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GRIFFIN, FLORA FAYE HELMS. The Effects of External Action and Its Relation to the Theme of War in Plays by Sean O'Casey. (1969) Directed by: Dr. Alan Price. pp. 95

This paper is an attempt to deal with one outstanding aspect of Sean O'Casey's dramaturgy--the use of external action. The element of external action appears often in O'Casey's drama and has important qualifications for each play in which it appears. While external action is not apparent or important in all of O'Casey's plays, it appears in all four of his earliest successful plays and reappears often in the later ones. Thus external action is widely used, its possibilities fully explored by O'Casey. It appears in both comic and tragic situations and is used for several different purposes, for comic effect, ironic comment, and a juxtaposition of comedy and pathos.

While external action is a method which O'Casey uses in many of his plays, this paper is mainly concerned with its effects on a specific group of plays, the seven plays based on a theme of war or violence: The Shadow of a Gunman, Juno and the Paycock, The Plough and the Stars, The Silver Tassie, The Star Turns Red, Red Roses for Me, and Oak Leaves and Lavender. These plays cover a period from 1913 to World War II, and two types of conflict: civil disturbance in Gunman, Juno, Plough, Star, and Red Roses, and world war in Tassie and Oak Leaves. O'Casey's treatment of these conflicts varies according to the events and his own involvement in or detachment from them.

In all seven plays, however, war is presented through means of external action, a technique which reflects changes in O'Casey's dramaturgy. The first three plays are realistic treatments of war; then Tassie, an expressionistic treatment of war, is an abrupt break from the first three. Still O'Casey's methods and use of external action continue. Star, a continuation of O'Casey's methods in Tassie, also relies on

external action to dramatize the conflict. Finally, Red Roses and Oak Leaves are a melding of the two methods, the realism of the first three plays and the expressionism of Tassie and Star.

Therefore, a study of O'Casey's use of external action in those plays concerned with war shows the development of O'Casey's dramaturgy in this particular area as well as his attitude toward war and its effect on men.

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in Partial Fulfillment
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THE EFFECTS OF EXTERNAL ACTION AND ITS RELATION

TO THE THEME OF WAR IN PLAYS

BY SEAN O'CASEY

by

Flora Faye Helms Griffin

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APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis has been approved by the following committee of
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Sean O'Casey, born in 1880, grew up in the Dublin slums during a time when Irish patriots were working increasingly for the independence of their state. Both of these factors were to influence his later writings. Surprisingly, O'Casey did not start writing or publishing until the second decade of the twentieth century even though he was a prolific writer after that time in the forty-five years left to him. His first writings were articles published in labor journals; a little later his first books were collections of songs in the tradition of the popular street ballad: Songs of the Wren and More Songs of the Wren, both published in 1918.¹ That same year saw the publication of The Story of Thomas Ashe (later called The Sacrifice of Thomas Ashe), a short narrative of the last days of one of the men executed as retribution for the Easter Rising of 1916.² After the appearance of this book, O'Casey was commissioned to write Story of the Irish Citizen Army (1919), his account of the organization and activities of the Army during the 1913-1914 strike and lockout and the subsequent events which led to the

¹David Krause, Sean O'Casey: The Man and His Work (New York, 1960), p. 28.

²Ibid., p. 30.

1916 Rising.³ All of this writing preceded O'Casey the playwright, for he did not try his hand at drama until he was almost forty years old.

Between 1918 and 1921 Sean O'Casey wrote four one-act plays, all of which he submitted to the Abbey Theatre in Dublin and all of which were rejected.⁴ These plays, The Robe of Rosheen, The Frost in the Flower, The Harvest Festival, and The Crimson in the Tri-Color have never been produced, and of the four only one has been published.⁵

Harry M. Ritchie concludes that the manuscripts of the four plays are probably permanently lost.⁶ However, about the content of these plays, he does comment on the oversimplification of heroes and villains in The Harvest Festival and The Crimson in the Tri-Color, a treatment of the characters stemming from O'Casey's Story of the Irish Citizen Army.⁷

Since so little is known about these four plays and since none was ever produced, for the purposes of this paper The Shadow of a Gunman is O'Casey's first play to be discussed. It is the first of what Ronald Rollins calls the Dublin trilogy. The three, The Shadow of a

³Krause, p. 30.

⁴Unpubl. diss. (Yale, 1960) by Harry M. Ritchie, "Form and Content in the Plays of Sean O'Casey," p. 95.

⁵Sean O'Casey, Selected Plays (New York, 1955), p. 797. The play The Robe of Rosheen was published in The Plain People, a Republican periodical, around 1918.

⁶Ritchie, p. 95.

⁷Ibid., p. 99.

Gunman, Juno and the Paycock, and The Plough and the Stars are based on a period from 1916 to 1923 when Ireland was fighting for her independence from England and the following period of civil strife between the Republicans and Free Staters. Although O'Casey was involved to some extent in these events, by 1916 he had withdrawn from the Irish Citizen Army and therefore did not take an active part in the Easter Rising or any of the events in the next few years.⁸ The year 1916 was the climax of a plan to rebel, and the Easter Week Rebellion was accomplished by the I. C. A., whose members came from the working class, and the Irish Volunteers, a more heterogeneous nationalistic group. The uprising provides the basis for The Plough and the Stars. Since the rebellion was unsuccessful, 1916 was followed by several years of warfare between the Irish nationalists and the enforcers of English law (either British Tommies or the Black and Tan Auxiliary Troops). The Irish protest against English rule and the cruelty of the Black and Tans is pictured in The Shadow of a Gunman. Finally in 1922, after England had agreed to free state status for Ireland, the period of unrest continued with the Civil War between the Free Staters and the Republicans, a struggle which affects Juno and the Paycock. Thus it seems that the entire period from 1916 to 1923 is rather accurately described by Seumas Shields in Gunman:

I wish to God it was all over. The country is gone mad. Instead of counting their beads now they're countin' bullets; their Hail Marys and paternosters are burstin' bombs--burstin' bombs, an' the rattle of machine-guns; petrol is their holy water; their Mass is a burnin' buildin'; their De Profundis is "The Soldiers' Song", an' their creed is, I believe in the

⁸Krause, p. 23.

gun almighty, maker of heaven an' earth--an' it's all for "the glory o' God an' the honour o' Ireland."⁹

