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**NATURALISM AND EXPRESSIONISM IN THE WORKS
OF SEAN O'CASEY**

**A Thesis
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the Faculty of the Department of English
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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM AND DEFINITION OF TERMS USED

Sean O'Casey's works are divided into three main categories. His early naturalistic plays made him famous; his later expressionistic dramas have lost some of that fame for him. Today the reading public knows him largely for his autobiographies.

I. The Problem

Statement of the problem. The purpose of this study is (1) to examine naturalism and expressionism in their historical settings, (2) to note the inclination of the life experiences of Sean O'Casey, (3) and to study the bent of his thought and the consequent tone of his writings in an effort to determine whether his works have gratified men's spiritual yearnings as those of the world's great dramatists have done, that is, to determine whether they are a dedication and a realization of life in terms of highest values.

Importance of the study. At no other time in the history of the theatre has the drama had the opportunity to serve such a world-wide social cause as now. Naturalism was the inevitable offspring of a scientific movement that

began with Darwin, Marx, Comte, and Taine. Studies of environment and heredity created a pessimistic determinism that allied itself with a strong desire on the part of the masses to improve their milieu. This wretched milieu was described objectively in the best manner of the scientific tradition. The psychological forces that move men were given much consideration, with the result that external observation dissipated while inner significances were employed to achieve the impressions of outer realities. Though naturalism and expressionism are diametrically opposed in theory, it is clearly evident that the latter was born of the former.

Sean O'Casey's earlier works are masterpieces of naturalism; his later works, in the expressionistic manner, have not yet gained, in the eyes of most critics, the distinction of his earlier efforts. In vision and determination, in originality and purposefulness, these later plays show much promise. O'Casey's flight and voluntary exile from Ireland have gained for him the enmity of Irish critics; his sharp swing to the left in his political convictions has lost him the support of his contemporaries; the difficulty of presenting his plays has kept many of his efforts from being frequently produced. No one critic, no one writer has attempted to survey O'Casey's works as a whole. In the light of our present mechanistic society, which

demands naturalism on every stage, in every moving picture, and in the magazines, O'Casey's works seem pitifully neglected. The world conflict conceived expressionism, and the voices of the world--of the masses--have not been popular in countries that have neglected the masses. O'Casey has received adverse criticism from all directions, and much of it seems prejudiced and biased. In this study the writer will attempt to analyze his works from an objective viewpoint, taking into account the forces that have attacked him, perhaps unwarrantedly.

Because Sean O'Casey did not begin writing until 1923 and because a great deal of his work has been done since 1939, there has not been time for critics to see him in the right perspective. As a consequence, he is given slight consideration in books of the drama. Nearly all the writers recognize the greatness of O'Casey in filling the gap left by the death of Synge. But he filled that gap with only three of his plays--his first three, which were naturalistic. And since his flight from Ireland and naturalism, critics have split on the worth of his efforts. The net result is that books contain only a few pages, often only a few paragraphs, on one of Ireland's greatest sons.

Lennox Robinson and Lady Gregory, who first encouraged O'Casey to write and who have known him intimately, have

written illuminatingly on him as a man and as a playwright. Padraic Colum, his contemporary, has also commented with some authority. For critical approval and disapproval, the writer has sought out those men who were close to O'Casey and who have long studied his works. A. E. Malone, late dramatic critic of The Irish Times, and Walter Starkie, director of the Abbey Theatre since 1927, have contributed worthwhile information to O'Casey's position in the theatre. James Agate and other critics for whom O'Casey has much contempt also have been consulted. Of course, such imminent writers as Stephen Gwynn, John Gassner, John W. Cunliffe, Allardyce Nicoll, Carl and Mark Van Doren, and others have contributed immeasurably with their penetrating insight into O'Casey's works.

The newspapers, especially The New York Times, with such able critics as Brooks Atkinson, Richard Sullivan, Horace Reynolds, and others, have given the American point of view on O'Casey's productions; and their judgment has been invaluable in criticizing certain phases of O'Casey's offerings.

By far the most profitable discussions concerning O'Casey's merits have been found in the periodicals. Again, the writer has tried to be discriminating in his selection of information. The Catholic World has been consulted to get the Catholic point of view on O'Casey's bitterness

toward Roman Catholicism; and articles by such men as Joseph Wood Krutch, observer for The Nation and Professor of Dramatic Literature at Columbia University, who has been sometimes unfavorable in his treatment of O'Casey, have been examined in order to view objectively both sides of the O'Casey controversy. Gabriel Fallon, a friend of O'Casey during the Abbey Theatre days, has contributed articles to Theatre Arts; Sean O'Faolain, an Irish novelist, has examined O'Casey for Commonweal; Mary Agnes Doyle, who played the part of Juno in Juno and the Paycock in Chicago, has written for Drama; and George Jean Nathan, who has championed O'Casey, has criticized him in Newweek and other magazines.

Mr. O'Casey has graciously answered some questions put to him by the writer, and his opinions and validations authenticate certain conclusions pertinent to the resolving of the problem.

II. Organization of Remainder of the Thesis

Chapter II of this thesis will examine naturalism and expressionism in their historical settings; that is, the history of naturalism and expressionism in the drama will be observed. The development of these theories and their emulation in England and Ireland must be given some consideration before an examination of Sean O'Casey's plays can be justified.

In Chapter III an attempt will be made to note the inclination of the life experiences of Sean O'Casey, for as Fred B. Millett says,

No one need be a devout believer in scientific determinism to hold that the physical environment in which men of letters and artists live conditions their productions in the most intimate and elusive of ways....¹

Because there is a perceptible line, if not a sharp one, between O'Casey's earlier naturalistic plays and his later expressionistic efforts, Chapter IV will be devoted to the naturalistic section and Chapter V will be concerned with the expressionistic part, each chapter being a study of the bent of his thought and the consequent tone of his writings. And finally, in Chapter VI, an effort will be made to determine whether Sean O'Casey's plays have gratified men's spiritual yearnings as those of the world's great dramatists have done.

III. Definition of Terms Used

Naturalism. "It is time to base our works on truth,"² wrote Émile Zola, the acknowledged father of naturalism, in his preface to Thérèse Raquin (1873). By 1880

¹Fred B. Millett, Contemporary British Literature (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1935), p. 3.

²Barrett H. Clark, European Theories of the Drama (New York: Crown Publishers, 1947), p. 401.

he had laid down the principles of his theories in Le Roman expérimental and followed it with Les Romanciers naturalistes in 1881. Observation of Nature rather than imagination, he believed, would supply the author with all his needs. To this objective analysis of external realities he fused the experimental method of science, or, in other words, the writer was to expose himself to life and to observe, as would a laboratory technician, the events and results provided by that experience.

Gustave Flaubert, in 1857, wrote Madame Bovary, the bible of the realists, in which he set up certain principles: accurate documentation, observation and impersonality in style and treatment. He placed much emphasis on money matters, disease, and detail, so that the word realism began to connote the immoral, trivial, and brutal. Nitze defines realism as "the art of representing actuality, viewed largely from the material standpoint, in a way to produce as closely as possible the impression of truth."³ The realists observed the most minute details: they emphasized money, food, shelter, and the getting of these necessities; they studied character changes due to environment and observed topography and physiology.

³William A. Nitze and E. Preston Dargan, A History of French Literature (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1932), p. 590.

Naturalism is an excessive form of realism. It is the natural child of a scientific age that began with Darwin and that was given social, political, and literary impetus by Comte, who was the first to found a sociological method; by Marx, father of the Social-democratic theory; and by Taine, whose doctrine of determinism declared that moral phenomena, like physical things, obeyed laws. Naturalism allows a wider range of subject matter than realism; in its presentation it dwells on the coarser forms of life, often in a repulsive manner. Plot is minimized; notation is magnified. In its treatment of heredity and environment it is deterministic, fatalistic, and pessimistic. Man is depicted as controlled by the laws of Nature, and his destiny is hopeless and helpless. From these criteria, then, it follows that the naturalistic drama, like the social novel, has for its purpose the portrayal of sociological problems.

Vernon Louis Parrington⁴ has listed the criteria of naturalism and the consequent results of following such a philosophy. The naturalistic writer must seek the truth, admitting of nothing occult; he must be frank, describing the deeper instincts and impulses--fear, hunger, sex--without restrictions. One of the most important rules is that

⁴Vernon Louis Parrington, Main Currents of American Thought (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1930), III, 323-27.

the writer should not attempt to judge, but should attempt to present the facts and to allow the audience to draw its own conclusions. The most vital concept is that of determinism, brought on by the study of heredity, environment, and a fatalistic attitude toward life. A purposive will has no place in the naturalistic drama. Unlike the romantics, the naturalist seeks no Nirvana, but, in his despair, takes on the attitude of defeat. Always he is the victim, and always he is bitter. This overpowering sense of being victimized springs from two sources: from without--the milieu, and from within--inner desires and impulses. This rush toward annihilation with its shadows--ugliness, defeat, pessimism--close behind, stirs the writer to create grotesque characters. Strong animal desires, weak wills, neurotic minds, and the physically deformed stumble through the pages.

Since this milieu is so undesirable, a few writers, wanting to change the environment, attach themselves to a cause that strives to improve the race. Hence, scientific objectivity, one of the primary rules of the Naturalistic school, is forsaken. Too, because of an over-emphasis on animal impulses, there is the danger that the artist will make an animal of man:

Men are more than sex-driven creatures--the city is more than the slums. There are sewers, but why not

accept the sewers without messing over its contents as they flow to disintegration? This is the commonest objection to naturalism.....⁵

What effect, then, does naturalism have on the drama? Parrington's answer to this question sums up the position that naturalism will take on the stage.

According to the Aristotelian tradition, tragedy results when an essentially noble character of heroic proportions transgresses an immutable moral law by a self-originating will and suffers the punishment dealt by poetic justice....But this assumes two things: (1) an eternally changeless moral law; (2) the existence of a purposive will. Both of these the naturalist refuses to accept.

The tragedy of naturalism lies in the disintegration and the pity or irony with which we contemplate man and his fate in the world....⁶

Briefly, then, naturalism is an exaggeration of the methods of Flaubert and of Balzac driven onward by Comte, Taine, and the scientists. For a working definition of the term, naturalism may be designated as encompassing the technique of the scientist in that it is

indifferent to moral convention and art, using hypothesis, examination of evidence, and verification of hypothesis. The laws of nature that [the naturalist's] experiments confirm are, of course, heredity, environment, and the physiological nature of the sentiments. The conduct of fictional characters is determined by these laws. 'A like determinism,' says Zola, 'will govern the stones of the roadway and the brain of man.'⁷

⁵Ibid., p. 325.

⁶Ibid., p. 328.

⁷Frank W. Chandler, Modern Continental Playwrights (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1931), p. 383.

Expressionism. Expressionism has been called the final phase in the revolt against naturalism.⁸ It was only natural that men should become dissatisfied with the gloomy realist convictions; and when they did, they strove for something beyond materialism, for the Something More in life. Their spiritual yearnings were dedicated to finding and expressing these new realizations in terms of highest values.

In painting, this reaction was called impressionism. It was simply an attempt by the artist to create on canvas his inward vision of external reality. Reality passed through the artist's mind, was added to by the creator's imagination which in turn was composed of his inner moods and conflicts and desires; and when reality passed through to the canvas only a symbol of the former object remained. The impressionists tried to evade objective reality. In literature this reaction was called expressionism, which took for its object the task of describing truth as perceived by the "eye of the spirit."⁹

Even before the rise to power of Hitler in Germany, there was discontent and dissatisfaction with the old tenets of realism; and the first signs of a coming change were

⁸Frank W. Chandler, Modern Continental Playwrights (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1931), p. 383.

⁹Ibid., p. 387.

in the air. In the plastic arts, too, experimentation increasingly tended toward the abstract and the new. Although Ibsen became famous for his problems of everyday living, strong currents, playing like powerful rip-tides beneath the surface, carried symbolic meanings that anticipated the later expressionists. Maeterlinck and Rostand gave the world examples of this new imaginative and subjective form. In England the Edwardians--the external painters--saw the Georgians win freedom from restraint. D. H. Lawrence tried to create a language of the unconscious; and James Joyce, like Marcel Proust, endeavored to capture the thoughts of the conscious and semi-conscious states of activity and write them down, with a consequent breakdown and elaboration of the sentence which was necessary to express this new stream-of-consciousness.

The dramatists, then, were seeking

a more profound view of life than was introduced by the majority of the realists and a different medium of expression. All have recognized that the naturalistic conversation cultivated from 1890 to 1920 is insufficient, that the terms of life can never be the terms of art...¹⁰

The drama was seeking a loftier dialogue than the commonplace.

The authorities are in agreement when they define expressionism. There are various branches--Cubism, futurism,

¹⁰Allardyce Nicoll, British Drama (London: George G. Harrap and Co. Ltd., 1949), pp. 449-50.

modernism, unaniam, dadaism--which, in their great lunge for newness and novelty, attained near-chaotic positions. When we hear Chandler saying, "It means not troubling about the outside except in so far as it expresses the inside,"¹¹ we hear a dozen others saying the same thing with the same words.

The expressionist, says Chandler,

unfolds a story devised to convey some abstract idea, some mood or fancy of his own. He cares nothing for the probability or even the possibility of the events he uses. His plot may therefore be as chaotic or fantastic as the inconsequential turnings of a kaleidoscope. His characters are likely to be figures as symbolic as those of the moralities, types rather than integrated personalities. They bear generic instead of proper names....They are puppet-like, mere automata directed from without.¹²

Allardyce Nicoll confirms this statement when he explains,

The expressionist technique generally demands the creation of character types as symbols of social and other forces....It aims at presenting before audiences the fundamentals of human nature in generalized form. Above all, it preaches the importance of the human as opposed to the mechanical....¹³

Essentially, says Chandler, expressionists tend to be mystics and pacifists. He quotes Edwin H. Zeydel, who characterizes expressionism by saying,

¹¹Chandler, op. cit., p. 383.

¹²Ibid., p. 385.

¹³Nicoll, op. cit., p. 448.

It denies the world; it boldly maintains that the only true Being is the Ego; it brooks no object at all;... It is pacifistic by its nature and humanitarian....Recently, it has become even Communistic, yes messianic.¹⁴

Finally, the expressionistic play, in order to achieve the desired results, often is operatic; and frequently a hodge-podge of sounds, from grim chant to the crowing of a cock, accompanies the action; supernatural magic, ballet, and stage designs all converge and co-operate to render those inner significances into a communicable state.

¹⁴Chandler, op. cit., p. 387.

