of what he thinks of individual groups.

In Purple Dust, O'Casey writes of rural Ireland with nostalgic traces; he believes that Ireland is still the best of countries, better than Great Britain. There is a wistful note throughout the entire play.

In Red Roses For Me, O'Casey presents a picture of what Ireland is and a vision of what it could become. In this play O'Casey still has faith in the potential greatness of Ireland, although there are traces of the beginnings of O'Casey's disillusionment concerning his native country.

In Cock-a-doodle Dandy, O'Casey dispairs of Ireland's chances of achieving greatness. He believes that Ireland is now so dominated by the clergy that it is impossible for anyone to rise above the rule of the clergy. He advises anyone wishing to live a full life to leave the country and implies that many Irishmen are doing this.

O'Casey's disillusionment with his native land is complete in Time To. Go. In Cock-a-doodle Dandy O'Casey points out that the forward looking Irishmen are leaving the country, in Time To Go he says that now even the saints are leaving the country. Only a miracle can save Ireland,

and O'Casey believes that this miracle is not probable. The country is now so dominated by the clergy and clericalism that there is no longer any hope for it.

O'Casey who once held out high hopes for his country is now completely disillusioned about it. He feels that all that the future once promised has been betrayed and lost to the clergy and clericalism.

O'Casey on Religion

In the early Dublin plays, religion was not an important aspect of O'Casey's works, but with the advancing years it becomes of increasing importance. O'Casey has no use for the clergy and a concept of life based on fear and solemnity which he believes the clergy advocates.

In The Silver Tassie, O'Casey shows religion as being replaced by the cannon and modern warfare. There is no attack on religion as such, but merely a statement that religion is not the answer to todays problems.

Within The Gates is the first important comment on religion which O'Casey makes. In this play he condemns clericalism because of its failure to help the common man. O'Casey is not opposed to Christianity as such in this play, but merely to the interpretation of Christianity by the clergy. The Atheists in this play are treated with scorn for their flat rejection of Christianity, while the Salvation Army Officers are condemned for their emotionalizing of religion. The Bishop is not presented as an essentially bad man, but merely as timid and fearful--afraid to face life. O'Casey wants the Church to help mankind in his search for happiness rather than hinder him by its emphasis on fear and dispair. He does not

want a new heaven and earth, but he wants to improve the one we already have. He criticizes the Church for accepting life passively rather than actively attempting to improve it.

There is a slight satirization of the Church in Purple Dust, but once again it is the clergy with whom O'Casey is angry. He feels that they are more concerned with material things than spiritual.

The Star Turns Red is a violent attack upon the Catholic Church. O'Casey feels that the true spirit of Christianity, as represented by the star of Bethlehem which is turning red, is being opposed by the reactionary clergy who are afraid of loosing their hold on the common man. There is still a ray of hope for the church however, because there is a minority of the clergy, as represented by the Brown Priest of the poor, who will align themselves with what O'Casey considers the forces of right. O'Casey, however, considers that the Church as a whole, as represented by the Purple Priest, is attempting to keep man in the middle ages of superstition and unenlightenment.

Red Roses For Me poses a peculiar problem because so much of the play is autobiographical. In this play, O'Casey is dealing with Protestantism rather than Catholicism. Reverend Clinton is a composite picture of two Protestant ministers whom O'Casey knew and was fond of and consequently he is presented in a favorable light. The obvious supposition would be that O'Casey is partisan in his attitude toward these two creeds. But with further examination this point proves to be invalid. It must be remembered that O'Casey rejected all of Christianity as a satisfactory solution to the worlds problems. Chapter IV of Pictures In The Hallway, entitled A Protestant Kid Looks At Reformation, shows

that O'Casey considered Protestantism and Catholicism equally bad. For this reason, this play should be considered separately in relation to O'Casey's attitude on religion.

Cock-a-doodle Dandy is a complete condemnation of clericalism. Father Domineer has no single saving grace, not only is he narrow, and bigoted, but a murderer as well. Father Domineer sets himself up as prosecutor, judge and jury. Although O'Casey is primarily concerned with presenting a picture of Ireland, he is also showing what can happen to a country when the clergy gets too strong a hold on it.