Although in Gunman O'Casey is presenting only one aspect of the period, the last and fiercest stages of the Anglo-Irish War,¹⁰ the quotation from Gunman applies to all three plays and to O'Casey's attitude toward the violence in all three plays. A background of war and bloodshed pervades the scenes of each play. In considering O'Casey's use of these events, Ronald Rollins concludes that O'Casey envisioned "this disorderly sequence of revolutionary episodes as a vast and terrible mass drama."¹¹ The drama to which Rollins refers is the violence which takes place usually offstage but which affects the lives of the characters and sometimes controls them despite their efforts to the contrary. In Ronald Rollins' words, "O'Casey's basic dramatic intention in this trilogy emerges, therefore, as an attempt to throw into high and sharp relief the encompassing anarchy, a disorder which threatens ruin not to one man (The Shadow of a Gunman), or one family (Juno and the Paycock), but to a city (The Plough and the Stars)."¹² It is true that we see the chaos of Gunman in terms of Donal Davoren, that of Juno in terms of the Boyle family, and that of Plough in terms of all the characters in the play. However, the differences are not so

⁹Sean O'Casey, Collected Plays (London, 1951), I, 131. Subsequent references to O'Casey's plays will be to this edition and will appear in the text.

¹⁰Unpubl. diss. (Tulane, 1960) by Patricia Moore Esslinger, "The Dublin Materia Poetica of Sean O'Casey," p. 178.

¹¹Ronald G. Rollins, "Form and Content in Sean O'Casey's Dublin Trilogy," Modern Drama, VIII (February, 1966), 419.

¹²Ibid., p. 420.

clearly defined. The violence in Gunman brings ruin not to Davoren but to Minnie Powell and Maguire while threatening others such as Grigson and Shields. And in Juno, the changes the war brings about for the Boyle family reflect what has already happened to the Tancred family. Thus there is an extension or generalization that makes the theme universal. O'Casey finally shows this theme more explicitly in Plough where no character remains untouched by the conflict.

In dealing with war as a recurring theme in O'Casey's drama, it is important to look at the relationship of war to the characters. The violence, as something outside the play or offstage, affects the characters differently. Sometimes, as in Juno, onstage action has little connection with the war, but the juxtaposition of the two provides the connection. Patricia Esslinger comments on the juxtaposition:

He [O'Casey] had chosen a background of war and had dissected his slum characters against the black lining of terror and death. The war is an important element in the motivation, in the resulting tragedy, and even in the comedy O'Casey includes, but the real heart of the play [Gunman] is its analysis of character. As his touch became more sure, O'Casey was to use this same theme of character mutilated by war even more effectively in his Juno and the Paycock, and The Plough and the Stars. . . .¹³

Emery C. Garrison agrees that in these three plays, "the decisions of the characters are determined or modified either directly or indirectly by these wars of discontent."¹⁴ While these statements are correct in

¹³Esslinger, pp. 177-178.

¹⁴Unpubl. diss. (Stanford, 1957) by Emery C. Garrison, "The Structure of Sean O'Casey's Plays," p. 25.

indicating a connection between war and the actions of the characters onstage, perhaps the best statement is one by Ronald Rollins, who is more explicit about the exact relationship. He says that through a use of the background of war O'Casey achieves "a two-fold objective: (1) he wants to trace in the foreground their personal, often exasperating, confrontations and collisions, as they meet only to fly apart, and (2) to record their constantly shifting reactions to, and appraisals of, the ebb and flow of battle in the background."¹⁵ In the three Dublin plays this two-fold objective is apparent. Gunman shows the accidental involvement of Davoren and Shields in underground activity as it also shows them reacting to the violence around them. More importantly, it shows Minnie Powell's heroism and their failure to involve themselves in order to help her. The violence, which the play indicates is always imminent, changes the action of the play. However, it does not seem to affect permanently either Davoren or Shields. The fact that their poses remain intact is a theme of the play. In Juno the battle is less evident, partially because none of the characters except Johnny attaches any personal significance to Tancred's death. (The notable exception to the indifference with which the other characters treat Tancred's death is Juno's speech, I, 56). Johnny, whose involvement in the war is active, thus involves the other members of his family. As a victim, he makes them victims of a different sort. Finally, in Plough the battle is more evident than that in Juno,

¹⁵Rollins, p. 422.

but unlike that in Gunman it is a battle rather than a raid. Here each character reacts to the battle in his particular way. Jack Clitheroe, Brennan, and Langon are active participants willing to die for the cause; Nora, since she protests her husband's involvement, becomes an unwilling victim, as does Bessie, whose death is totally meaningless; Fluther, Peter, and the Covey suffer the humiliation of being held prisoners even though they have taken no part in the rebellion. In all three plays the battles are meaningful only in terms of the characters. In Minnie's death, Johnny's death, and Bessie's death the playwright is concerned mainly with them, and there is no greater political theme unless it is that the objectives of the battles do not justify human bloodshed or suffering. The theme of war, therefore, is obviously important to the three plays Gunman, Juno, and Plough.

While critics have been quick to recognize the element which unites the Dublin trilogy--the Anglo-Irish wars--they have not considered so carefully the theme of war as it appears in subsequent plays by O'Casey. In four other plays, The Silver Tassie, The Star Turns Red, Red Roses for Me, and Oak Leaves and Lavender, O'Casey returns to the theme which he found so compelling in his early plays. In these four he deals with World War I, World War II, and the Great Lockout of 1913, an event which is the basis for two of these plays.

The theme of war appears in the play written immediately after the trilogy. The Silver Tassie, written about World War I, leads David Krause to say that "The action in each succeeding play is built

around an ever-expanding radius of involvement."¹⁶ It is true that O'Casey tries to make more universal the idea of human suffering in The Silver Tassie. Clearly not a repetition of O'Casey's attitude toward the Irish War of Independence and Civil War, the play is a condemnation of any war. Through two individuals, Harry Heegan and Teddy Foran, O'Casey shows how the vitality and exuberance of young men are destroyed by war: Heegan comes home paralyzed; Foran, blinded. At the same time, through the others who have stayed at home and through Barney Bagnal who returns home safe and a proclaimed hero, O'Casey shows the indifference and callousness of those, who, not having been wounded in body or spirit, can go on enjoying life despite the presence of Heegans and Forans. Thus The Silver Tassie has a message of despair which is more overwhelming than the irony in the first three plays. Here O'Casey dwells on the changes in the characters wrought by the war.¹⁷ As Harry Ritchie thinks, "A sick or maimed man is dead man / sic / for O'Casey. This . . . accounts for the vivid portrayal of wounded Johnny, of paralyzed Harry and blinded Teddy as the most horrible proof of man's inhumanity to his fellow man."¹⁸ The impersonal force of the war, which represents man's inhumanity to man, in The Silver Tassie is even less personal, its objectives never even mentioned. Moreover, this impersonal war is emphasized by the indifference of the other characters. One of the last speeches in the play is made by

¹⁶Krause, p. 66.