CHAPTER II

NATURALISM AND EXPRESSIONISM IN THEIR HISTORICAL SETTING

In order to determine Sean O'Casey's position in the theatre today, the conception and development of naturalism and expressionism must be observed. O'Casey's dramas are a part of that development, not exactly like anything that preceded them, but a result of much growth, much change, and much study. The purpose of this chapter is to bring the history of naturalism and expressionism in the drama up to the time of Sean O'Casey's debut as a playwright.

There is no play, no date, no line of demarcation separating naturalistic and expressionistic plays. Naturalism, by its very nature and by its limitations, conceived expressionism. The birth of the new art was not a sudden thing but a gradual renouncement of the obvious for mystic and intuitive values.

When dramatists first began using the expressionistic technique, they hardly knew what they wanted. Today, amid world confusion and conflicting ideologies, there is more uncertainty about the direction art will take and what its success will be, because art changes along with life, and in recent years life has been jet-propelled forward at a faster speed than ever. These seemingly chaotic conditions are

indicative of a healthy attitude, however, as Allardyce Nicoll points out:

The remarkable development of the imaginative play in recent years and the no less remarkable experimentation in novel forms of expression demonstrate the keenly flowing life force which courses through the theatre of today....¹⁵

John Gassner¹⁶ points out that in Germany as early as 1808, Heinrich von Kleist, a romantic who looked inward too much, achieved success with his psychological dramas, establishing himself as a forerunner of Strindberg. Later, in 1835, Georg Buchner wrote plays that had both the naturalistic vein of despair and the psychological suggestiveness of expressionism.

In France the well-made play, or pièce-bien-faite, was successful under the supervision of Eugène Scribe and Victorien Sardou. These plays were highly artificial and almost laughable in the resolving of their plots. Yet, by keeping his hand on the pulse of the audience, Sardou was able to anticipate the desires of his patrons. By this conforming to his milieu, Sardou was a forerunner of realism in the theatre.

Émile Augier and Alexandre Dumas fils used the technique of the well-made play, but they founded the social

¹⁵Allardyce Nicoll, British Drama (London: George G. Harrap and Co. Ltd., 1949), p. 498.

¹⁶John Gassner, Masters of the Drama (New York: Random House, 1940), p. 337.

drama and presented problems of illicit love and domestic relations. With this introduction of social problems, the stage was now set for the entrance of Henrik Ibsen, who is generally considered to be the father of the modern theatre. Ibsen advanced beyond the stage of the well-made play and the farcical plots of Scribe. This Viking of the theatre, as Gassner¹⁷ calls him, was a poet at heart; and with his dialogue and situations of the commonplace he fused a psychology that expressed in almost symbolic tones his revulsion toward poverty and his vision for a new humanity. In France Émile Zola recognized the genius of this dramatist and influenced André Antoine to produce his play in Le Theatre Libre. Out of the North was to come still another great influence, August Strindberg, whose sensational naturalism and symbolism stamped him a master of both the external and the inner affairs of men.

By 1873 Zola, desiring to go beyond mere objectivity, as seen in Balzac and Flaubert, wrote the first consciously written naturalistic drama, Therese Raquin. In the preface to this play he stated what was to become the dictum for a host of dramatists all over the Continent: "The experimental and scientific spirit of the century will enter the domain of the drama, and in it lies its only possible

¹⁷Ibid., p. 354.

solution."¹⁸ In 1880 he laid down the principles of his theory in Le Roman Expérimental, a manifesto based upon Claude Bernard's L'Introduction à la médecine expérimentale (1865). Bernard had applied the laws of matter to the study of living creatures, thereby giving the science of physiology and medicine as much, if not more, attention than the material sciences. Comte, with his Positivism, applied his knowledge of the physical sciences to sociological problems; and Taine extended science to include literary criticism, claiming literature could be dissected and examined as any physical thing could be. Thus, the "slice of life"--tranche de vie--gained the supremacy. One of Zola's disciples, Henri Becque, wrote with such pure objectivity that he left the conclusion of the drama up to his audience. The well-made play had breathed its last.

Naturalism now needed a theatre, a home for its intents and purposes. André Antoine, a determined producer, supplied that home. An actor with an amateur group called the Cercle Gaulois, he found himself surrounded by conventionality. He formed the Théâtre Libre¹⁹, which had for its purpose the suppression of the well-made play, the employment of realistic stage design and naturalness in elocution,

¹⁸Barrett H. Clark, European Theories of the Drama (New York: Crown Publishers, 1947), p. 401.

¹⁹William A. Nitze and E. Preston Dargan, A History of French Literature (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1922), p. 681.

the rejection of the favored and conventional playwrights in favor of new writers, and the insistence on ensemble co-operation instead of starring individuals. Consequently such writers as Ibsen, Hauptmann, Strindberg, and Tolstoy found themselves welcome in France.

From Hegel, Gassner²⁰ tells us, the Germans were given the concept of class conflict and of the war to be waged between capital and labor. Karl Marx set the people to thinking in terms of the masses, and this attitude passed over into the drama. The Frere Ruhne was the German counterpart of Le Théâtre Libre, and Otto Brahm was the German Antoine. Gerhart Hauptmann was the brightest star born out of the efforts of this new theatre. He blended with his naturalistic observation sympathy for the social-democratic cause; this was the first time that contemporary issues were given such backing by the theatre. There sprang up, as a result of this play, a bond between the theatre and the common people; the hero of the hour was not an individual but a group.

It was only logical that out of naturalism, with its growing missionary zeal and with its vision for a new world, new modes of expression should be demanded. Real values, the Something More in life, were being sought after. This trend toward examining the inner life found a leader in

²⁰Gassner, op. cit., p. 448.

Maurice Maeterlinck. With his motionless, or static, dramas, he created dreamy and introspective needs that influenced other writers to follow him.

Whereas the stage had used real props--real doors, real meat--and generally tried to achieve the ultimate in realism, stage designers now began to simplify the stage, where imagination and poetry were regaining some of their old magnificence. Adolphe Appia and Gordon Craig were the poets of the stage,²¹ and these two men, with design, light, suggestion and impression, "retheatricalized the theatre."²² Modern painters--Picasso, Matisse and others--were brought into the theatre. Hauptmann, a forward-looking playwright, wrote Hannele, a blend of realism and fantasy. Frank Wedekind and a follower, Walter Hasenclever, created the term "expressionism" and wrote the first purely expressionistic plays.

Little need be said about Russian realism. Chapter IV will necessarily have to include some discussion of Anton Chekhov, for Sean O'Casey's dramas contain some of his qualities.

In the introduction to his book Forces in Modern British Literature, Tindall wrote, "The year 1885 seemed a good beginning because at that time naturalism and

²¹Ibid., p. 421.

²²Loc. cit.

symbolism began to shape British literature....²³ As a matter of fact, it was in 1885 that George Moore wrote the first naturalistic novel, A Kummer's Wife. The English, like Sardou, had kept their hands on the pulse of the audience, and, like Sardou, had tried to meet the demands of that audience. Sentiment and morality pervaded their works. But George Moore had been to Paris; he had studied Zola, Flaubert, Balzac, and the Goncourt brothers; he aspired to emulate in England what was being done in France. He refused to soften his Francophile enthusiasm, and the British had lost in their laps a purer naturalism than they had looked for.

Henry Arthur Jones and Arthur Wing Pinero,²⁴ working under the influence of Augier and Dumas fils, were using the stage to present their dramas of social problems. John Galsworthy was further advanced in naturalism. Bernard Shaw veered from the naturalistic path, for he believed "in the vitalistic doctrine of evolution, emphasizing man's will and his capacity to transform himself and his environment."²⁵

²³William York Tindall, Forces in Modern British Literature (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947), p. vii.

²⁴William Vaughn Moody and Robert Morris Lovett, A History of English Literature (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1926), p. 459.

²⁵Fred B. Millett, Contemporary British Literature (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1935), p. 57.

This belief in a purposive will the naturalists could not tolerate.

The Georgians, with their emphasis on exploration of the mind which called forth a stream-of-consciousness technique in writing, did much to bring about expressionism in England. D. H. Lawrence had made an effort to give the unconscious states of mind a voice, and Virginia Woolf used the stream-of-consciousness technique effectively; but it remained for James Joyce to create the new language. His Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man is a solipsistic effort which meets the requirements of expressionism. James Stephens, with Crock of Gold and Deirdre, represented the change that was inevitable.

Before discussing the position of the drama in Ireland prior to Sean O'Casey, a brief word about the three schools of revolt against naturalism seems in order. Allardyce Nicoll²⁶ says this opposition falls into three schools: (1) the poetic drama, (2) the modernist 'continental' or expressionistic school, and (3) the school of historical playwrights. Nicoll lists Archibald MacLeish's Panic and Maxwell Anderson's Winterset and High Tor as giving a definite impetus to the creation of a poetic drama. T. S. Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral also was influential. Significant, too, was W. H. Auden's collaboration with

²⁶Nicoll, *op. cit.*, pp. 451 ff.

Christopher Isherwood to combine current colloquial speech with the tones assumed by modern non-dramatic poetry.

The expressionistic school still held that prose was more suitable to the theatre than poetry, but they nevertheless sought a concentrated language that held the essence of ordinary speech. Most hopeful and promising of the three schools, believes Nicoll,²⁷ is the historical play.

Ireland's past is legendary, mythical, and mystical. Standish O'Grady's History of Ireland (1880) renewed Ireland's heroic traditions, and the Gaelic League and the Irish Literary Society evolved out of the revival of interest. Douglas Hyde began his crusade for a native language. The language and the people, plus the sounds of discontent, poverty, terror, and revolution, made realism in Ireland, as in Russia, a vehicle for nationalism. British imperialism, too, had fomented Irish nationalism.

"In one sense," said A. E. Malone, late dramatic critic of The Irish Times and Irish critic for the London Times, "realism is implicit in the Irish dramatic movement from its inception--not imported from outside."²⁸ Yet, Edward Killy had been among the first to acclaim Ibsen;

²⁷Ibid., p. 485.

²⁸A. E. Malone, "The Rise of the Realistic Movement," The Irish Theatre (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1939), p. 93.

and George Moore, another early folk-dramatist, was an ardent follower of Zola. Padraic Colum, who along with Lady Gregory and William Boyle began the realistic movement in Ireland, had studied Ibsen and Maeterlinck. Yeats favored Maeterlinck and the poetic drama; Lennox Robinson, who introduced the problem play in Ireland, had observed the techniques of Bernard Shaw and Granville Barker and immediately after became manager of the Abbey Theatre, Ireland's version of Le Théâtre Libre. Surely his influence was imported. As a matter of fact, realism was in the air; and though Ireland had much with which to make realism a natural child, it nevertheless felt the influence of the major realists of England and the continent.

The same year Colum's three major plays were produced, 1903, Lady Gregory's and J. M. Synge's plays were also staged. Lady Gregory gave the Irish peasantry the first realistic treatment, and Synge's plays were more poetic than realism is thought to be. Synge's respect for Ibsen and Zola was not much; yet the accuracy with which he prepared the dialogue of The Playboy of the Western World surpasses that of Hauptmann's Silesian workers in The Weavers. At Synge's death he had contemplated doing for the slums what he had done for the peasantry. To complete this task a man from the slums, Sean O'Casey, who had a touch of genius, rose far above his heritage to stand like a mountain among low-lying hills.

CHAPTER III

THE LIFE EXPERIENCES OF SEAN O'CASEY

The purpose of this chapter is to take "swift glances back at things that made" Sean O'Casey. Through examination of O'Casey's autobiographical books, the writer will observe the things that made him, will follow the development of his thought, and will observe the pattern of his thinking in so far as it will aid in the analysis of his plays.

The first few pages of I Knock at the Door brilliantly set the tone and point the direction the author is to take in succeeding chapters, indeed, in succeeding books. It covers the first twelve years of Johnny's life (Sean, the Irish form of his name, was not taken until years later when he joined the Gaelic League), years when Dublin was split politically and religiously. Queen Victoria reigned, and most of Catholic Dublin paid allegiance to her. The Dublin slums held a small minority of self-styled popery-purged Protestants, and Johnny was one of this poverty-stricken, oppressed group. I Knock at the Door is as much a story of Dublin as of Johnny, and the sights and events that impressed the growing boy were the same events that shaped the city. Padraic Colum²⁹ points out that although

²⁹Padraic Colum, "A Dramatic Autobiography," Yale Review, 29 (Autumn, 1939), 183.

James Stephens' The Charwoman's Daughter was the first book depicting tenement life in the Dublin slums, it was woven together with fantasy and poetry that raced off to Tir-nan-oge. I Knock at the Door is strictly confined to the streets, and Sean O'Casey recalls the glitter and glamor, but mostly the pain and poverty, of those streets during a confused and troubled era.

Johnny was the last of thirteen children and one of five to live to adulthood; all the others died of croup. The little boy was born into a world turned topsy-turvy by Darwin, who was trying to teach the people that the earth was no six-day job but a slow process that put millions of years between them and the monkey bone from which they sprang.³⁰ And the little boy had dropped down into a world filled with needs, desires, and ambitions, only to be pushed back, beaten down, trampled upon. This oppression Johnny felt from three sources--the English, the Catholic Church, and the privileged classes. Charles Stewart Parnell represented the opposition to England with his fight for Home Rule by Ireland. Johnny's mother, who was to be his companion in the tenements for many years to come, represented the opposition to the Catholic Church with her extemporaneous and pithy sermons on the idolatry of popery. Johnny himself had

³⁰Sean O'Casey, I Knock at the Door (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1939), p. 3.

a vision of fairer days, and he was the defiant opposition that cursed and fought the privileged classes.

Young Johnny had his troubles. Bronchitis nearly killed him; and at the age of five a terrible eye disease, ulcerated eyeballs, struck him. One day while at the eye clinic with his mother, Johnny, eyes covered with bandages, overheard a comment on the difference in color of the admittance cards held by the people there for treatment. Paupers held red cards, and Johnny, proud like his mother, who would never accept charity even when starving, thrust out his black card for all to see that Johnny was no pauper. This is typical of the pathos and compassion with which O'Casey gains sympathy for the sorrowful lot he pictures. Horace Reynolds³¹ says one would think that O'Casey would be willing to forget the agony that was his childhood; yet he seems to want to make people read what he went through while so many of his fellow men did nothing to improve his position. While Johnny was learning to hate, he, nevertheless, was no misanthrope; for he had a hunger for beauty that was superior to any hatred.