O'Casey on Politics

The Dublin plays provide a fair and penetrating study of Irish national politics during the 1916-1922 period. O'Casey tries to be fair in presenting all sides of the problem. The Plough And The Stars is an excellent example of this. Different characters with different political beliefs all have an opportunity to state their cases. O'Casey does not advocate any particular party or political philosophy in these plays, rather he is scrupuously fair in presenting all sides. He does not allow himself to be carried away with the romantic fervor of the revolutionists nor does he condemn them for their fervor. Rather he presents them as they are. As sociological studies these plays are a fair evaluation of the situation in Ireland during this period.

O'Casey, however, loses this imparitiality when he begins to write of Communism. These plays, The Star Turns Red, Oak Leaves And Lavender and to a lesser extent Red Roses For Me all expound the Communistic philosophy. The Star Turns Red is the prime example of this political

prosolyting. O'Casey says the world is divided into two camps and every individual must align himself with one side or the other. In this battle, O'Casey aligns himself with the Communists and writes to expound the Communist philosophy. In this play he is definitely expounding a political, or social, position.

Red Roses For Me and Oak Leaves And Lavender although milder in tone, still expound the same philosophy. O'Casey believes in Communism and he writes of what he believes.

O'Casey On Pacifism

One of the most important of O'Casey's attitudes is his attitude toward war. The Silver Tassie is primarily concerned with war and its effects as is Oak Leaves And Lavender to a lesser extent. The problem is treated in several other of O'Casey's other plays.

In the Dublin plays, O'Casey regards war as an evil. He feels that it is senseless since it fails to solve the important and immediate problems of man. O'Casey reflects the postwar disillusionment of the Irish who had fought not only Great Britain, but a Civil War as well. All of this fighting had done nothing to solve the immediate problems of poverty, disease and unhappiness of the slums. If anything, it had only intensified the misery.

The Silver Tassie is completely pacifistic in its attitude. O'Casey sees nothing glamorous in war. He does not believe that it brings out the best in man, but rather that it does terrible things to society and the individual. The suffering and misery that result from such nationalistic

flare-ups are condemned by him. The Silver Tassie is similar to several of the pacifistic plays written after World War I such as Irwin Shaw's Bury The Dead.

There is a sudden shift in O'Casey's attitude toward war in The Star Turns Red and subsequent plays. O'Casey now believes that war is sometimes necessary to achieve goals. The character of Popjoy, a conscientious objector, in Oak Leaves And Lavender is treated with scorn by O'Casey. In these plays, O'Casey advocates war as the only method of gaining the Communist ideals.

On the surface this appears to be a complete reversal of his position, but actually it is essentially the same position that O'Casey held in the Dublin plays. What O'Casey objects to is not war itself, but to the reasons for war. In the Dublin plays and The Silver Tassie war was the result of nationalism and this O'Casey does not consider an adequate reason for the suffering that results from fighting. But with his conversion to Communism, O'Casey believes that he has found a cause worth fighting for. In the case of Communism, he believes that the great good which will result will compensate for the temporary misery and suffering.

O'Casey As An Idealist

Tied in with O'Casey's attitude toward war, is O'Casey's idealism. In The Plough And The Stars the idealistic Jack is understood by O'Casey, but he objects to his blind idealism. However, after O'Casey's conversion to Communism, he condones the idealism of Ayamonn in Red Roses For Me who dies for his cause. Ayamonn's death is for a cause worth dying for which may eventually help in the formation of a new world.

The first example of O'Casey's idealism is in the character of The Dreamer in Within The Gates. The Dreamer points the way toward a solution of the worlds problems, but O'Casey is not yet sure what that solution is. It is a world based on happiness, light and love, but the Dreamer provides no positive program to achieve this world.

In The Star Turns Red, O'Casey finds a positive program on which to build and his idealism takes definite direction. Kian in The Star Turns Red, Ayamonn in Red Roses For Me, and Drishogue in Oak Leaves And Lavender are all idealists who die for their beliefs. O'Casey believes that the idealism of these men is the hope of the world and that their death serves a purpose in the eventual attainment of that hope.

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