¹⁷Garrison, p. 114.

¹⁸Ritchie, p. 33.

Susie Monican, speaking for herself and the other characters:

Jessie, Teddy Foran and Harry Heegan have gone to live their own way in another world. Neither I nor you can lift them out of it. No longer can they do the things we do. We can't give sight to the blind or make the lame walk. We would if we could. It is the misfortune of war. As long as wars are waged, we shall be vexed by woe; strong legs shall be made useless and bright eyes made dark. But we, who have come through the fire unharmed, must go on living. (II, 103)

Therefore, in The Silver Tassie there is a bitterness in the idea that Heegan and Foran have sacrificed themselves for a noble ideal.

Not so with The Star Turns Red and Red Roses for Me. Although written in the 1940's, these plays deal with the strike or Great Lockout of 1913, in which O'Casey was involved as a member of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union and as a member of the Irish Citizen Army, which was organized to protect the strikers. His presentation of violence in the two plays, then, is qualified by his attitude toward the struggle. Whereas in Gunman, Juno, and Plough O'Casey seems to be pointing out the futility of war, in The Star Turns Red and Red Roses for Me, he shows violence as a suitable means to achieve the ideal of the workers. Although several people are killed, and more than one critic has protested the superfluous bloodshed and horror in The Star Turns Red,¹⁹ the play ends on a hopeful note. The clenched fist of the communist promises the unity of workers which will bring them a new day. Thus Michael and Jack, victims of the battle, become true heroes. This attitude is quite different from the playwright's attitude in Gunman, Juno, or Plough. O'Casey shows little

¹⁹ Ritchie, p. 203.

sympathy for Johnny's cause, or Jack Clitheroe's or Minnie's, choosing rather to show the meaninglessness of their sacrifices even as he treats these individuals rather sympathetically. As David Krause says of these three plays, "Because he [O'Casey] is sceptical about rampant heroism, he is at heart more concerned about the individual nature of his people than the cause they are heroic about."²⁰ The obverse is true of Star and Red Roses. Like Star, the latter play dwells on hope for a better world. The heroic and Christlike Ayamonn makes a sacrifice because he envisions a better world in the shape of a shilling. Therefore, the violence in Star and Red Roses, although it brings death and destruction, stems from a noble cause which will eventually relieve the misery of the people.

Finally, there is Oak Leaves and Lavender, another play written in the 1940's and based on war, this time World War II. Not quite so bitter as The Silver Tassie, Oak Leaves nevertheless shows war as a force which interrupts the lives of the characters and brings only death and destruction. It is the same impersonal force as in Plough and Tassie that kills Edgar and Drishogue in Oak Leaves. While these two are rather heroic in character, like Ayamonn in Red Roses and Jack in Star, their deaths are essentially meaningless because the play emphasizes their reasons for living and their vitality; they have qualities reminiscent of Heegan and Foran in Tassie. Like Tassie, also, Oak Leaves emphasizes the universality of the theme of inevitable death through the opening and closing scenes. The dancers and the Son of Time reiterate the threat of doom that is present not only for Edgar and

²⁰Krause, p. 71.

Drishogue but for all people in wartime. It seems, then, that Oak Leaves and Lavender represents a return to the theme of the futility of war and the horror of destruction.

Since war or hostilities are a theme in all of these plays, they share to some extent a structural element based on this theme. The structural element, offstage or external action, serves various purposes in the plays: to comment on action onstage; to contrast to action onstage; to dominate action onstage, molding the lives of the characters. In a study of these seven plays my purpose is to show that external action has an important function in each play, contributing to both the structure and theme of each play. As I have already indicated, the war and its relationship to the people is important to this discussion. Much of the paper will be concerned with that topic and the use of external action in presenting the war.

However, my discussion of offstage action will not be strictly limited to the presentation of war through offstage action. For example, often in these plays there is offstage action intended to create a comic effect, as in Juno when Joxer Daly and Captain Boyle are frightened by approaching footsteps. Their fear is comic because they are trying to avoid a confrontation with an angry Juno. My discussion of external action used to create a comic effect will be limited to the plays under discussion since there are several comedies written by O'Casey which depend on this device.

A consideration of external action in the seven plays will be limited to a literal sense of the term: the action which takes place offstage, which is heard onstage, and which qualifies action

onstage.²¹ Such action in Gunman, Juno, Plough, Tassie, Star, Red Roses, and Oak Leaves can serve one of two main purposes, the first one being to provide ironic or comic comment on action onstage and the second one being to interrupt the action onstage. An example of the first can be found in Juno, when Captain Boyle, in his best philosophical stance, proclaims, "I often looked up at the sky an' assed meself the question-- what is the stars, what is the stars?" His answer comes not from Joxer, but from a man in the hallway, and it is not so grand as the Captain imagines: ". . . blocks, coal blocks!" (I, 26) The situation can be reversed so that onstage action provides a comment on that offstage. The second act of Plough is replete with instances. Rosie Redmond's complaint, which is interrupted by the voice of the speaker outside, is a contrast to his speech. While he exhorts the people to begin a glorious, cleansing war, she is concerned with a much more practical, if inglorious, matter: earning money for a tolerable place to live. The second type, external action which interrupts action onstage, occurs often in all the plays. One instance is in Juno when the loud knock at the street door elicits a reaction from Johnny to show that he is crippled by fear of such a moment. The other characters do not see his reaction; they remain caught up in their own problems. But the incident reinforces an earlier impression for the audience (from Act I) that Johnny is somehow connected with Robbie Tancred's death.

In addition to these uses of external action, the ambivalence of

²¹Robert Hogan, The Experiments of Sean O'Casey (New York, 1960), p. 45. Hogan's use of the term exterior structure refers to the general structure of the play, particularly in reference to The Plough and the Stars.