His father's funeral is one of the most moving and pathetic episodes in the whole book. He had wasted away with a spine injury received while climbing a ladder to get a book. He was a scholar, and from him Johnny got the ambition

³¹Horace Reynolds, "Sean O'Casey Up to 12," Book Review Section, The New York Times, (July 23, 1939), 4.

and the desire to read and to study. O'Casey shows us the white thing in the coffin before the lid is screwed down; he depicts the boy's fear to kiss the dead man, the mother's quiet grief, the indifference of the clergy at the graveside. This "grotesque harshness and powerful tenderness O'Casey can blend together better than any other writer alive,"³² says Desmond MacCarthy in the London Times. To tragedy O'Casey adds humor, just enough to balance the scales, and tragi-comedy is the result. This contrast is his unique genius. Often he steps beyond the decorum of the Victorian realists, as when he describes the pain of childbirth in the first paragraph of this book. Yet in the same full sentence he passes to the colors and sights precious to little boys.

After the death of his father, Johnny and his mother had to survive on the few shillings his brothers brought in. Food became rare in the house. A chunk of bitter bread was often a whole meal. Perhaps once a year Johnny and his mother would have an egg to share between them. Johnny weakened and stole a lump of bacon, and his mother, after a Bible-quoting reprimand, went out for cabbage to go with the bacon. Because of his serious eye trouble, Johnny could not, under doctor's orders, attend school. But a Reverend Mr.

³²Desmond MacCarthy, "An Irish Childhood," Living Age, 356 (June, 1939), 392.

Hunter, "Pig balls Hunter--hunter the runter the rix stix stunter,"³³ persuaded Mrs. O'Casey that the streets started sin, so Johnny was lugged off to the "rag-and-bone education provided by the church and state for the children of those who had not the wherewithal to do anything better."³⁴ When the teacher beat him unmercifully, his mother refused to let him be taken back, so Johnny never went to school. He wandered the streets, explored Dublin, fought with Catholic kids, and learned about sex. He was as quick to hurt others as others were to hurt him, but when he and a gang took advantage of a wandering window mender, "a vandering windy vendhor," one senses that he regretted the part he played in the trick.

Three chapters in this book are especially significant. In "The Castle Ball" episode Johnny (O'Casey, actually) gives vent to his hatred of the privileged classes, dressed in their gorgeous splendor with "not a speck of the dust of the earth on their skin or on their clothes."³⁵ In "The Protestant Kid Thinks of the Reformation" O'Casey pokes fun at the holy College of Cardinals, turning out saints in mass production. He praises Luther, who saw the light, and

³³O'Casey, op. cit., p. 125

³⁴Ibid., p. 132.

³⁵Ibid., p. 21.

who, when popes and priests persecuted him, "stood firm to the shock in his smock like a rock and mocked them with many words."³⁶ A few shiny drops out of the great waves of truth as seen by Luther fell in the Dublin slums. In "The Dream School" O'Casey uses a stream-of-consciousness technique to give a small boy's impression of life as he would like it. These three chapters exemplify the fierce satire, the facetious, bitter anger, and the romantic dream-like nostalgia that characterize O'Casey's literary style. Like James Joyce and T. S. Eliot he uses rapid notation, soliloquy, scraps of verse and fragments of incidental thoughts to draw a picture and evoke a mood. He employs the Irish brogue even when talking in the first person if the rhythm of the prose demands it. His long sentences rush out and sketch outlines; then deftly he adds detail, color, meaning; the result is a tapestry with a tale told in technicolor. His poor eyesight made him sense people's characters by the rhythm of their voices and other qualities not often observed by persons with good vision, so that his characterizations have a Chaucer-like fullness and his images, the richness of a Flemish masterpiece.

Mrs. O'Casey brushed the hair off Johnny's forehead five times a day for a quarter of an hour and put a

³⁶Ibid., pp. 126-27.

³⁷Ibid., p. 269.

bandage on his head to keep him from looking like a little moron. Ella, his sister, introduced him to syntax and prosody, and he learned to read. Tennyson's "The Brook" stimulated, if nothing else, an interest in the source of the river Liffey. Much more interesting was kissing Jennie Clitheroe, a little friend.

Well, he'd learned poethry and had kissed a girl. If he hadn' gone to school, he'd met the scholars; if he hadn't gone into the house, he had knocked at the door.³⁷

Pictures in the Hallway, the second of O'Casey's autobiographical books, opens with the death of Parnell and carries Johnny through the early days of Sinn Fein, the Irish Language Movement, and Dublin pro-Boer demonstrations. When Parnell, who was trying to destroy the links that bound Ireland to England, died, Johnny and his tattered tribe were gripped with fear. Internal strife rocked Ireland anew. Catholics had killed or defeated many Protestants: Robert Emmet, Wolfe Tone, Napper Tandy, and others. And when O'Casey hears the name of one of these heroic men, he calls the roll of all Irish Protestant heroes. Ireland was a country divided in thought and allegiance, and Johnny's own family was typical. Mick and Tom, his brothers, were soldiers for the Queen, while his Da was all for Ireland and all for Parnell.

³⁷Ibid., p. 269.

At the age of fourteen Johnny went to work, but he was not at all happy. The days were long and dreary; the job was tedious; the employers were unjust. Johnny's starvation wages forced him to become a petty thief to provide his home with the necessities of life. With all of his hardships, he never gave up his reading. He studied the dictionary, and every time he could save a few pennies for a second-hand book, he bought one. Dickens, Scott, Balzac, Ruskin, Darwin, Carlyle, Shelley, and especially Shakespeare he read avidly. He had hoped, with a small raise he was due to get, to buy a volume of Milton; but he was fired for impudence and he stole the book instead.

When Tom came home from the army, he was able, out of his salary and the gains from loot acquired by smashing cases where he worked, to add to the support of the family. There was a little more to eat: "The kindly fruits of the earth were coming his way."³⁸ For his next job Johnny got up before four to go to work in the freezing cold; he tied sheets of paper around his legs to keep his wet pants from hurting them; and a sugar sack sewed with twine was his outer jacket to protect him from the snow. And the job was to push a heavily-laden sled up hill and downhill and cross-town making deliveries. While he rested between pushes, he

³⁸Sean O'Casey, Pictures in the Hallway (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1942), p. 212.

studied O'Growney's Simple Lessons in Irish. He wanted to join the Gaelic League; Sean, he learned, was his name in Irish.

Sean came to realize that he knew more than his co-workers. They scorned Shakespeare, but Sean, with his brother Archie and a small company, had formed the Townshend Dramatic Society. They rented a stable, made benches, and white-washed walls; and Sean himself played a part as Henry the Sixth and later as Father Dolan in Dion Boucicault's The Shaughraun. He knew he was well over their heads on the winged horse.

Maturing intellectually and emotionally, he felt he must attach himself to some cause that would align his actions with the vision he had for the fairer days. When he met a young Gaelic League friend, he asked,

Do you believe that Ireland ought to be free, and that the English are our enemies?

I believe it, indeed.

And so do I! Is Sinn féin sinn féin....Ireland must be free, and the English garrison must go!³⁹

Thus Sean launched himself into the world as the underdog's defiant and determined champion. He had no sympathy with a man who looked only for the bread of life, for a full pot was not the end-all of living. There should be time for dancing and singing, for poetry and loving. He was a pacifist but he could fight when cornered; and Dublin's workers were

³⁹Ibid., p. 259.

cornered by want. Jim Connolly's Socialist Republican Party was shouting for all workers to arise, and although Sean adored Dublin, he was convinced that the three dungeons of Dublin--poverty, pain, and penance--had to be attacked and destroyed.

Everyone in Dublin who shared Sean's vision filled the streets to cheer when the news flashed that England was suffering setbacks during the Boer War. The people resisted the police, who tried to club them from the streets; and when Sean, in danger of having his head battered in by a charging horse-policeman, felled the man with a flag pole, his heart sang, "I strike a blow for you, dear land."

More than in the first book, Pictures in the Hallway employs the Joycean pun. Ernest Boyd says that in this book "there is much re-Joycing."⁴⁰ Actually there is less emphasis on pun-making than in fun-poking. For instance, Sean hates Harmsworth, whose papers he had to sled around town. Harmsworth, conscious of the reading public and the power of the vote, printed a paper, reduced in size, for a half-penny. He used illustrations, serial stories, big headlines; he printed sensational news and sponsored contests. Sean called the paper a

roaring British Buddha. He comes, he comes, he comes
o'er the waters to me. Pioneers, O Pioneers. A silk

⁴⁰Ernest Boyd, "Still Knocking at the Door," The Saturday Review of Literature, 22 (March 21, 1942), 5.

umbrella and the handle of a broom. Boomlay, Fumelay, Doomlay, Zoom. The Congo comes to Canterbury.⁴¹

James Stern⁴² condemns O'Casey's use of the Joycean technique, calling the book amateurish and clumsy. O'Casey does not use the pun to evoke a picture as does Joyce; instead he uses it to comment. The "select few" becomes the "select phew" in O'Casey's language, for example. Stern also says that Mrs. O'Casey never really comes to life, thus proving that he knows little of what he is talking about. For of all O'Casey's characterizations, and there are some truly great ones, Mrs. O'Casey stands out as the most vibrant. Scores of critics have commented on the delicacy and artistry with which he has drawn his mother, typical of which is Horace Reynolds' comment: "One wonders is she or Juno the finer portrait."⁴³

Having knocked on the Tavern Door of Life, and not being at all pleased with the picture he saw, Sean passed into the Hallway, hoping to

create things out of his own life. He'd begin to make pictures himself; ay, pictures, too, that would be worth hanging in the Hallway for other people to see.⁴⁴

⁴¹O'Casey, Pictures in the Hallway, op. cit., p. 329.

⁴²James Stern, "Recall the Irish Years," New Republic, 106 (March 30, 1942), 434.

⁴³Horace Reynolds, "O'Casey in Erin," The Saturday Review of Literature, 32 (March 5, 1949), 18.

⁴⁴O'Casey, Pictures in the Hallway, op. cit., p. 356.

⁴⁵Sean O'Casey, Drums Under the Windows (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1946), p. 13.

Drums Under the Windows relates O'Casey's experiences during his bitter pre-playwright years, the fifteen years or so up to and including the 1916 Easter Rising. Sean became a common laborer, handling pick and shovel until his body became solid and healthy. Jim Connolly, the seer of the Irish Socialist Republican party, was preaching "the gospel of discontent smoking faintly in the hearts of most men,"⁴⁵ The men with whom he worked cared little for the Gaelic League; yet Sean felt that these men were all-important in anything to be done for Ireland. The once-splendid old Georgian houses, now black with decay, contained his true brethren. He dedicated himself to fight the school that held his kind in constant need and want.

While trying to do something for his country, Sean was to be hampered by his own troubles. Ella, his sister, was left, on the death of her insane husband, with six hungry, ragged children. They all moved in with Sean and his mother. With the children sleeping on the floors, watching him greedily while he ate his own meager meal, Sean could not find the inspiration to write. He rented a flat for Ella, and all seven of the family slept in one bed. One night Ella, worn down by scrubbing too many floors, died in bed. Sean was unable to give her anything but a pauper's funeral, for

⁴⁵Sean O'Casey, Drums Under the Windows (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1946), p. 13.

he had sacrificed his last penny to help Dr. Michael O'Hickey in his fight to get the Irish language as an essential study into the University of Maynooth.

From overwork and under-nourishment, Sean's legs were overtaken by a creeping paralysis that the doctors said was a spinal disease. Actually, he was starving to death! He had burned up too much energy on too little food. Until after he was thirty-two years old, he had never tasted a tomato, a peach, a pineapple, a fig, an apricot, or a banana. And it had been years since he had even had an apple or a plum.⁴⁶ Such poverty pushed Sean's thinking way to the left, and he saw that there was nothing dignified in either dire poverty or great wealth.

His faith in religion weakened, and he saw the Bible as a myth, a fancy. Darwin had singed the wings of the beautiful fairy:

Oh, Michael Angelo, it took more than the painting of a divine finger to make a man! A million years it took to mould him into what he is today, and the job is barely half-way over.^{46a}

When Bishops in Rome ignored O'Hickey and officials dismissed him from Maynooth College, Sean's contempt for the Catholic Church increased; Rome he facetiously called the gateway to Heaven and said the keys could be found on a

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 383.

^{46a}Ibid., p. 120;

nail just above the pope's bed.

His bitterness did not hinder him but strengthened his determination to do some good. He worked for the Gaelic League or Republican Brotherhood till midnight every night, after having toiled with pick and shovel from dawn to dusk. Finally he became secretary for the Gaelic League and also acted as janitor and teacher. He served in the secret Irish Republican Brotherhood and had tried to bring it together with the Labour Movement. But seeing how few of the I. R. B. were willing to include the vast army of common workers in the cause, he left the I. R. B. And when a Gaelic League friend whispered in his ear that he should wear a collar and tie to the meetings, Sean was indignant. He had worn a muffler because he did not own a tie or even a shirt. To this day O'Casey's symbol of resentment toward clothes and position and conventionality is his muffler; he married in his muffler, and he will probably be buried in his muffler.

The Communist Manifesto with its cry of "Workers, unite," attracted Sean; and the word En-Masse was to him the key that would open the door to the future. He joined the Irish Transport and General Workers Union to stand by the Red flag that fought for a life for the many, for a life higher than that of the oxen.

Here, Sean thought, is the beginning of the broad and

busy day, the leisurely evening, the calmer night...
 never to be conscious of a doubt about tomorrow's
 bread.⁴⁷

During the great lock-out of 1913, Sean worked on a committee to aid the women and children of the workers. Later he was called upon to take the Irish Citizen Army in hand, and the flag of this band had for its symbols labor's near and higher ideals--the Plough and the Stars. Shortly after, Eoin MacNeill formed the Irish Volunteers, who bickered with the Citizen Army; but Jim Larkin knit them into a fighting force. On Easter Monday, 1916, these two small bands of heroic men, with no chance of winning the immediate battle, marched down O'Connell Street and took over the General Post Office. Dease, Connolly, and the other leaders were executed after the British had overwhelmed the pitifully small band of heroes. The British captured Sean, ill with a tubercular swelling in the neck and just out of the hospital, accused him of being a sniper, stood him against a wall, and but for a lucky incident--the real sniper was caught--the theatre would never have heard of O'Casey. The leaders were dead; the fighters were hauled off to prison; but Sean, quoting Whitman, shouted "Vivas to those who have failed." Cathleen ni Houlihan could be proud again, for every time an Irish lad fell by a British bullet, Ireland would be the

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 279.

victor. The people would think; and thinking, they would remember.

O'Casey's last autobiography, Inishfallen Fara Thae Eall, with its underlying theme of disillusionment, was chosen by the Newspaper Guild⁴³ of New York as the best non-fiction work of 1949. After the Easter Rebellion, the English, having learned something of terror tactics from the Germans, invented the Blacks and Tans, a stern-trooper type of soldier that occupied Ireland to keep peace at any cost. The Republicans ambushed them in the streets, and the Blacks and Tans retaliated with sudden midnight sweeps that terrorized the people.