O'Casey's plays through the juxtaposition of comic and tragic elements is made possible partially because of external action. Because of his presentation of comedy and pathos side by side, Una Ellis-Fermor calls O'Casey a tragic satirist "in whom the comedy of satire points directly to tragic implications."²² The entire second act of Plough is perhaps the best example; the comedy in the pub, set against the call to war from offstage is heightened by the contrast. At the same time, however, there are tragic implications about the outcome of the battle being planned suggested by the fact that the characters in the pub can ignore or treat lightly the call to arms.

The external action, which has important qualifications for each play, will be discussed play by play in the order in which they were written. Such an approach will present an occasion to show how the use of external action develops in O'Casey's drama. For the moment, it is sufficient to say that the first three, Gunman, Juno, and Plough are realistic plays. They are, in spite of O'Casey's objections,²³ realistic treatments of the events. As such their external action is also realistic. It is The Silver Tassie that makes the break with realism; the expressionistic treatment of its second act makes a different kind of demand on external action. In this act of Tassie external action relies on spectacle and music. The plays written after Tassie show the continuing influence of expressionism on external

²²Una Ellis Fermor, The Irish Dramatic Movement (London, 1954), p. 196.

²³Sean O'Casey, Rose and Crown (New York, 1952), p. 32.

action. However, in Red Roses and Oak Leaves particularly, the use of expressionism is better integrated in the entire play than is the second act of Tassie and appears side by side with a realistic treatment of external action.

The House of a Living Man (1911) was first produced by the Abbey Theatre in Dublin (April 2, 1911), was first published in the U.S.A. in 1912. The play is based on an incident from Shaw's life during the last year of imprisonment and of isolation. It tells the story of a man called the Black and how he was called to do all the British people to do during the war and to fight the Irish Republican Army. According to Walter Charlton, it was not intended for the public but for the private reading of a certain group of people. It was written by the author for the purpose of being read to a group of people. It was written for the purpose of being read to a group of people.

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Walter Charlton, The House of a Living Man, Harvard University Press, 1912, p. 10.
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CHAPTER II

THE SHADOW OF A GUNMAN

The Shadow of a Gunman, O'Casey's first play produced by the Abbey Theatre in Dublin (April 9, 1923), was first published in Two Plays in 1925.¹ The play is based on an incident from O'Casey's life during the Irish War of Independence against Britain.² At this time auxiliary troops called the Black and Tans were called in to aid the British forces in keeping order and in fighting the Irish Republican Army. According to Walter Starkie, it was not uncommon for the police or the Black and Tans to raid a building, hoping to find bombs or evidence of activity against the state.³ Such a raid was the basis for the incident in Gunman.

In Inishfallen, Fare Thee Well in a chapter entitled "The Raid," O'Casey recounts his adventures during that night.⁴ He was already in his room in bed when the first trucks stopped in front of the building. There he remained, trembling with fright as the street door was broken by rifle butts and while the entrance to the large shed in back was broken. Finally he heard the motors moving away, but at the same time

¹Sean O'Casey, Selected Plays, p. 798.

²Esslinger, p. 190.

³Walter Starkie, "The Plays of Sean O'Casey," Nineteenth Century and After, CIV (August, 1928), 227.

⁴Sean O'Casey, Inishfallen, Fare Thee Well (New York, 1949), pp. 57-78.

he became aware that there was someone at his door. His visitor was Nellie Ballynoy, the comely and enticing wife of one of the tenants, whose presence in his room caused him great anxiety. However, before he was able to resist or encourage her advances, the trucks returned. This time every tenant in the building was aroused and sent outside; there O'Casey heard that an arsenal had been discovered in the shed. He suspected that any one of the tenants could be responsible except perhaps Charlie Ballynoy, Nellie's thin and delicate husband who was not friendly with the other tenants and who seemed to have little interest in the cause of Irish freedom. The end of the chapter is O'Casey's description of the man responsible and of his arrest:

Amid a group of soldiers with rifles at the ready marched a thin forlorn figure, but the lips in the pale face were tight together, and the small head was held high. Peering closer, Sean saw that handcuffs kept the two small hands locked together, and that from one of them red blobs were dripping on to the white frost on the path, leaving little spots behind like crimson berries that had fallen on to snow. . . .

Sean peered closer. Good God--the prisoner was the timid, insignificant Charlie Ballynoy who took no interest in politics! . . . Standing there in the middle of the soldiers, with the searchlight covering him with glory, he held up his iron-locked hands from which clouts of blood still dripped.

--Up th' Republic! he shouted with the full force of his voice.

The lorry drove off, and the red specks in the rime turned brown and lonely.⁵

From this incident and from his personal knowledge of the period, Sean O'Casey created The Shadow of a Gunman.

The play is very much like the incident described in the autobiography. Two characters in particular provide a link between the two: Donal Davoren seems to be a self portrait because he is a poet who

⁵Sean O'Casey, Inishfallen, pp. 77-78.

attracts people and who wins Minnie Powell's admiration and love; and Minnie, who is the romantic interest in the play and who becomes the heroine, seems to be a combination of the characteristics seen in Charlie and Nellie Ballynoy.

In both descriptions of the raid, O'Casey makes it clear that the event is not a complete shock to the people, that once the trucks arrive and the officers enter the building, the characters are only too well aware of the terrible consequences that could ensue. The raid is a horrible interruption that shows how the people are terrorized by the continuing battle between Irish nationalists and the British forces. It is Seumas Shields who describes the chaotic conditions (quoted in Chapter I, p. 3) created by fanatical nationalism and indiscriminate bloodshed which is beginning to destroy the people it is supposed to save.⁶ Thus while the Irish Republican Army is glorified by most of the characters in the play, it is no cause with O'Casey. Rather, his purpose is to show the great gap between the shadow (Davoren, Shields, Tommy Owens, and Grigson) and the real hero (Maguire and Minnie Powell). Although Minnie acts heroic in the play, her death is only an ironic mistake because she is not responsible for the presence of the bombs and she thinks she is protecting a gunman for the I. R. A., someone worthy of her sacrifice. In her death, then, O'Casey comments on the meaninglessness of the sacrifices the people are making. And, according to David Krause, the other characters are "satiric and anti-idealistic

⁶Krause, p. 67.

portraits of the Dublin slum-dwellers and would-be patriots in
The Gunman. . . ."⁷

The setting for the entire play is the room where Donal Davoren and Seumas Shields live. Therefore, with this setting, all of the action concerning the raid, except for the investigation of their room, takes place offstage. In addition, several incidents leading up to and following the raid occur offstage: Maguire's death, Minnie's arrest, and her subsequent death. Through a combination of the observer-narrator and offstage sounds, the progress of action is reported. Thus the external action is a major contribution to the play.