Sean joined the Socialist Party of Ireland and campaigned for penny-dinners for needy school children, while he and his mother could not even afford the penny-dinner he was trying to get for others. Silicosis had shrivelled a lung and pulled his heart out of its place, adding to his other frailties. He cursed his social surroundings that continually shoved him back into the wasteland that was Dublin's slums; and he cursed the ways of the world that allowed people like his brothers and sister, who had had possibilities of becoming something, to die by the wayside because of the indifference of teachers, pastors, and officials.

⁴³News item in The New York Times, March 29, 1949.

When the truce came and peace was hoped for, Ireland was again split in two; for the Treaty was practically unconditional surrender. But the Treaty was accepted, and De Valera led his Republicans against the Free Staters in a Civil War. The Bishops--who had downed the Men of '98, the Fenians, and Parnell--favored the Free Staters, and De Valera was forced to surrender. The bright-eyed Cathleen ni Houlihan, who had dared to hold her head high during the Rebellion, now became the old Hag of "eara. Sean blamed the bourgeois class for Ireland's plight, saying they sold out the common man and the common task for a few privileges. At this point his faith in religion waned almost to the vanishing point, and his hatred of Catholicism increased.

Sean wrote The Story of the Irish Citizen Army and received fifteen pounds for it, a sum that would care for him and his mother for seven months. During the Civil War he wrote a one-act play satirizing the contesting parties involved, but his work was never noticed. His first play, The Front in the Flower, the Abbey Theatre returned with the notation that one of the main characters was reminiscent of other characters in Abbey plays. Sean knew that he had not imitated, because he had only been to the Abbey twice in his life. Horace Reynolds⁴⁹ insists that O'Casey

⁴⁹Reynolds, "O'Casey in Erin," 22. cit., p. 18.

was an Abbey-trained man, but O'Casey denies this. His second play, The Harvest Festival, also was returned by the Abbey, but with an added note from Lennox Robinson, then manager of the Abbey Theatre, that the play had possibilities. Lady Gregory liked his third play, The Crimson in the Tri-Colour, but it could not be produced during the revolution; and besides, Lennox Robinson lost the only manuscript. In 1923 O'Casey's first play to be produced, The Shadow of a Gunman, opened to an almost empty house; but by the third night the Abbey was sold out. Sean's entrance into the world as a playwright brought him but four pounds.

Sometime later he sent in two one-act plays: Cathleen Listens In, a skit on Irish politics, and The Cooking of Doves, a series of discussions and rows in a public-house. The Abbey accepted the first one; the second, turned down, later was incorporated as the second act in one of O'Casey's greatest plays. Sean was learning that many of his plays that had been turned down were actually superior to some being produced. Cathleen Listens In had been received by the audience in dead silence, making Sean the only playwright in the history of the Abbey to be received without the clap of a single hand. Disappointed at first, he grew grimly determined; and Junco and the Paycock became his greatest success. Yeats praised him as having given hope and new life to the theatre.

Success was not too sweet for O'Casey. It did not bring him much money, and a few things happened to add to the bitterness that already was eating at his heart. While writing The Plough and the Stars, he had discussed it with Liam O'Flaherty, who praised the play to Sean's face but later condemned it as a bad play in a letter to the Irish Statesman. O'Casey vowed he would never again reveal his works in progress. The reception given The Plough and the Stars made Sean, for the first time in his life, feel some hatred for Ireland. He was drifting away from Inishfallen, for in his work he had found joy in living with his thoughts. Once enough money was in his pockets, he would leave the island forever.

A group of young writers had tried to get him to join them in an attack on Yeats, but Sean refused to help them. These same young writers began to condemn his works. Shaw's Dramatic Criticism and Nathan's The Critic and the Drama, added to his personal experiences, showed Sean the shallowness that was at the bottom of much of the so-called literary criticism.

O'Casey had mailed a copy of his works to Moscow, and he communicated with Raissa Lomonovska, a Russian in England. Now, tired of the literary cliques of Dublin, busy patting each other on the back; disgusted with life as it had to be

lived in Ireland; sick of the attitudes that were mere patterns of thought that began in Rome and were cast through stained-glass windows to fall on Erin, Sean wanted to move to England to become a voluntary exile from all these lies of life. Before he boarded the boat that would deliver him from the evils he hated, Sean looked upon the city where for over forty years he had struggled for an existence.

Oh, God Almighty, the life he was living now had almost all been spun from what he had felt, had seen, had touched in these few Dublin streets.⁵⁰

Like Ibsen, O'Casey's desire was to show how human beings, emotions, and destinies evolved out of the social conditions that nurtured them. His autobiographies are drama. Of his life, Mary Agnes Doyle, who played Juno in Juno and the Paycock in Chicago, says, "What a story--more pitiable and tragic, comic and colorful, than any of his plays."⁵¹ The terrible ordeals of Sean O'Casey's life in the slums serve as a bitter exposure of the labor and housing problems, and if his sympathies are with Communism, he nevertheless stands for the betterment of all mankind. He remarks that he could be a supporter of all parties, for in his struggle to see things improved, he made no distinction . . .

⁵⁰Sean O'Casey, Inishfallen Fare Thee Well (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949), p. 395.

⁵¹Mary Agnes Doyle, "Sean O'Casey Comes to Chicago," Drama, 18 (December, 1927), 69.

between the color, race, religion, or politics of a man.⁵²

It was an everyday battle for O'Casey to gain a simple livelihood, and the jobs he held sound like a list by Walt Whitman. In a letter to the writer, Mr. O'Casey writes,

I try to fight for a condition of things which will free us all from the anxiety of getting a livelihood. None of us should have to worry about getting a job when we reach working age. This relief alone would hearten us to understand life more easily, and free us for fuller thought and more expansive enjoyment.⁵³

In summing up, then, Hippolyte Taine's theory of "race, milieu et moment"⁵⁴ is perfectly exemplified by O'Casey's life experiences and work. Sean O'Casey inherited through his mother, a love of beauty; and through his father, a love of learning. Through Irish history he fell heir to old traditions, old legends, and old troubles. The poverty under which he lived shaped his thoughts, and humanitarianism emerged, tinged with pink; under political and social stress pink turned red. A Protestant in a land of Catholics, he became a non-conformer in all his actions and a Rationalist in religion. At the time of his debut into the theatre, realism was enjoying its heyday in Ireland. The peasantry was being

⁵²"Poor, dear, dead Men," Time, 47 (May 13, 1946), 102.

⁵³Sean O'Casey, Personal Letter to Jeston R. Weeks, May 31, 1950.

⁵⁴William A. Nitze and E. Preston Dargan, A History of French Literature (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1922), p. 649.

exalted, and Synge, at the time of his death, was contemplating an urban drama. O'Casey, who was laying bricks next door to the Abbey when his plays were produced there, was wading in a literary stream that already had a direction and a momentum. It was inevitable that if he should write, he should represent his own people and write in a manner that conformed to the dictates of the times.

Brooks Atkinson⁵⁵ has observed that Sean O'Casey's plays are products of his hard and passionate living; Thomas Quinn Curtiss⁵⁶ says the raw life of O'Casey fashioned his plays. Thus, the voice of the singer is recorded, but Time, long ago, had determined the song.

⁵⁵Brooks Atkinson, "O'Casey's Own Story," Book review section, The New York Times, (September 2-, 1946), 1.

⁵⁶Thomas Quinn Curtiss, "Playwright in Process," Theatre Arts, 30 (August, 1946), 494.

CHAPTER IV

NATURALISM IN THE EARLY PLAYS OF SEAN O'CASEY

The Shadow of a Gunman, Juno and the Paycock, and The Plough and the Stars compose that portion of Sean O'Casey's works which is called naturalistic. These three plays gained fame for O'Casey and gave new life to the Abbey Theatre, which, since Synge, had slipped considerably in prestige. Although there is to be found naturalism in his later plays, it is fused with expressionism and merits discussion along with that genre. This chapter has for its purpose the examination of these three plays in so far as they deviate from the established conception of the naturalistic drama.

Sean O'Casey had made several unsuccessful attempts to have a play of his produced by the Abbey Theatre. When The Frost in the Flower was returned with an added note that the play was not far from being good, he was encouraged to send in another effort, The Crimson in the Tri-Colour. Lennox Robinson, the manager of the Abbey, since it was a practice to write a personal note on rejected manuscripts which showed promise, cheered O'Casey on. And Lady Gregory⁵⁷, who sent a detailed criticism of the characters along with the rejection, said, "I believe there is something in you, and your strong

⁵⁷Lennox Robinson, editor, Lady Gregory's Journals (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947), p. 67.

point is characterization." O'Casey sensed success; he doubled his efforts, for his one ambition was to have a play of his produced in the Abbey.

As the 1923 season of the Abbey came to its final week of poor attendance, O'Casey's The Shadow of a Gunman was given the last three nights. A handful of people attended the first night; the second night was good; the third night was a complete sell-out.⁵⁸ O'Casey's dream came true, and the Abbey was to enjoy a revival of fame. With new plays such as O'Casey's, with a subsidy from the Free State, with new actors and a new manager, the Abbey's success was unprecedented. O'Casey's personal triumph, his emergence from poverty to recognition, was a triumph for the oppressed people he represented.

The Shadow of a Gunman, a slow-moving, almost plotless two-act play, has for its mission the portrayal of the ordinary people of Dublin during their sufferings at the hands of the Blacks and Tans during England's occupation of Ireland. A few brave but often light-headed Republicans waged guerilla warfare against the British, and more civilians suffered from the conflict than anyone else. In this contrast that was obvious between the dreamy ideals of the ^{the} Republicans and their wretched surroundings, O'Casey detected an irony that was to

⁵⁸Sean O'Casey, Inishfallen Fare Thee Well (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949), p. 163.

supply him with the needs to compose The Shadow of a Gunman.

The scene is laid in a tenement house where Donal Davoren, a poet, speaks so magnificently of rebellion that he is mistakenly taken to be a revolutionist. O'Casey's description of him could easily be a self-portrait:

His struggle through life had been a hard one, and his efforts have been handicapped by an inherited and self-developed devotion to 'the might of design, the mystery of colour, and the belief in the redemption of all things by beauty everlasting.' His life would drive him mad were it not for the fact that he never knew any other. He bears upon his body the marks of the struggle for existence and the efforts toward self-expression.⁵⁹

Another character, Seumas Shields, a pedlar of hairpins and other notions, is the mouthpiece through whom the slender plot is revealed. Maguire, a Republican and the companion of Seumas, leaves his bag with his friend while he takes the day off from his peddling because he has certain business to attend to. Minnie Powell, a resident in the house, is fired by the poet's patriotic speeches. She holds him in reverence, thinking him to be a Republican, when actually he is only the shadow of a gunman. Mrs. Henderson and Mr. Gallagher, also assuming Donal to be a gunman on the run, bring a letter to him, addressed to the Republican Brotherhood, hoping he will give it to the proper persons and thereby see some trifling injustice made right. Donal, enjoying the undeserved

⁵⁹Sean O'Casey, Collected Plays (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1949) I, 93-94.

admiration of all, pretends to be what he is not.

Now the stage is set for action. Maguire, the Republican peddler, is killed while participating in an ambush. His bag is still in the poet's room. The Blacks and Tans, overhearing a rumor about a Republican (Donal) living in the house, sweep down in a midnight raid. Donal has the letter addressed to the Republican Brotherhood, and he realizes if he is caught with it, his guilt would be taken as certain. At the same time, it is discovered that Maguire's bag contains bombs. Donal and Seumas, so brave and so idealistic, swoon in helpless fear while Minnie, devoted to Ireland, to the Insurrection, and to Donal, takes the bombs to her room. Proving to be complete cowards, Donal and Seumas allow her to be arrested and, as a consequence, killed.

Although in a naturalistic drama the playwright does not express his own opinions or form judgments, O'Casey himself thought that the only way to carry out this scheme was to burn the writer. In The Shadow of a Gunman, although critics consider it meets the requirements of naturalism, O'Casey's sentiments appear on every page. Donal Davoren praises Shelley because he threw a few rocks through stained glass windows; O'Casey's complete disgust with Irish politics is shown; Tone, Emmet, Parnell are worshipped; and O'Casey's despair over the Irish characteristic of laughing at serious things and crying over trifles is evident.

Donal Davoren is also reminiscent of O'Casey in that he is adulated but given plenty of elbow room when the Tommies are around, just as O'Casey was given plenty of room during the Easter Rising because he was a member of the Irish Citizen Army. And in Inishfallen Fare Thee Well, in a chapter called "The Raid," a midnight sweep by the Blacks and Tans similar to the one in The Shadow of a Gunman captures, just as in O'Casey's play, a person who is not at all suspected.

The play, in resolving itself, gives O'Casey's judgment. In his opinion there are too many addle-brained, hell-bent-for-glory men running around trying to win a war with occasional pot-shots at the British. He had seen much stupid behavior during the Easter Rebellion, and although he admired the courage of the rebels, he considered it foolish courage. The Republicans grabbed a star and hoped to be led to their destinies. They were, but their destiny proved to be the firing wall and the British dungeon. The civilians suffered. More civilians died than Republicans. O'Casey's point is that people like Donal Davoren and Seumas Shields, who talk much but do little, cause suffering and tragedy in the world.

In June and the Paycock and The Plough and the Stars appear the same characteristics of O'Casey's style that are to be found, in a less mature manner, in The Shadow of a Gunman.

Minnie Powell is the heroine in The Shadow of a Gunman, just as women in the other two plays hold the world

together with their love or courage or compassion. And it is always a Protestant woman. The characteristic phrase, which started with William Boyle's⁶⁰ comedies in 1905, is used in The Shadow of a Gunman, but not so effectively as in June and The Plough. Mrs. Henderson is boring with her oft-repeated "Am I right or am I wrong?" The usual naturalistic note of pessimism is detected; the stage is realistic; and but for a contradiction by Michael Lennon, the language is well-adapted to the characters. Lennon objects to the statement of Mrs. Grigson in which she says, "I haven't seen sign or light of him since." Says Lennon,

This is quite wrong. The Irish shun the perfect tense as much as possible. This tense is unknown to the Irish language and the Irish usage seems to have grafted itself onto our own English speech. What Mrs. Grigson would have said is: 'I didn't see sight [sign] or light of him.'⁶¹

Such minor defects are insignificant when one considers the great talent of O'Casey's for contrast. This mingling of stark tragedy with humor O'Casey achieves only by a technical skill unsurpassed on the contemporary stage. Shakespeare was O'Casey's constant delight, and certainly the Irishman is an able student of combining, like his master, the tragic and

⁶⁰Andrew E. Malone, "The Rise of the Realistic Movement," The Irish Theatre (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1939), p. 93.