O'Casey's use of external action builds as the play progresses. While there is only one offstage incident in Act I that contributes to the plot of the play, there are several in Act II. Nevertheless, that one incident in Act I is major, and other elements in the act contribute to offstage action. In the first act, as a prelude to Act II, the outside world is brought in by a parade of characters coming to see either Davoren or Shields. This kind of action does serve to emphasize the world beyond their room. Early in the act, the knocking at the window and woman's voice introduce a series of interruptions devised to awaken Shields. There is little point to this external action so far as theme is concerned, but it does serve to introduce the subject of Maguire, Shields' friend. In addition, the continual subject of Irish nationalism and civil unrest in Ireland provides general background information which prepares the audience for the events in Act II.

⁷Krause., p. 38.

While the two subjects, Maguire and civil unrest in Ireland, are introduced side by side, so that there seems to be a connection between the two, it is not made explicit for the audience until later in Act I with the news of Maguire's death. After the initial interruption in the first act, each subsequent one adds to the shape of the play: Maguire leaves his bag as a reminder of the outside world through the rest of the play; the landlord emphasizes the precarious positions of Davoren and Shields and introduces suspicions about Davoren as a gunman; Minnie, Tommy Owens, Mrs. Henderson, and Mr. Gallogher show that the general assumption is that Davoren is a gunman for the Irish Republican Army. Each interruption, then, contributes to the significance of the only important external action in Act I. In the latter part of the act there is the call of a newsboy hawking a Stop Press edition, and voices from outside explain that in an ambush near Knocksedan a man named Maguire was killed. Davoren and Shields, in their innocence and lack of awareness, do not see that this news holds any significance or warning of danger for them, much to their distress later. For the audience, however, this incident of external action strengthens earlier suspicions about the action of the play.

At the end of the first act, vainly glorying in the respect other people have paid him while assuming that he is a gunman, Donal Davoren says to himself, "And what danger can there be in being the shadow of a gunman?" (I, 124) Thus the theme of the play, the contrast between what people are and what they seem to be, is introduced in Act I. Furthermore, this theme, which is represented best by Davoren's

accidental duplicity, is reinforced by other characters, particularly Minnie Powell and Seumas. Act II continues the theme by presenting in contrast the characters and actions of Davoren and Minnie, and in this act external action is the means by which O'Casey contrasts the two. Davoren, who has allowed Minnie and others to think that he is a heroic gunman for the I. R. A., cowers in his room while Minnie is arrested for possessing bombs, the bombs she took from Shields' room in order to protect Shields and Davoren. Her arrest, which takes place offstage, is followed by her death, which also takes place offstage. Ironically, Minnie is killed while still protecting Davoren, who makes no move to help her. This final action of the play, which emphasizes Minnie's heroism and its contrast to the cowardice of Shields and Davoren, indicates the importance of external action to O'Casey's statement of theme in Act II.

At the same time, suspense in Act II depends on offstage action. The first warning, a volley of shots, frightens Shields and Davoren, but since they do not know of the bombs they do not think that they are in any more danger than the other tenants. However, the sound of an approaching motor which stops in front of their building does make an impression on the two men, because Davoren has in his possession a letter to the I. R. A. and because he almost simultaneously discovers the bombs in the bag left by Maguire. There is time to burn the letter while they hear the police knocking at the door, breaking the glass, and beating the door with rifle butts. By the time the door is broken open, Minnie, in a desire to protect the two men, has taken the bag to her room. The final action of the play, as indicated earlier, turns on

Minnie's heroism. After the sounds of the raid on the building, there are voices heard in the hallway; they are those of the soldiers giving orders and of Minnie answering with her patriotic, "Up the Republic." (I, 152) Davoren and Shields wait, hoping that they are free. Their relief is interrupted by fierce and rapid gunfire and sounds of confusion. Since these ominous sounds are the last of the external action, they must be explained later by a neighbor who says that Minnie was shot while trying to get out of danger of the explosives. Thus external action shows the gap between dialogue and action. Minnie, who "wouldn't sacrifice a jazz dance" to save a man's life, according to Shields, is the only heroic character in the play (unless one takes Maguire into account). In contrast, Davoren and Shields, who profess to be bold, patriotic Irishmen, make no move to help Minnie or to redeem the error caused by their stupidity and pride.

The tragedy of this second act is heightened by its juxtaposition with comic elements, and again external action is used to juxtapose the two. The first volley of shots, coming from a lane close by, has grim humor in the abrupt change it causes in Davoren and Shields' behavior. This is the kind of moment that makes Una Ellis-Fermor call O'Casey one of "the tragic satirists in whom the comedy of satire points directly to tragic implications."⁸ The comic element continues in Act II in contrast to the tragedy building offstage; while the danger outside is made more immediate and acute by the sound of shots, the drunken neighbor, Mr. Grigson, is singing for Davoren and Shields. Later, his

⁸Ellis-Fermor, p. 199.

repeat performance for them of his encounter with the police is followed immediately by the sounds of explosions and gunfire (the occasion of Minnie's death).

From these comments on external action in the play, it becomes clear that such action does influence the statement of theme and the structure of the entire play The Shadow of a Gunman. It, along with exposition, serves to introduce the chaos in Dublin which has resulted from the war of independence. As the external action achieves this effect, it also juxtaposes comic and tragic elements, illuminates character, and builds suspense throughout the play but particularly in the second act.