⁶¹Michael J. Lennon, Catholic World, 130 (January, 1930), 458.

the humorous. This talent grows into genius with the writing of Juno and the Paycock.

In writing his play, O'Casey drew upon his greatest source, a virtual well-spring of humanitarianism that quenched some of the bitterness of tenement life. This plea for tolerance and understanding can be read between all his lines, and it is the glue that binds O'Casey's statements into a drama of universal importance.

After the success of The Shadow of a Gunman, Lady Gregory asked O'Casey to tea. He refused, using as an excuse the fact that he had to work hard with cement all day, and that by the time he got home to his flat and prepared his evening meal, he would not be in a condition to attend a tea. He was still hopelessly poor. He was grateful, however, and despite the failure of Cathleen Listens In, he remembered Lady Gregory's remark that characterization was his strong point. This pat on the back disciplined his writing; he concentrated on his characters; and Juno and the Paycock was the result. The figure of Captain Boyle he took from real life, and he spent almost five years perfecting him. He is one of O'Casey's greatest creations, and Lady Gregory's encouragement no doubt had much to do with the playwright's finished product. O'Casey once told Walter Starkie⁶² that he often used

⁶²Walter Starkie, "Sean O'Casey," The Irish Theatre (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1939), p. 157.

real characters for his plays, and that sometimes he used the same names.

Juno and the Paycock is of all O'Casey's plays the one that most nearly meets the demands of the strictly naturalistic drama. Plot is minimized and environment is emphasized. It is pessimistic in its conception and fatalistic in its denouement. It is rigidly objective, almost photographic; and it does not resemble, even faintly, in any respect, the well-made play.

O'Casey presents a real picture of tenement life in Dublin during the Civil War, and he shows the effects of the struggle between Free Staters and the Republicans on the ordinary folk. In 1924, the year Juno was produced, there were 40,000 families living in single rooms. It was not uncommon to find several dozen youngsters living in the same house;⁶³ O'Casey once had a room where he was surrounded by flats that contained seven and eight children each. Accused of writing only of what he knows, he replied, "What in the name of Heaven should a man write about?"⁶⁴ He believed passionately that the people, the people in Dublin's slums, were the bone, muscle, and brains of Ireland.

⁶³Padraic Colum, The Road Around Ireland (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1937), p. 262.

⁶⁴John W. Cunliffe, Modern English Playwrights (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1927), p. 234.

As Juno and the Paycock opens, the Boyle family, who live in a two-room apartment in a Dublin tenement house, are down to their last shilling because of the laziness of Captain Boyle, who spends his time 'paycocking' around with his fair-weather friend, Joxer. Juno earns the daily bread for her family, and she, along with her daughter Mary, are the long-suffering heroines of the play. O'Casey's love and respect for his mother find expression in the characterization of the women in many of his plays. Mary has two forces working on her life: circumstance, pulling her backward; and a meagre reading knowledge, pulling her forward. Johnny, the son, is a nervous, irritable young man who had had a hip shattered and an arm blown off while participating as a Boy Scout during Easter Week. At the beginning of the act, it is revealed that a former friend of Johnny's and a Republican, has been killed. When a furtive figure in a trench-coat looks for Johnny, one suspects immediately that all is not well.

After the last sausage in the house is gone, and the captain evidently has been successful in evading all offers of a job, Mary appears on the scene with a young man who announces that the Boyle family has inherited a small fortune from a distant relative. A common scheme in Irish realism was the employment of a marriage contract or a settlement of property.⁶⁵ Mary falls in love with the young man, a school

⁶⁵ Curtis Canfield, Plays of Changing Ireland (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1936), p. 195.

teacher, who seems to be conscious that he is above the Boyle family. It's a 'darlin'' situation as far as Joxer is concerned, for everything that will bring him an extra pint is 'darlin'.

In Act II the Boyle family begins an improvement program. Artificial flowers decorate the rooms; a phonograph is bought; Captain Boyle and Joxer are truly intoxicated with their wealth. Mary becomes engaged to the young schoolteacher. In Act III the walls come a tumblin' down, for the schoolteacher, in drawing up the will, makes an error that takes away the money the Boyle family was to get. They are in debt to their neighbors; their furniture is taken back; the teacher skips out leaving Mary pregnant; and sometime during the confusion Johnny is spirited out by a couple of trench-coated Irregulars, who suspect the erstwhile Boy Scout of not being a true-blue Republican. When Juno learns he has been shot, she mutters a prayer:

Sacred Heart o' Jesus, take away our hearts o' stone and
give us hearts o' flesh! Take away this murderin' hate,
an' give us thine own eternal love!⁶⁶

Juno's prayer is "the only prayer to be heard on the stage today. It comes from Ireland,"⁶⁷ says one critic. But

⁶⁶O'Casey, Collected Plays, op. cit., I, 87.

⁶⁷Euphemia Van Rensselaer Wyatt, Catholic World, 150 (March, 1940), 731.

as a matter of fact, Thomas Carlyle⁶⁸ used the words in Past and Present in 1843 when he spoke of hearts of stone and hearts of flesh. O'Casey had the right spirit, though. He is often Carlylean in his contempt for shallowness and stupidity, and the words fit him well. When Lady Gregory said to him, "This is the prayer we must all use; it is the only thing that will save us, the teaching of Christ," O'Casey corrected her-- "of humanity."⁶⁹

In sharp contrast to this tragedy, the last scene of the play ends in comedy that is close to farce. "Juno and Mary leave the Captain, for he is disgraced by Mary's condition. As he and Joxer stumble into the room, which is now empty of furniture, they have not the slightest idea of what has happened to Johnny. The Captain is not even quite aware that his family is gone. Joxer is in a darlin' stupor, and the Captain knows only that "th' whole worl's. . . in a terr. . . ible state o'. . . chassis!"⁷⁰

The comedy of The Shadow of a Gunman is far surpassed by the antics of the drinking companions, Captain Boyle and Joxer Daly. There is such an Elizabethan quality in the daring and richness of these characterizations as to prompt

⁶⁸Thomas Carlyle, Past and Present (Centenary Edition, Vol. 10; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1843), p. 26.

⁶⁹Robinson, op. cit., p. 76.

⁷⁰O'Casey, Collected Plays, op. cit., I, 155.

George Jean Nathan to say, "They are Molière full of Irish whiskey."⁷¹ The dialogue is earthy but poetic. O'Casey captures the full flavor of slum speech, and if such high-flown prayers as that of June seem contradictory to her class level, Stephen Gwynn testifies for the validity of such highly-colored phrases by citing a remark he overheard from a Dublin cook: "There's not as much water in the house as would baptise a fairy, and me with the potatoes to put down for dinner."⁷² This is natural speech; yet what could be more poetic?

In presenting his 'slice of life,' O'Casey's naturalism is as truthful as the master realists, the Russians. His characters are drunken, ignorant, Godless--and comical. He shows these characters as victims of a depressing poverty, and he puts upon them the stresses of Civil War and of earning a living. Trampled upon by these circumstances, the shortcomings of their ill-destined lives stomp them further into the mire. For a brief, pathetic moment these people think they find the means by which they can leave the squalor in which they live. Fate decrees otherwise, and despair clouds their joy. Like Chekhov, O'Casey's genius is his ability to mingle

⁷¹George Jean Nathan, "The Best of the Irish," Newsweek, 43 (Jan. 29, 1940), 33.

⁷²Stephen Gwynn, Dublin Old and New (Dublin: Browne and Nolan Limited, N. d.), p. 3.

sorrow and joy.

O'Casey has much pity for the Irish; yet no one sees their faults more clearly. He hits where the hitting is needed. O'Casey was bitterly disappointed that the Treaty with the British was such that a Civil War was necessary. He had hoped for peace, but instead of linnet's wings in the evening, there were bullets. So O'Casey struck at the political leaders. At the production of Juno these political figures came and cowered in their seats.

It was as if O'Casey had in truth and in fact achieved such a setting as Shakespeare had conceived in the play-scene in Hamlet.⁷³

Two years after the production of Juno, Joseph Wood Krutch⁷⁴ offered a criticism which other critics have taken up and annoyed O'Casey with ever since. It is his opinion that Juno and the Paycock was acclaimed, not for what it was, but for what the audience wanted it to be. The Dublin audience was mentally prepared and eager for such an effort, and what the play lacked, they supplied out of their imagination. O'Casey was sincere, says Krutch, but he was no artist. A bevy of contemporaries, such as Agate and Lennon, have taken up the chant that O'Casey's success was due to the propitiousness of the moment rather than the dramatic skill of the work.

⁷³Lennon, op. cit., p. 456.

⁷⁴Joseph Wood Krutch, "Dublin Success," Nation, 122 (March 31, 1926), 348.

Nevertheless, the Hawthornden Prize of 1926 went to Sean O'Casey for his play, Juno and the Paycock. The award carried a prize of one-hundred pounds, money that O'Casey welcomed, for just prior to the announcement of the award, he had had to pawn his best pair of trousers in order to finance a few meals.

After Juno was produced, O'Casey worked for thirteen months on his new play before turning it over to Lady Gregory. He was still living in a tenement house and was trying to get enough money together to leave Ireland. The Russian, Raissa Lomonovska, in England had some political ideas that O'Casey was eager to hear.

Just as The Shadow of a Gunman depicted slum life during the occupation of the Blacks and Tans and Juno and the Paycock pictured tenement life during the Civil War, The Plough and the Stars presents the problems of the common people under the stress of the Easter Rebellion of 1916. The Plough and the Stars were the symbols of the Irish Citizen Army, the first group of young men to arm for rebellion. O'Casey himself had been a member of the Citizen Army, and he wrote his first work, The Story of the Irish Citizen Army, about that small band.

This third play, The Plough and the Stars, presents the story of a few people who are caught up in the terror and bloodshed of the Easter Rising. They are all tenants of a

single house. There is a Communist, a Republican, an Orangeman, together with Catholics, consumptives, widows, wives, and prostitutes. Jack Clitheroe is a commandant in the Citizen Army, and Nora is his pretty bride of a few months, who suffers, as one of the living, the horrors of war. In I Knock at the Door we learn that Clitheroe was the name of a young girl friend in O'Casey's youth, and in Inishfallen Fare Thee Well we discover that Nora was the name of a girl whom he had planned to marry but whose Catholic parents discouraged the union. Mollser, a young consumptive child, also was taken from real life. Such a child actually lived in the basement of O'Casey's tenement house.

Fluther Good, a carpenter fond of his pint, has the same function as Seumas Shields in The Shadow of a Gunman; through him the plot moves somewhat jerkily to its tragic ending. And like Seumas Shields and Joxer Daly, he uses the characteristic phrase over and over. Everything is "derogatory" to Fluther. Peter Flynn, Nora's uncle, and the Young Covey, her cousin, provide much of the humor in the play with their constant bickering. Fluther Good is considered by many critics to be one of O'Casey's greatest comic creations, but, in the first two acts, especially, Peter and the Young Covey steal his thunder.

The Young Covey is Sean O'Casey's mouthpiece. He has a

look of perpetual protest on his face, and his speech contains the ideas of the author. Speaking of life, the Young Covey says, "It's all a question of the accidental gatherin' together of molleycoveys an' atoms."⁷⁵ When taken to task for his belief in evolution, he brings up the matter of the skeleton of the man of Java. He speaks enthusiastically about the freedom of the working man, and Karl Marx is his source of argument. O'Casey's strongest emotion, like the Young Covey's, is his passion for the rights of man.⁷⁶ He is not so concerned about freedom as he is for economic emancipation, and he tries to influence everyone to read Jenersky's Thesis on the Origin, Development, and Consolidation of the Evolutionary Idea of the Proletariat. These are clearly O'Casey's ideas, and this attachment to a cause that will bring about a change in the living standard of the people is an exaggerated phase of naturalism that is indicative of the coming change in his literary theories.

Act II, the finest act in the play, is based upon O'Casey's one-act play, The Cooing of the Doves, which was rejected by the Abbey. The scene is the inside of a pub, and just outside the window a rally for rebellion is being held. The voice heard through the window supposedly is that of Padraic

⁷⁵O'Casey, Collected Plays, op. cit., I, 170.

⁷⁶Frank J. Hynes, "O'Casey at the Bat for Erin," The Saturday Review of Literature, 29 (May 11, 1946), 7.

Pearse,⁷⁷ who stormed the General Post Office and proclaimed the Irish Republic; and O'Casey, with the instinct of the naturalist, uses part of a speech of Pearse's:

Bloodshed is a cleansing and sanctifying thing, and the nation that regards it as the final horror has lost its manhood....There are many things more horrible than bloodshed, and slavery is one of them.⁷⁸

Rosie Redmond, a daughter of the 'Digs,' protests her loss of business because the orator outside makes men think of "higher things than a girl's garters."⁷⁹ At this point during the production the audience rioted. This single incident, however, did not alone prompt the riot. Rosie sang a song that was very objectionable and coarse; the flag of the Citizen Army was brought into the pub; the word 'bitch' was used; and the author's treatment of the humorous side of the rebellion as well as the tragic side ruffled the people's idealism a little too much. The audience claimed a prostitute never walked the land of Erin; that the flag never saw the inside of a pub; and that the author was trying to ridicule the Irish people. The claim that an Irish lass was never a prostitute is quite naive; the assumption that the flag never saw the inside of a pub is merely an assumption; the accusation

⁷⁷P.S. O'Hegarty, "A Dramatist of New Born Ireland," North American, 224 (June, 1927), 317.

⁷⁸O'Casey, Collected Plays, op. cit., I, 193-94.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 190.

that O'Casey intended to ridicule the Irish is somewhat justifiable. For just as The Shadow of a Gunman shows the Republicans to be light-headed and trigger-happy, and just as Juno and the Paycock shows the terrible sordidness of slum life, The Plough and the Stars combines the two elements to show at once the superficial objectives of the rebellion and the horrors suffered by many people as a result of a romantic insurrection that overlooked problems right under its nose. O'Casey presented the facts, and the audience, not composed of the tenement dwellers, objected. The objectors stormed the stage and released stink bombs; the police were called to restore order. Yeats yelled at the mob that they had "once more rocked the cradle of a reputation."⁸⁰

Despite the fact that Yeats's poetic drama was falling by the wayside, he fought always for the good of the Abbey Theatre; and he realized that O'Casey was the best thing that had happened to the Abbey since Synge. George O'Brien, the new director of the theatre, objected to The Plough. Lady Gregory, rather than submit to any dictatorial policy, would choose freedom of expression at the expense of losing the theatre's subsidy. Yeats came to her rescue and defended the objectionable parts of The Plough. Of the prostitute in Act II he says:

⁸⁰John Gassner, Masters of the Drama (New York: Dover Publications, 1940), p. 570.

She is certainly as necessary to the general action and idea as are the drunkards and wastrels. O'Casey is contrasting the ideal dream with the normal grossness of life and of that she is an essential part.⁸¹

He similarly defended the other portions of the play under fire, and the riot was the result. However, even though the Irish audience is noted for its brick-bat habits, Lady Gregory⁸² points out that the disturbance at The Plough and the Stars production was caused by women who made a habit of demonstrating at different gatherings merely for the excitement.

In Act III the killing and looting that mark the beginning of the rebellion give way to the tragedy that befalls the women. Peter and Fluther are typical of the talk-much, do-little type of revolutionary that can cause trouble, only to run for shelter when it comes. The heroes of the Citizen Army, as represented by Jack Clitheroe, are typical of the romantic idealists who overlook the problems at hand and busy themselves with situations that are insignificant compared to the real and urgent needs to be faced at home. Slum life and slum problems are the real challenge, O'Casey indicates.

In the last act Jack is killed; the British put down the insurrection; and Nora is left in a depraved state of mind. Her premature baby dies and is put in the same coffin with Mollser, the consumptive child, who also has died. Here

⁸¹Lennox Robinson, op. cit., p. 89.

⁸²Ibid., p. 96.

is the real tragedy, O'Casey tells us. A few men dying in a futile cause are nothing compared to the sufferings that the living endure. This note of pacifism grows with each new play of O'Casey's. His real sympathy is for the women. The most macabre scene that O'Casey has created is that one in the last act with Peter and Fluther playing cards on HOLLISER's coffin. Nora is insane with grief; the sound of fighting in the streets drifts up to the room, darkened except for the red glare of the fires in O'Connell Street.

When Bessie Burgess, a street fruit-vendor who has quarrelled ceaselessly with Nora, nurses her during her illness, O'Casey shows that, essentially, the people are united. Catholic and Protestant can be friendly when circumstance demands it, and suffering is such a circumstance. Bessie is killed trying to protect Nora, and the play ends when the British soldiers, who come up to inspect the body, have a cup of tea and sing "It's a Long Way to Tipperary."

A notable emphasis on Protestantism is to be found in The Plough and the Stars. For instance, when O'Casey needs to send someone for a doctor to care for Nora, several men turn down the job, and Bessie Burgess, a Protestant, runs the gauntlet of bullets. This emphasis is no accident, for O'Casey at this time was saving his money to go to England. The added emphasis on Socialism is no accident, either; it is an indication of O'Casey's coming change in residence. This Protestant

sympathy undoubtedly was designed to attract the attention of the English audience. He could accomplish this on the Irish stage because at that time the directorate of the Abbey was almost entirely non-Catholic.

The Young Covey, with his Socialistic speeches, brings a new quality to O'Casey's plays. Whereas in Junó and the Paycock fatalism is the prevailing tone, The Plough and the Stars in the character of the Covey, contains the Marxian theory that active will has an important role in society. Strict naturalism has no place for a purposive will; but henceforward the idea of society being able to transform itself by action is to be dominant in all of O'Casey's plays.

There is another new and very important trend in The Plough and the Stars. O'Casey's two previous productions had an Elizabethan quality about them in characterization. The Plough, too, contains this element.

Young Covey rears his gospel of economic regeneration with the emphasis of Pistol; there is a Falstaffian ring about Fluther...; old Flynn is Shallow all over again; and Rosie is pure Doll.⁶³

But the most significant Elizabethan quality is not characterization but presentation. The Abbey never spent much money for stage settings, with the result that acting had to take the place of realism on the stage. O'Casey employed the simplicity

⁶³James Agate, The Contemporary Theatre (London: Chapman and Hall, Ltd., 1927), pp. 46-47.

of the Elizabethan in this respect. Oliver M. Sayler writes,

O'Casey, like the Elizabethans, is content with symbolic stimuli to the imagination--a handful of soldiers with property swords serving as proxy for untold armies locked in mortal strife.⁸⁴

This one quality is prophetic of the symbolism that is to come in his next drama, The Silver Tassie.

Despite the fact that The Plough and the Stars has been hailed by many critics as "one of the classics of the modern world theatre,"⁸⁵ Joseph Wood Krutch,⁸⁶ in attacking his plays with unflattering and, to borrow from Fluther, 'derogatory' remarks, persists in remaining O'Casey's perpetual persecutor. According to Krutch, there is in O'Casey's plays no form, no movement, no informing purpose; the characters are weak and are strung together with skimpy melodramatic action. He defies anyone to recall after six months anything except a jumbled, confused memory of some drinking, fighting, and dying.

After the riot at the Abbey during the production of The Plough and the Stars, O'Casey decided once and for all that Dark Rosaleen held no more attraction for him. He put the Irish Sea between him and his past; he became one of Inish-fallen's wild geese, a voluntary exile that sought in other

⁸⁴Oliver M. Sayler, "The Play of the Week," The Saturday Review of Literature, 4 (Dec. 10, 1927), 427.

⁸⁵George Jean Nathan, World's Great Plays (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1924), p. 12.

⁸⁶Joseph Wood Krutch, "Poet Laureate," Nation, 141 (Dec. 21, 1927), p. 718.

climes what he failed to find at home. He carried with him new ideas and new hopes. His new ideas concerned a different kind of drama, a better drama; and his new hopes concerned a different kind of life, a better life.

In this chapter, the writer, by observing Sean O'Casey's life experiences and the consequent pattern of his thought, has attempted to show that the naturalism in his early plays was not attributable to a studied, conscious art; but that it was the result of hard and raw living. O'Casey knew little of the historical settings of naturalism. As pointed out in Chapter III, he fell into a literary stream that already had a direction and a momentum. He was the product of social circumstances, and his plays were the product of literary circumstances.

Of the historical background of naturalism, he says, "I know as little about them as the Quantum Theory."⁸⁷ As far as being a conscious naturalistic writer, he says,

No...I hadn't heard the term, and, even now, don't bother my head about these distinctions or differences. The affairs of Juno happen in the big tenement house, where I lived, and I was the one who told Juno [Mrs. Moore] that the will wasn't worth a damn. I just set down what happened in my own way.⁸⁸

⁸⁷Sean O'Casey, personal letter to Weston R. Weeks, June 26, 1950.

⁸⁸Loc. cit.

CHAPTER V

EXPRESSIONISM IN THE LATER PLAYS OF SEAN O'CASEY

It stands to reason that O'Casey, once he had put Ireland behind him, should abandon naturalism for a form in which he could express his inner emotions. In his first three efforts he gave Ireland her chronicle plays. Now, with Ireland's epochs written about, labeled, and pigeon-holed, he must search for new materials. Separated from the source of his material, he must rely on his imagination more than ever. The dogmatism of naturalism tired O'Casey. In religion and politics he believed in evolution, and it follows that he should reject the setness and finality of naturalism and attach himself to some form of literature that would allow growth, progress, and, consequently, imagination, in his creations. Expressionism satisfied these new demands. From the representative art of naturalism he turned to the presentative art of expressionism. From photographic art he turned inward, to a drawing of the emotions personal to the artist. For those critics who insist that O'Casey, in exiling himself from Ireland, cut himself off from his material, let it be remembered that O'Casey's mind and heart were filled to the brim with many memories and many emotions. And since his new art was to be an expression of inner significances rather than outer realities, he had his material with him. What the eye sees, the hand can paint; and the

picture will be an illusion of reality--that is naturalism. What the heart feels, the mind can express, and the expression will be the essence of the thing felt or imagined--that is expressionism. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the expressionistic technique of O'Casey's later plays, noting those intuitional, mystic, and personal values of his art that distinguish his dramas from other expressionistic plays.

Sean O'Casey the pacifist, not satisfied with his previous attempts to express his bitter denunciation of war, turned, in The Silver Tassie, to expressionism. Harry Heegan, home on leave from the front, wins the silver tassie, the championship cup, for the third straight time, giving it to the Avondale Football Club permanently. Jessie Taite, a c^hevaceous lassie who plays up to the man of the hour, is engaged to Harry. Susie Monican loves Harry, too, and she is jealous of Jessie. Harry's family is eager to get him back on the boat to France, for they are primarily interested in the maintenance money received from the government for his being in the fight. Mrs. Heegan persuades Harry to postpone his marriage to Jessie so that she will not be done out of her money. The first act moves fast, is humorous and cynical at once, in the best O'Casey tradition. In preparation for the second act, which is entirely different from anything he had done before, O'Casey employs a language more poetic than he has previously used:

'An the hedges by the road-side standin' stiff in the silent cold of the air, the frost beads on the branches glistenin' like toss'd-down diamonds from the breasts of the stars....⁸⁹

Yet, he uses the same kind of double-talk that one finds in any of his previous plays to set the tone for the next act:

Out with one of them wine-virgins we got in 'The Mill in the Field,' Barney, and we'll rape her in a last hot moment before we set out to kiss the guns!⁹⁰

Act II of this play started a controversy that completely separated O'Casey from the Abbey Theatre and split the critics, who formerly were almost unanimous in their praise of him, into two groups, one heaping praise, the other casting abuse.. This act marks O'Casey's venture into expressionism, and if it is stiff and artificial, it nevertheless is the beginning of a new style in England, a style as yet unmatched by any of O'Casey's contemporaries.

The scene is a war-ravaged spot just behind the trenches. Augustus John, an English painter, following the example of Gordon Craig, who attempted to give poetic expression to the drama by effective stage-settings, in painting the settings for The Silver Tassie, exaggerated the grotesqueness of the shell-rent monastery, the barbed wire, the blasted stumps, and the gun emplacement. The soldiers in the scene are cold, weary, and

⁸⁹Sean O'Casey, Collected Plays (London: Macmillan and Company, Ltd., 1949), II, 8.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 29.

demoralized. They are without identity, but are referred to as 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th soldiers; they are types, representative of many men. Fatigued from twelve hours of duty of ammunition transport, the men welcome a short breather. A Visitor dances in blithely to interrupt the day dreams of the soldiers; one was visioning his wife and little girl, crying for a balloon. The Visitor, like some war correspondents, is very brave; for he can get as much out of war as he wants and dance blithely away again. O'Casey's satire is humorous but bitter, and he touches upon the things a foot-soldier would experience or complain about.

Deserving of a rest, the exhausted men must parade--a typical army trick. They must attend a stupid lecture--a common army duty. And what is more, they have to wear gas-masks--a real army punishment! A Staff-Wallah tells them exactly how to wear the masks:

Brigade Orders, c/x 143. b/y 341. ⁴Regarding gas-masks. Gas-masks to be worn round neck so as to lie in front $2\frac{1}{2}$ degrees from socket of left shoulder-blade, and $2\frac{3}{4}$ degrees from socket of right shoulder-blade, leaving button margin to reach $\frac{1}{2}$ of an inch from second button of lower end of tunic. Order to take effect 6 A. M. following morning of date received.⁹¹

This is not as exaggerated as much as it might seem, for United States Army orders often are as complicated.

When the soldiers speak, it is in antiphonal chant.

⁹¹Ibid., pp. 51-52.

The movement is ritualistic, and the music is similar to that of the church service.⁹² The dialogue is not Irish braggart; rather it is stylized. O'Casey uses blank verse, prose, rhymed lines, and a rhythmic effect reminiscent of the Old Testament, of which he is a scholar. What O'Casey is trying to do is to present a cross-section of the emotions of the soldier. O'Casey gives their dreams in one selected and concentrated bit of dialogue:

Would God I smok'd an' walk'd an' watch'd th'
Dance of a golden Brimstone butterfly,
To the saucy pipe of a greenfinch resting
In a drowsy, brambled lane in Cumberland.⁹³

Though they are thoroughly despondent, the men still have some faith: "There's a Gawd knocking about somewhere."⁹⁴ But they are resigned to the hopelessness of their own situation:

Christ, who bore the cross, still weary,
Now trails a rope tied to a field gun.⁹⁵

The final prayer to the guns, grimly chanted by the whole cast, contains O'Casey's finest expression of his hatred for war. This whole act is indebted to Ernst Toller's Masses and Man. Though there is much pessimism in O'Casey, he, like Toller,

⁹²Stark Young, "Sean O'Casey and Victor Chenkin," New Republic, 61 (Nov. 27, 1929), 17.

⁹³O'Casey, Collected Plays, 22. cit., II, 45/

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 46.

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 63.

had a faith in a new world. Toller, also a pacifist, pictured the tragedy of war and envisioned a revolution without bloodshed. In O'Casey's earlier naturalistic plays the vision of a world remade, but remade without bloodshed, is manifest. As Toller was convinced that love could remake society, so is O'Casey confident that "Religion is love."⁹⁶ This idea of love or co-operation remaking the world is Russian and is in direct contrast with the western world's concept of competition.⁹⁷ Thus, expressionism was partly born of the struggle between two worlds. This new idealism found in expressionism a limitless field for new expression, and just as Act II of The Silver Tassie is hazy in outline, so is the world, with its class struggle, vague in its outline.

The setting in Act III is a hospital ward. Harry, paralyzed from the waist down and twisted of mind, is neglected while others in the ward with minor ills are given much attention. Jessie throws over Harry for a soldier who has won a medal. Most of Harry's family are in the hospital or visiting there; just how they all got to the one place is left unsaid, deliberately, to avoid realism. Harry is advised to forget Jessie, for he has been hit in the spine. This act is a terrible let-down from the second act, which builds up an

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 14.

⁹⁷E. Stanley Jones, Christ's Alternative to Communism (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1935), pp. 14-15.

emotional tenseness that suffers from the casualness of the hospital ward. The reader's emotion is not ready to be turned off like a faucet; yet, that is what is expected of Harry Heegan. He is not ready for the return to normalcy. In Act IV Harry, full of self-pity, glides around like a ghoul in a nightmare. The scene is a party at the Avondale Football Club where members have forgotten Harry, their one-time hero. The war is over; people are readjusted; and they look with unconcern upon human wrecks like Harry. Despairing of life, grieved by his loss of the faithless Jessie, Harry crumples the silver tassie into a twisted mass, just as now he is a twisted mass, and presents it to the club. The symbol of triumph becomes a symbol of tragedy! Susie Monican utters the only solution in the whole act:

We can't give sight to the blind or make the lame walk.
We would if we could....As long as wars are waged, we
shall be vexed with woe...but we, who have come through
the fire unharmed, must go on living. Come along, and
take your part in life!⁹⁸

O'Casey, writing to Lady Gregory from London, said that he thought his new play was the best he had written and that he wrote it because of love for the work and a deep feeling that it should be written.⁹⁹ He wrote it in secret, not letting anyone know what it was about until he had finished it.

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 103.

⁹⁹Lennox Robinson, editor, Lady Gregory's Journals (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947), p. 104.