CHAPTER III

JUNO AND THE PAYCOCK

Juno and the Paycock was O'Casey's third play to be presented at the Abbey Theatre. Following The Shadow of a Gunman, a one-act play entitled Kathleen Listens In was produced on October 1, 1923.¹ This play was O'Casey's first produced fantasy, a symbolic story about Ireland and the many factions and conflicts that continued to enervate the country. Apparently the play was either a shock to the audience or a complete failure, for the first night audience, after the curtain went down, filed out in complete silence, not one person having applauded.² Harry Ritchie says that, stung by this failure, "O'Casey resolved to return to the pattern of The Shadow of a Gunman, embellished with melodramatic showmanship."³ Juno and the Paycock, therefore, is apparently O'Casey's return to realistic drama. Seen on March 3, 1924, and later published in Two Plays, 1925,⁴ this play also has a background of violence. The violence which affects Juno is the Irish Civil War, a struggle which raged from the Treaty of December, 1921,⁵ to March, 1923. The treaty, an agreement between Great Britain and Ireland to

¹Sean O'Casey, Selected Plays, p. 798. Kathleen Listens In was not published until much later: Tulane Drama Review, V (June, 1961), 36-50.

²Ritchie, p. 112.

³Ibid.

⁴Sean O'Casey, Selected Plays, p. 798.

⁵Esslinger, p. 299.

settle the Irish War of Independence, was rejected by De Valera and his followers mainly because they objected to Ireland's remaining a part of the Commonwealth, which meant that the Irish citizens would still be expected to take the oath of allegiance to the British crown. Their battle against the new state of Ireland disrupted the country until March 23, 1923, when De Valera told his followers to wait for another opportunity to take up the battle.⁶ During this time De Valera's followers were known as the Diehard Republicans because they wanted a state completely free of Great Britain; their opposition was the Irish Free Staters led by Arthur Griffith, who had signed the treaty with Great Britain.⁷ Coming directly after the War of Independence, the period was one of chaos marked by wanton murders, assassinations, and executions.⁸ Unfortunately, the lines of battle were even less clearly drawn than before the treaty for now those groups who had formerly been united in a desire for Irish independence were intolerant of each other's existence.

It is little wonder, then, that the entire history of the period comes through vaguely and uncertainly in Juno. Probably this lack of clarity suited O'Casey's purposes, for he saw and wanted others to see that the Irish were sacrificing themselves in a battle which was senseless.⁹ And even though the struggle was fierce and vicious for

⁶Esslinger, p. 234.

⁷Ibid., p. 229.

⁸Starkie, p. 228.

⁹Sean O'Casey, "O'Casey in Hungarian Costume," Blasts and Benedic-
tions (New York, 1967), p. 135.

those involved, the majority of the people, as seen in Juno, do not participate. Sometimes the principles of the two sides were obscured by more immediate, personal crises of the people. Furthermore, O'Casey himself was not involved in the struggle, having long since divorced himself from the causes of any one particular group.¹⁰ The objective, critical view of the Civil War in Juno could arise from O'Casey's own political position during the twenties. In connection with this attitude toward the war in Juno, Patricia Esslinger suggests that one reason for O'Casey's objectivity is that he did not use a specific incident from his own personal experiences as in Gunman. Rather, unlike the first Abbey play, Juno is based on O'Casey's general observations of the period.¹¹

Thus the war is of background character; it provides the backdrop for the domestic tragedy in Juno and contributes to that tragedy. The war joins with middle class morality and slum life to defeat the characters.¹² Since the war is seen in terms of only one character, Johnny Boyle, it affects the family through him. As Saros Cowasjee points out, it is Johnny who gives the play a historical basis: "Johnny Boyle is introduced into the play with masterly effect. He provides the link between the Boyle tragedy and the Civil War,

¹⁰ Esslinger, p. 259.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 239.

¹² Ibid., p. 248.

without which the action could have been placed in any period of Irish history."¹³ Johnny's connection with the war is explained and introduced by his activities during Easter Week, 1916, and his participation in the O'Connell Street battle; but more importantly, Johnny's connection with the war is through Robbie Tancred, whose death is a direct result of the Civil War. In turn, Johnny's responsibility for Tancred's death means that he will become another victim of the war.

The war and its effect on Johnny account for much of the offstage action in Juno. Numerous references to the situation outside are made part of the exposition in discussions between Johnny and Juno and in her introduction of Johnny to Bentham. The war and the imminent danger it presents for Johnny are recalled by the knock at the outside door, Johnny's reaction, the appearance of the man in the trenchcoat, Joxer's fear of being too close to windows when strangers are around, the visit the two Irregulars make to Johnny, Tancred's funeral, and Johnny's hallucinations. These incidents represent not only offstage action but onstage action and a combination of the two as well. Still, the war is seen as an outside force that eventually disrupts and helps to destroy the family.

Johnny's tragedy is emphasized as only one of three lines of plot, and the action involving the Civil War is submerged in more personal problems by the fact that during much of the play Johnny remains

¹³Saros Cowasjee, Sean O'Casey: The Man Behind the Plays (New York, 1964), p. 58.

offstage (his room is not part of the scenery) and calls to characters onstage. Such an arrangement indicates Johnny and his involvement in the Civil War as a peripheral concern of the other characters if not of the play. External action in Juno, therefore, is different from that in Gunman, and seems less important perhaps, because there are three lines of plot in Juno that do not appear to be as closely connected as the two in Gunman. The three lines of plot--the inheritance, Mary's love affair, and Johnny's predicament--show that external action concerning the war has immediate effect on only one character, the others not being aware of Johnny's predicament although they will eventually be caught up in his tragedy.

At the time of his death, Johnny's tragedy has an influence, perhaps of major importance, on the structure of the play. As one of the three lines of plot the action concerning him is important for that reason, but in addition, all three lines of plot are integrated by their influence on the Boyle family and particularly by their final effect on Juno. Two critics, in finding fault with the structure of Juno have indicated that they think these three lines of plot are relatively independent of each other. Robert Hogan explains his criticism in this way: "A major fault of the play is that the exterior action of the gain and loss of the legacy has little connection with some of the interior actions, particularly Johnny's."¹⁴ While it is true that the hope held out by the legacy is rather superficial and melodramatic compared to the other two lines of plot, there is a strong link among

¹⁴Hogan, p. 37.

the three in that they all have a disastrous effect on the Boyle family. It would seem also that Bentham's disappearance and his desertion of Mary results at least partially from the news that the Boyles will not get the inheritance. Milton Waldman goes even further in saying that "There are three lines of plot, the Boyles' elusive inheritance, Mary's unfortunate love affair, and Johnny's treachery. Neither of the former two has any relation to the last, and their connection with each other is, to say the least, slender."¹⁵ Again this criticism seems too harsh because the tragedy of the Boyle family results from a combination of disasters that converge to destroy the unit. And it is the family itself that provides the link to all the misfortunes. On the other hand, there are critics who express an opinion at the opposite extreme. John Gassner says that O'Casey "provided a tight structure in the family drama Juno and the Paycock . . ." (as opposed to the loose structure of The Plough and the Stars).¹⁶ And in refuting Milton Waldman's criticism, Emery C. Garrison insists that there is unity in the inter-relationship of the complications and that the plot does coalesce. However, Garrison makes his statement more extreme by arguing that Johnny's death is the determining factor in the breakup of the family because Juno is not free to choose to leave the Captain until after Johnny is dead.¹⁷ While I agree with both Gassner and Garrison

¹⁵Milton Waldman, "Criticism of Juno and the Paycock," The London Mercury, XIII (February, 1926), 422; As quoted by Garrison, p. 62.