When he sent it to the Abbey, he had every right to expect the play to be produced, for he, almost alone, had restored the theatre to a prestige unenjoyed since Synge. Lennox Robinson did not like the mixture of realism and expressionism, and he rejected the play. Lady Gregory was dissatisfied with the last two acts. And Yeats condemned the work as a bad play and refused to produce it.

O'Casey was bitter, and rightfully so, with Yeats; for The Silver Tassie has enough poetry in it to justify production. Yeats was foolish to reject the play, for its selected and concentrated language is allied with the move to restore the poetic drama to the stage, and that was Yeats's dream. He rejected his dream. He was too arrogant and proud, says Gabriel Fallon,¹⁰⁰ to allow O'Casey to drag the Abbey out of naturalism. Since that day the Abbey Theatre has slipped, and today the National Theatre of Ireland has not the reputation it had twenty years ago. Geared to naturalism, it is doubtful whether Yeats's cast could have done credit to the Tassie anyway.

O'Casey, already somewhat a force in the theatre, could get the play produced in London if for no other reason than that it had become a cause célèbre. C. B. Cochran, an English producer, spent and lost a good deal of money staging The Tassie at the Apollon in London. It ran for only eight weeks, but

¹⁰⁰ Gabriel Fallon, "Pathway of a Dramatist," Theatre Arts, 34 (January, 1950), 39.

the controversy started by the exchange of letters between Yeats and O'Casey raged on. Bernard Shaw¹⁰¹ championed the play and drew some support for O'Casey. Gordon Bottomley, a modern poet who liked the poet's way of using the theatre, wrote of the second act of The Silver Tassie.

Mr. O'Casey in that hour opened new means of expression to English dramatists; he showed them ways to say important things of which naturalism does not know how to speak; he used symbols as the oldest and greatest drama of all did, and in doing so helped them toward new life for our time.¹⁰²

Allardyce Nicoll writes, "By far the greatest achievement in what may for convenience be called the 'Continental' manner is the second act of Mr. Sean O'Casey's The Silver Tassie."¹⁰³

On the other side of the fence, Harold Clurman¹⁰⁴ says The Tassie is foolish; from Ireland T. L. Connolly¹⁰⁵ writes that O'Casey is a deliberate propagandist and that the play is buffoonery. When Yeats argued that O'Casey could never

¹⁰¹George Freedley and John A. Reeves, A History of the Theatre (New York: Crown Publishers, 1941), p. 492.

¹⁰²Ashley Duke, Theatre Arts, 15 (October, 1931), 791-2.

¹⁰³Allardyce Nicoll, British Drama (London: George G. Harrap and Co. Ltd., 1949), p. 483.

¹⁰⁴Harold Clurman, "Theatre: Off Broadway," New Republic, 121 (Sept. 19, 1949), 22.

¹⁰⁵T. L. Connolly, "The Case of Sean O'Casey," Commonweal, 23 (Feb. 14, 1936), 442.

find himself in England because he could never become a child and grow up again, critics took up the case and have begged him ever since to come home. Sean O'Faolain,¹⁰⁶ in a sincere and sympathetic putting-out-of-the-welcome-home mat, touches upon one reason why O'Casey will never go back; that is, O'Casey has become engrossed in humanity.

To O'Casey, being engrossed in humanity means subservience to the word En-Masse; Russia, too, was interested in the word En-Masse. Consequently, by living in England and writing his expressionistic dramas, O'Casey had found his place in the sun. He would never go back to the land of bitter memories!

When O'Casey wrote Within the Gates, a symbolic allegory that was completely subjective and stylized, that used fantastic scenes, recitative, and song to evoke its mood of disillusionment and revolt, critics like Carl and Mark Van Doren, who already thought that O'Casey had dissipated his energies in The Silver Tassie, became convinced that the playwright had, by exiling himself from Ireland, totally destroyed his dramatic abilities.¹⁰⁷

The scene of the play is a park in London, and its

¹⁰⁶Sean O'Faolain, "The Case of Sean O'Casey," Commonweal, 25 (Oct. 11, 1935), 578.

¹⁰⁷Carl Van Doren and Mark Van Doren, American and British Literature Since 1890 (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1940), p. 340.

theme is the hypocrisy of formal religion and of the shallow society that upholds it. This theme is built around the disorder of the world, or more specifically, of England, after World War I. Within the Gates, says Florence Codman, "is O'Casey's dramatization of the Waste Land of the post-war world;"¹⁰⁸ and the park represents that wasteland. The characters are not individuals but types, and they compose a cross-section of humanity. The speech is not O'Casey's Irish brogue, but Cockney; but he captures the earthy humor of the English poor as well as he did the Irish. Gassner sums up the characters--who are not really characters at all, but voices--in this manner:

He [O'Casey] dramatized the misery of the world's outcasts in the person of the Young Whore, the hypocrisy of the master classes and the Church in the character of the Bishop who fathered and forgot her, the impoverished spirit of the people in the chorus of Down-and-Outs, and the upsurge of the human will in the Dreamer....¹⁰⁹

O'Casey's humanitarianism reaches its peak in this play; for as an Irishman who loves his fellow Englishmen, he goes beyond the narrow nationalism of pride in country and professes that all men are brothers. "He pities the suffering English, but he sees in the Young Whore, who is symbolic of youth, the

¹⁰⁸Florence Codman, "Sean O'Casey," Nation, 133 (April 25, 1934), 476.

¹⁰⁹John Gassner, Masters of the Drama (New York: Dover Publications, 1940), pp. 570-71.

courage and determination of people to live life to the hilt and die dancing. Her heart ailment is symbolic of the unstable future that youth must face. Grenville Vernon calls the play a "hedonistic farrage,"¹¹⁰ and justifiably so; for the Dreamer says, "Will none of you ever guess that man can study man, or worship God, in dance and song and story!"¹¹¹

The play has no plot, so far as progressive action is concerned. The purpose of the play is not to tell a story but to evoke a mood. We learn that a ghost-drum is always heard when England is in danger; and the sombre chant of the Down-and-Out chorus, with the sad, muffled drum-beat in the background, creates the temper of a world about to collapse. The chanting of the Evangelists, urging all to be converted before it is "too late, too late, too late," has the same rhythm of Thomas Hardy's rook that found "no grain, no grain, no grain." A kind of rhythm, created by chant, song, and the movements of the characters, takes the place of plot. When the Readers read of murder, rape, suicide, and divorce in the newspaper, the park band plays "London Bridge Is Falling Down;" and the Readers sing that "gold and silver will not do" while two comics argue whether England should be on the gold or silver standard. This is like T. S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men." The play,

¹¹⁰Grenville Vernon, Commonweal, 21 (Nov. 9, 1934), 66.

¹¹¹O'Casey, Collected Plays, op. cit., II, 124.

with its flashes of consciousness, with its streaks of unintelligible symbolism, Gassner calls a "noble failure,"¹¹² despite its humanity, its irony, and its hope. With its conflict with the conventional--"It 'as been the few rebels life gave us... that have rushed the world ahead!"¹¹³--the play has been compared to the old morality plays; but for once Joseph Wood Krutch¹¹⁴ is in step with the other critics when he calls the play a charade--a guessing game. Almost without exception critics agree that O'Casey, in trying to advance his art, suffered through loss of unity and through the absence of the strong characterizations which attracted Lady Gregory and gave him his chance in the theatre. John Van Druten, although he got second-hand from the Bishop his idea for the title of his play The Voice of the Turtle, ridicules O'Casey in that play. Bill Page, telling of the types of plays he did not like, pokes fun at dramas with men paralyzed from the waist down [The Silver Tassie] and with prostitutes, bishops, and atheists representing a cross-section of life [Within the Gates].

Few critics seem to think that expressionism, which is so opposed to naturalism, contains elements of realism. If the gruesome war scene in the second act of The Silver Tassie is not realistic in subject matter, then what is? If the antics

¹¹³O'Casey, Collected Plays, op. cit., II, 151.

¹¹⁴Joseph Wood Krutch, "Mr. O'Casey's Charade," Nation, 139 (Nov. 7, 1934), 546.

of the Nursemaids and the Guardsman, and of the Young Man in Plus-Fours and the Scarlet Woman are not realistic in speech and behavior, then what is? Expressionism is a technique, and it is technique that O'Casey experiments with in his first ventures into his new medium. M. D. Zabel,¹¹⁵ one of the first critics to realize that Sean O'Casey's expressionism was re-turning imagination and poetry to the theatre, blamed the failure of Within the Gates on the incompatibility of this realistic element to fuse with the poetic element.

To defend his play against the critics O'Casey wrote The Flying Wasp, a book that shows off his Irish temper. He hits hard at the critics who condemned The Silver Tassie while praising Sherriff's Journey's End, a play with a similar motif. Sherriff had never read Shakespeare, and when persuaded to do so, he disliked the unnatural soliloquies of Hamlet. O'Casey condemns naturalism; he says the champion cricketer has more influence on the people than Shakespeare; he hails Mickey Housie as the greatest actor in England; and he places England's position in the theatre just ahead of the Republic of San Marino!

Especially is O'Casey angry with James Agate, who thought Within the Gates to be so much rubbish; and when he is not eloquently cursing Agate, he is less eloquently cursing everyone

¹¹⁵M. D. Zabel, "Poetry for the Theatre," Poetry, 45 (December, 1934), 155.

who likes, even just a little bit, Noel Coward's plays. As for Agate's admitting that the play is beyond him, O'Casey says, "To whisper the fact to the world rather than confine it between four walls--I am not a damn bit surprised."¹¹⁶

O'Casey renounces realism as dull; and he claims that critics favor it because it is easy to understand and explain. Like Poe and Baudelaire, O'Casey favored suggestiveness in his words. He had seen T. S. Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral and was much impressed with its echo of fine things said in the drama long ago. The music and song and dance of the Elizabethan play and ritual of the Greek drama led O'Casey to write Within the Gates. The stirring of the heart, as conceived by the expressionist, was more vital to O'Casey than the stirring of the hair as seen by the naturalist. He believes, with Maxwell Anderson, that "The theatre is essentially a cathedral of the spirit."¹¹⁷

The Star Turns Red. O'Casey's next production, he wrote primarily to be a cathedral of the spirit of the proletariat. With the revolutionary zeal of a Bolshevik, O'Casey in this play shows the struggles and the ultimate victory of the working class in spite of corrupt church leaders and petty politicians. It is a typical Marxist melodrama. The time is tomorrow.

¹¹⁶Sean O'Casey, The Flying Wasp (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1937), p. 49.

¹¹⁷Ibid., p. 106.

and when Red Jim, the voice of Communism, is asked what he wants, he answers with a familiar "The world." Even George Jean Nathan, who has championed O'Casey from the beginning, will not follow him into the aggressive Communism of this play. Nathan¹¹⁸ thinks that Strindberg and Communism are the worst influences on modern playwrights, and he fears that the Communism of The Star Turns Red has seriously affected O'Casey's art.

The play is dedicated to the men and women who fought through the great Dublin lockout in 1913. Dublin was the hub of distribution for Ireland, and most jobs were unskilled freight-handling jobs. O'Casey, who worked at many of these menial tasks himself, was very sympathetic with the workers. The play itself revolves about two sons: Kian, a Fascist, and Jack, a Communist who keeps Lenin's picture on the wall and constantly plays the "Internationale" on his cornet. This split in the family is reminiscent of the differences of opinion in O'Casey's own household concerning political issues.

Red Jim is the symbol of Communism, of the revolting worker; the Purple Priest of the politicians represents the authoritarianism and power-madness of the Roman Catholic Church. A young girl speaks of the staleness of the story of Christ, but she also says that her grudge is not against the

¹¹⁸George Jean Nathan, Encyclopedia of the Theatre (New York: Alfred A. Knoff, 1940), p. 286.

Church but the pietistic attitudes of certain of its ministers, which is a perfect picture of O'Casey's point of view.

The Star Turns Red is a vision of a new way of life, and Red Jim speaks the noblest passage O'Casey has written for the defense of the poor:

If the heritage of heaven be the heritage here of shame and rage and the dead puzzle of poverty, then we turn our backs on it! If your God stands for one child to be born in a hovel and another in a palace, then we declare against him. If your God declares that one child shall be clad in silks and another in sores, then we declare against him. If your God declares that it takes a sack of sovereigns to keep one child and a handful of pence to keep another, then we declare against him. If your God declares that one child shall dwell in the glory of knowledge and another shall die in the poverty of ignorance, then we declare against him; once and for all and forever we declare against your God, who hath filled the wealthy with good things and hath sent the poor empty away!¹¹⁹

O'Casey has transposed the words of St. Luke 1:53 in this cynical protest against the rich. He says of the play that "there's no denunciation in it that can't be found in the Bible,"¹²⁰ and he cites Amos as an example of his proof.,

The star in the play is the Star of Bethlehem, and it can be seen, through one of two rear windows on the stage, shining by a church spire. If there has ever been any confusion about the compatibility of O'Casey's revolutionary ardor and his pacifism, this play clears it up. Like Toller, O'Casey wanted improvement for the workers; but he wanted this

¹¹⁹O'Casey, Collected Plays, op. cit., II, 324-25.

¹²⁰Sean O'Casey, personal letter to Jeston R. Weeks, June 26, 1950.

revolution to come about without bloodshed. How? When the soldiers march on Red Jim and his workers, the Communists convert them. What could be more simple? It is not a recommended military procedure, but it is expressionistic art. The star, tickled pink with the goings on, moves over by the factory chimneys in the other window.

During the battle with the Fascists, whom O'Casey considers bloodless, the Red Guards, to the tune of Glazounov's Preamble to "Scenes de Ballet," go through the movements of battle: firing, loading, and dying with clenched fists raised high. If O'Casey is lost politically, he nevertheless in this play uses his prerogative as a genius to utilize his imagination expressionistically. And where else on the stage is a comparable vision of the world remade?

In Red Roses for Me, O'Casey, "like Joyce...is living on his youth, eating it daily with new sauces, finding no new nourishment in the life he is living."¹²¹ This play, too, is centered around the Dublin Transport Workers' strike of 1913. It is a play constructed out of the experiences related in his autobiographies; indeed, many of the same sentences are to be found in Red Roses for Me that are in Pictures in the Hallway; and he uses many sentences in the last two of his autobiographies that apparently were lifted right out of the play.

¹²¹John V. Kelleher, "O'Casey in Boston," New Republic, 115 (March 20, 1944), 380.

Ayamonn Breydon is the young Sean O'Casey, fired with Shake--spears, Ruskin, Darwin, and socialism; he tries his hand at painting and writing verse. A few of these bad verses, written under the influence of Nora, the girl he left behind him, are in Windfalls, a collection of poems, short stories, and one-act plays, published in 1934. Mrs. Breydon, with her unselfishness and love of musk, fuchsia, and geraniums, is Mrs. O'Casey; Sheila, with her dominating Catholic parents and her insistence that Ayamonn succeed, is the Nora described in Inishfallen Fare Thee Well. In the character of Mullcanny, O'Casey's evolutionary beliefs are embodied: a man's hand is like a monkey's paw, a horse's hoof, the flipper of a seal, or the wing of a bat; a man has traces of a tail, or, in scientific language, ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny.

Ayamonn is the speaker for the workers, who, demanding a shilling raise, are routed and clubbed by the police. The shilling is not much, but it represents the first step in a long march toward a new world. This belief in the future is O'Casey's main theme. It is his mission in life to see that one and all receive the fair fruits of the earth. Above this, however, is a higher goal. For O'Casey, like Shelley, "has passed on to the Apotheosis of man."¹²² In the expressionistic third act a group of pedlars sell their wares on the bleak and

¹²²Robert Fordyce Aickman, "Mr. Sean O'Casey and the Striker," 19th Century, 96 (April, 1946), 173.

black streets of a poverty-stricken Dublin. Life has passed them by, and the city appears as "a graveyard where th' dead are all above the ground."¹²³ Under the inspiring influence of Ayamonn's words, the pedlars arouse themselves; and the city of Dublin shines with bright colors. Ayamonn is the trumpet in the city, and the people are not afraid. Like a scene in Pictures in the Hallway described in Chapter III, Ayamonn dances with a young girl while the people clap a tune. It is a dream, a vision of what O'Casey would like the world to be--a world of dancing, music, and the brotherhood of man. O'Casey is a romantic Communist, an artistic Communist, a literary Communist whose gospel is the urgency to live fully and well. When Ayamonn admires a painting by Constable, it symbolizes the happy union of Communism and culture; when Brennan o' the Moor, who has a fortune in the Bank of Ireland, regilds the Madonna of the Catholic women of the house, it represents capitalism upholding painted superstition; and when Ayamonn dies for Ireland, one senses that victory, not defeat, is in the air for the proletariat and that red roses, the symbol of the House of Lancaster and of royalty, shall be worn by all men. Using Irish history and Irish characters, O'Casey had written what many critics acclaimed his finest play since he had left Ireland--

¹²³Sean O'Casey, Red Roses for Me (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1943), p. 90.

Red Roses For Me. George Mayberry¹²⁴ attributes the success of the play to O'Casey's return to Irish national problems.

Oak Leaves and Lavender is a repetition of the themes of O'Casey's other expressionistic plays. The time is during the Battle of Britain, and "the subject...is England's spiritual response to the challenge of war."¹²⁵ O'Casey employs mostly fantasy in creating the atmosphere of battle, tension, and courage. Ghostly figures glide stiffly about in the great English mansion, waiting to be joined by the people who now live in the house but who will soon die. Drishogue, a young flier, speaks the ideas we have learned so well by now: "The past has woven us into what we are,"¹²⁶ and "Woe unto any nation making war on the Soviet Union!"¹²⁷

"The Ride of the Valkyries" gives the effect of the rush and roar of warplanes; a mother sees her dead young son's face in a sudden blaze of fire; the house shakes mysteriously; the scent of lavender in the house, and the rustle of skirts of people long dead, warn of impending death. The old house itself, with its whorled panelling and classic architecture,

¹²⁴George Mayberry, "The Most Distressful Country," New Republic, 110 (Feb. 14, 1944), 218.

¹²⁵H. A. Darlington, "Difficulties in Presenting His Plays," The New York Times, (June 8, 1947), II, 3.

¹²⁶Sean O'Casey, Oak Leaves and Lavender (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947), p. 32.

¹²⁷Ibid., p. 70.

turns into a fantastic workshop. The whorled panelling becomes cogs; turn-belts turn; drop-hammers drop; and a tank is born! The scene has changed to suit the aspect of the world outside. Produced for a short time at the Lyric Theatre at Hammersmith, it failed because the people did not feel up to fighting the evening rush on the busses to get there; and because the average English audiences do not care for the poetical prose and fantastic imagination of O'Casey.

Cock-a-doodle-Andy, O'Casey's last play, is as rich in humor, wit, language, irony, and hope as anything he has ever written. Brooks Atkinson¹²⁸ calls it a satire on puritanism and another variation of O'Casey's fight against convention. O'Casey must agree, for he sent a clipping to the writer, saying it was a fine criticism. Margo Jones produced the play in Dallas, but it was probably the most diluted drama ever presented. The underlying theme of the play is one of satire against institutionalized morality, but the real theme is Communism. Texas theatre-goers are in no mood to accept a play championing Communism.

The two leading characters are Michael Marthraun, a small farmer now the owner of a rich bog, and Sailer Mahan, once a sailor and now the owner of a fleet of trucks carrying the turf from Michael's bog to town. They argue constantly, as most of O'Casey's Irish comedians do, after the manner of the

¹²⁸Brooks Atkinson, "Paradox of O'Casey," The New York Times, (April 2, 1950), II, 1.

Irishmen in Fred Allen's Alley. Sailors' workers demand an increase of a shilling in salary, and in order to meet their request he asks a two-shilling raise from Michael. Actually, Michael, with his ill-gotten bog, with his top-hat and his money in the bank, represents capitalism. Sailor is the middle-man between capitalism and labor. The workers earn a few pence a week.

Loraleen, Michael's young daughter just back from England, creates a furor in the house. For when she is about, strange things happen: the holy objects of the house are disturbed, and a cock parades around the house. The cock-shy capitalists are very much afraid, for the cock represents Communism. Loraleen goes up in a blaze of fire and the cock emerges in her place. Loraleen, or the cock, is not an evil witch but the essence of free-will inherent in all men. She represents the opposition to capitalism, conventionality, and popery. Shanaar, an old Irish peasant, symbolizes the superstition and weaknesses of the Irish. When he learns that the cock is in the house [Ireland], he advises the Priest to speak Latin, for the cock could not endure the Latin. The Messenger is a Communist fellow-traveler and is proud of it; when the fierce red wind from the east blows everyone else about, he is aware of nothing except a soft breeze in the air carrying the scent of apples. O'Casey warns the world, especially America, that flying cups and flying saucers will not do down the cock. And when he

denounces papistic propaganda in the following quotation, there is no doubt that he is getting close to American shores:

Are you goin' to pit our paltry penances an' haltin' hummin' o' hymns against th' piercin' pipin' of th' rosary be Bing Bang Crosby an' other great film stars, who side-stepped from published greatness for a holy minute or two to send a blessed blast over th' wireless, callin' all Catholics to perpetuatin' prayer!¹²⁹

There is the usual praise of a pretty pair of luring legs; there is the usual search for a better way of life; but in this play O'Casey paints with bitter and cynical words pictures as clear as the squalor of Juno's slums. Only in Within the Gates has he attempted to say so much, but this last play leaves no doubts about what he is trying to say. In Cock-a-doodle-Dandy, a thoroughly symbolic and dramatically fantastic drama, O'Casey hopes for a new humanity. The cock is the symbol of a new life, and its crow sends the spectres of capitalism back to their graves and heralds the dawning of freedom and equality.

¹²⁹Sean O'Casey, Cock-a-doodle-Dandy (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1949), p. 37.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Sean O'Casey's works diverged in a wood, and it has made all the difference to the critics of the drama. Most authorities agree on the genius of his earlier naturalistic plays; but when he renounced the Green Goddess of Realism and allied himself with that nervous genre of fantasy and symbolism known as expressionism, he left behind a host of admirers who feared the unknown that lurked in the darkness beyond the trees. As a consequence, strong winds of critical disapproval have buffeted O'Casey about on the path he has chosen to take as a dramatist.

The life experiences of O'Casey provided him with the materials for his earlier naturalistic plays, and the critics were unanimous in their cry of "O'Casey abui!" Yet, although the dramatist enjoyed fame as the Irish Chekhov, romanticism was incipient in his nature. When he exiled himself from Ireland, he allowed this romantic temperament to grow, abandoning naturalism forever. Actually, realism and romanticism are not so far apart as is commonly believed; the romantics went back to nature; the realists went back to life as it is. Even in his naturalistic plays, O'Casey so deviated from the rigid concepts of naturalistic drama as to stamp him a reformer. He attacked the church; he attacked the capitalistic order; and,

on the constructive side, he preached the brotherhood of man. Although O'Casey is now best-known for these early plays, it must be remembered that, generally, dramatists who were once realists and then stepped into a new medium, Ibsen and Strindberg, for instance, are usually best-known for their efforts in realism; for usually the dramatist, in his realistic plays, writes of tangible things close to him, that are a part of him. Thus, he can communicate his ideas more easily than when he employs symbols and expressionistic techniques to express the intangible. Although O'Casey today is still considered a genius of the naturalistic drama, despite his renouncement of all forms of realism; although these early plays are still produced more frequently than his newer efforts; and although modern Ireland gained her chronicle plays in The Shadow of a Gunman, Junco and the Paycock, and The Plough and the Stars, these early works, even if they are a dedication to life in terms of highest values, are not a realization of his higher ideals. This realization is satisfied only in his later plays. But, unhappily for O'Casey, his turn to expressionism divided his followers. Irishmen, rather condescendingly, said he would never write another good play while he was separated from Ireland; some critics who opposed expressionism condemned everything he wrote; jealous contemporaries, unable to persuade him to join their cliques, conspired against him; Catholics annoyed him; critics held his sympathy for Communism against him; producers were reluctant to stage his

plays, which too often were financial fiascoes; but O'Casey has been determined. He is dedicated to expressing himself on certain world problems, and for this expression he has chosen a selected and concentrated language that is allied to the movement to restore the poetic drama. However, O'Casey, just as he was not a conscious writer of naturalistic drama, is not consciously allied to the movement to restore the poetic drama; rather, this quality of his creations is merely incidental to his main purpose.

My selected and concentrated language may be allied to the notion of 'restoring a poetic drama' to the stage; but not by any deliberate effort on my part. All dialogue in drama is selected--selected badly, or selected well. But I am of those who think that drama good enough to go on the stage should be good enough to read at home; that drama should be--as it is--a part of our great heritage of literature....Although I'm doubtful about what is being now called a 'poetic play,' no good play is without its own poetry. But it isn't the formal verse, the ballad, or the lyric, though each and all of these may appear in a play; it is the whole sense, rhythm, and form of the play, action, scene, and dialogue, that make the poetry of a play, in my opinion. In brief; to my mind, a play not worth reading is not worth producing--realistic, naturalistic, or expressionistic. If poetry is to be brought into the drama, then it must be dramatic in itself or embedded in the drama for an essential or elegant part of it; and, always, in my opinion, drama must be close to the people's need, their hopes, fears, wants, ambitions, life and death, their song and their folklore, their meanness and their courage.¹³⁰

If, as Gabriel Fallon says, in these later plays "there is a Samson--but...a Samson eyeless in Gaza, at the mill with

¹³⁰Sean O'Casey, personal letter to Weston R. Weeks, June 26, 1950.

slaves,"¹³¹ there is, despite the dangers of the experimental techniques employed by O'Casey, "splendour of language...

that sends all the little Plays by Poets scudding into studious oblivion."¹³²

O'Casey's muse is the proletariat. The Cross he supplants with the Red Star. The leering poverty of his days in Ireland made him the champion of the world's underdogs:

Steady workers, here and elsewhere; steady poor of the poorer classes; your day is coming....The Red Star is a bright star. "No pope, no politician, no cleric, no prince, no press-lord can frighten it down now, or screen its ray from our eyes."¹³³

By attaching himself to such a world-wide cause as the improvement of the masses, O'Casey writes a drama with a universal dedication; by preaching the brotherhood of man, the necessity of labor, the beauty of love, the magic of color, and the ecstasy of merely living, he bears the same message that Christ brought to earth. And thus his plays have gratified many men's spiritual yearnings as those of the world's great dramatists have done. O'Casey defends his position by writing,

I was a Communist before I heard the name of Lenin; just as Bernard Shaw was....Communism is the new form of life; no sudden evocation, but a gradual growth of many

¹³¹Gabriel Fallon, "Pathway of a Dramatist," Theatre Arts, 34(January, 1950), 38.

¹³²Robert Fordyce Aickman, "Mr. Sean O'Casey and the Striker," 19th Century, 139 (April, 1946), 173.

¹³³Sean O'Casey, Inishfallen Fare Thee Well (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949), p. 221.

centuries; materialistic evolution, brought about by thought and things: the breaking up of feudalism, that, in itself, broke up the tribal system; Christianity gave it a shove forward; and before that the gradual evolution of the Jews from tribal superstition...emphasized, say, in the difference between the first set of the Ten Commandments [tribal superstition and tabu] and the second set, which we all know of [highly moral teachings.] The things--some of them--were industry, the machine, the bicycle, the train, the motor-car, and so on.

But what does it matter what a man may be--Conservative or Communist--when, as a dramatist, he writes a good play? Besides, there's a lot of Communist thought outside of Marx's 'Capital'; in Dickens, Thackeray, Byron, Browning, Crabbe, Hardy, Shakespeare, and the Bible--to mention a few.¹³⁴

O'Casey's greatest fight is against social evils. In his early naturalistic plays his weapon was objective truth. "He would have done Ireland no favor by romanticizing the exploits of the men in the Citizen Army. Instead, he told the truth as he saw it. Consequently, his dramas were branded as anti-Irish. In his later expressionistic plays O'Casey wrote down his personal impressions. The Molière of the slums shifted his art from the outside to the inside. Truth alone was no longer his weapon; imagination, symbolism, and political propaganda became his new tools.

From the very beginning of O'Casey's career his so-called naturalistic dramas contained elements of emotionalism. He abandoned the objectivity of that genre and sought a medium that would give complete freedom to his feelings and to his imagination, for basically O'Casey is a romanticist. He speaks

¹³⁴O'Casey, personal letter, op. cit.

the language of Marlowe, but his temperament is romantic; he is a man of the Renaissance, but he is plagued with modern problems. His first fight was to gain for the common man a livable wage for his day's labor and a peaceful night when his work was done. O'Casey has never been able to forget the squalor in which he lived and in which many of the peoples of the world still live. Half his art he dedicated to depicting this squalor; the other half he dedicated to expressing his abhorrence of it and visualizing the world remade. That he was able to survive in his environment and still retain some images of grandeur is remarkable in itself. O'Casey would impress upon everyone that life is transient and precious, and that rich laughter, art, color, music, love, and the kindly fruits of the earth should be enjoyed and shared by all:

One of the sadder charms of life is that it is so short, and that we have but a second in which to get to know life. Quick, We Have But a Second!¹³⁵

¹³⁵Sean O'Casey, personal letter to Jeston R. Weeks, May 31, 1950.

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