¹⁶John Gassner, Form and Idea in Modern Theatre (New York, 1956), p. 35.

¹⁷Garrison, p. 63.

that the structure of Juno is controlled, the link to the three lines of plot being the rather strong one of the family unit, I would suggest that Garrison's argument about the final outcome of the play would be acceptable only if it were moderated. The destruction of the family and Juno's decision to leave the Captain are caused not just by Johnny's death but also by the disappointment over the expected inheritance and by Mary's pregnancy, conditions equally as important as Johnny's death.

External action, or the war and Johnny's involvement in it, shapes the tragedy of the play. While the first two lines of plot make the play a tragi-comedy, Johnny's line moves almost inexorably toward tragedy. This is not to say that the loss of the inheritance or Mary's pregnancy is any less tragic, for Mary's fate is a harsh one, but the tragedy in these two situations seems less inherent in the given situation and less evident from the beginning of the play than Johnny's. Rosamond Gilder thinks that Johnny, in the first scene, "prepares the laughing playgoer for the tragedy which is to come."¹⁸ Saros Cowasjee agrees: "Tragedy looms in his person, and his presence on the stage, or even in the wings, is a constant reminder that the joys of the forthcoming legacy cannot last. He is the one discordant note in the 'boozy low melody' of the play, the one figure that keeps reminding us that tears must follow mirth."¹⁹ The audience sees this movement toward tragedy in the first scene when it follows Johnny's reaction to

¹⁸ Rosamond Gilder, "Criticism of Juno and the Paycock," Theatre Arts, XXIV (March, 1940), 165, as quoted by Garrison, p. 75.

¹⁹ Cowasjee, p. 58.

Robbie Tancred's death notice (I, 4) and later when it is prepared for Johnny's fearful reaction to the thundering knock at the street door (I, 21-22), both occurrences in Act I. External action in Act II offers a comment on the Boyles' callousness and a foreshadowing of Johnny's death. In the middle of a party given by the Boyles, noises on the stairway and voices of people indicate that Tancred's funeral procession is forming. Following this, when two Irregulars come to warn Johnny that he must "attend a Battalion Staff meetin' the night after tomorrow," (I, 60) in the distance can be heard the voices of the people praying for Bobbie Tancred. In Act III the offstage action is very slight, but it has a tremendous effect. Following a knock at the street door, the voices of policemen are heard asking for Mrs. Boyle. For the audience they are Johnny's obituary, and his death is another tragedy added to the first two: the news that the inheritance will not be theirs, and the news that Mary will have an illegitimate child. The movement of Johnny's tragedy, as it progresses in the external action of the three acts, then, parallels the general movement of the play.

While external action plays an important part in defining the tragedy in Juno, it is used in that play for other effects, namely satiric comment, comic-tragic contrast, and general comic effect, none of which is unrelated to the tragedy. Satiric or ironic comment on action onstage is made to deflate the character of Captain Boyle in Act I. His vain, shallow philosophizing, "I often looked up at the sky an' assed meself the question--what is the stars, what is the stars?" is answered roughly by a voice from outside: ". . . blocks,

coal blocks!" (I, 26) At the same time that the comment makes him laughable, it comments on the meaninglessness of his world by answering his question. This ambivalence is one of O'Casey's talents: the juxtaposition of comedy and tragedy so that each one is heightened by the other. In several of his plays external action provides an occasion to contrast comic and serious elements. The most important instance of this contrast in Juno occurs in Act II where the pathos of Robbie Tancred's funeral and mourners interrupts the Boyles' party. Although the Boyles feel remorse for a moment, they resume their celebration in spite of the funeral. Their insensitivity to others' sorrow is heightened by the audience's knowledge that their son is in some way responsible for Tancred's death and that Johnny fears for his own life. Another kind of comi-tragic contrast is achieved when sounds from outside interrupt action onstage. In Act I, when the knock is heard at the street door, Johnny is terrified, assuming that the Republicans have sent someone to execute him (I, 21-22). Not long after, when steps are heard coming toward the door, the effect is comic. Captain Boyle and Joxer, who assume that Juno is returning, make frantic efforts to hide the breakfast they have cooked (I, 26). This kind of comic situation appears several times in Juno (Act I) and in other plays, notably The End of the Beginning and Purple Dust. For Juno, the comedy makes the impending tragedy more poignant.

From this examination of the line of plot concerning Johnny and the external action of the Civil War in Juno and the Paycock, it becomes clear that there is significant offstage action in the play and that it pertains mainly to Johnny and to the war and the connection between the

two. In this light, external action is involved in only one of three lines of plot. Yet the war, because it influences Johnny, has a relationship to the other characters; Johnny's death, a direct result of the war, is one of the factors that destroy the family.

CHAPTER IV

THE PLOUGH AND THE STARS

After Juno, almost a year elapsed before Sean O'Casey's next play was produced at the Abbey. The play, The Plough and the Stars, began its first run on February 8, 1926 and was published that same year.¹ For the subject of Plough, O'Casey turned to an event ten years old, but one that was a natural subject for him, following Gunman and Juno--the Easter Week Rebellion of 1916. The time of the play is November, 1915, to Easter Week, 1916, (I, 160) an approximation of the historical dates when the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army were preparing for a battle with the British. Through ill luck, poor planning, and weak organization, their rebellion was unsuccessful.² So it is in O'Casey's play, where it seems doomed from the start. In the play, as in reality, the rebellion is accomplished momentarily by the Volunteers and the I. C. A., two nationalistic groups that have little in common except their desire for Irish freedom. They fail because their numbers are so small, because they ludicrously expect the British to "play the game" by not bringing in heavy artillery, (I, 223) and because the Irish people do not come to their aid.

Like the Rebellion itself, the several events of the play have

¹ Sean O'Casey, Selected Plays, p. 798.

²Esslinger, pp. 108-113.

their origin in O'Casey's experiences; the looting scene, the shooting of Bessie Burgess, the imprisonment of the men in the church are notably paralleled in O'Casey's autobiographical volume, Drums Under the Windows.³ Moreover, Saros Cowasjee identifies from O'Casey's acquaintances possible models for his characters.⁴ Besides the autobiographical volume, William Armstrong identifies as an important historical document, Story of the Irish Citizen Army, a brief history written by O'Casey in 1919 and in which he reveals the sources of Plough.⁵ Finally, it is important to mention that the speech heard in Act II of Plough is a patchwork of quotations from various speeches made by Padraic Pearse in 1915 and 1916.⁶ Thus it becomes evident that in Plough O'Casey makes use of what he saw and heard during Easter Week, 1916, and the months leading up to it. In connection with his use of these events in Plough, his own position during the Rebellion seems to have some effect on the play. O'Casey had earlier been a member and officer of the I. C. A., but in 1914, having disagreed with another leader over the membership qualifications, he left the group.⁷ Therefore, O'Casey's detached, critical attitude toward the aims of the I. C. A. and the Volunteers appears in the play as a condemnation of

³Sean O'Casey, Drums Under the Windows (New York, 1956), pp. 408-421.

⁴Cowasjee, pp. 62-63.

⁵William A. Armstrong, "The Sources and Themes of The Plough and the Stars," Modern Drama, IV (December, 1961), p. 234.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Krause, pp. 22-23.

the futile war they wage.

Plough, like Gunman and Juno, has a background of violence which is important to the play, yet the emphasis is different here. In Juno the Civil War is subordinated to the domestic tragedy by the fact that Johnny is the only member of the family who is directly involved in the war or even interested in it. In Gunman the violence is seen as only one incident (perhaps one out of many similar incidents, but still only one) which interrupts the lives of the people and destroys one of them. And the violence is subordinated to the theme of appearance and reality in Gunman. In Plough, however, the violence takes on a new significance because it surrounds the individuals onstage and threatens to destroy all of them. The war outside has become a theme of the play. According to Robert Hogan, "In The Plough, the exterior action of the rebellion of Easter Week has a grim importance of its own, not only greater in scope than any of the interior actions, but also illuminating them with meaning."⁸ The war remains offstage, presented by a combination of two techniques, the classical narrator and observer technique and offstage sounds or actions which represent the war. Sean O'Casey's use of external action as structure and theme, then, is best illustrated by The Plough and the Stars, a play unified by offstage action. There are many critics, like Hogan, who recognize the significance of the relationship between the war and the structure of the play, but few comment at length on O'Casey's technique. A notable exception is Harry M. Ritchie, who comments on O'Casey's use of offstage sound effects

⁸Hogan, p. 37.

and his use of parallel elements and ironic fusion of opposites in the plot structure:

The final moment of the play best illustrates O'Casey's genius for combining sound, visual detail and stage business into an overwhelming emotional effect. The British soldiers, Sergeant Tinley and Corporal Stoddart pour out cups of tea, a last reminder of Nora's pathetic attempts at gentility in the slums, while Nora herself sobs in the next room, her baby and husband both dead. Outside in the streets the sounds of machine-gun fire and artillery blend with the cries of the wounded. Here in the room beside the tea-party scene lies the body of Bessie Burgess. The British soldiers join with their buddies in singing "Keep the 'owme fires burning" as "the glare in the sky seen through the window flares into a fuller and deeper red." a pathetic summary of grief, pain and destruction made all the more vivid by visual and auditory detail.⁹

This is the kind of scene that O'Casey has apparently been working toward in his use of external action in these first three plays.

In an attempt to comment on the presence and purpose of external action in the play, it is necessary to look at the general structure of the play and at critical comment on this structure. Generally, it is agreed that the structure of Plough is very loose, an idea shared by reviewers both sympathetic and hostile. However, in trying to refute the sharp criticism of structure in O'Casey's play, Emery C. Garrison has taken the extreme position that Plough can be fitted into the classical framework. In order to support his theory, he presents the idea that the tragedy within "the structure of the play results from the actions of the two central characters," Nora and Jack Clitheroe.¹⁰ While it is true that the Clitheroes are main characters, and that one sees the

⁹Ritchie, pp. 150-151.

¹⁰Garrison, p. 94.

break-up of the family in Plough mainly through them, they do not control the action of the play. Neither one can be called a classical hero or heroine because the tragedy of the play, even as it involves them, surpasses them to threaten an entire city. Since the play cannot be defined in terms of either Nora or Jack Clitheroe, it seems that, viewed in Garrison's terms, the play would be a failure. There are six other characters equally important, according to Robert Hogan, who sees eight interior movements in the play.¹¹ Surprisingly, David Krause sees Jack Clitheroe as a secondary figure; in his words, Plough shows "a relocation of the main plot in the comic characters. Non-comic characters like Johnny Boyle in Juno and Jack Clitheroe in The Plough, who might have been counterparts to Davoren, are now secondary figures."¹² While it is true that there is a striking difference between O'Casey's presentation of Davoren and his presentation of Johnny Boyle and Jack Clitheroe, it seems that Clitheroe could less easily be counted a secondary figure than simply one of the eight main characters.

As Hogan suggests, the personal crises of these eight characters, set against the terror and destruction of the war, broaden the scope of the play. Even while recognizing the broad scope of the play, some critics have been very harsh on its structure. Joseph Wood Krutch laments the lack of form, lack of movement, and lack of any unified or

¹¹Hogan, p. 43.

¹²Krause, p. 91.

lasting effect in either Juno or Plough.¹³ Andrew E. Malone is equally critical: "It [Plough] is little better than a series of disconnected scenes with the fighting as a background, and the theme gets lost in the multiplicity of incidents."¹⁴ Fortunately, the majority of critics recognize that the structure of Plough is very loose without condemning it for not conforming to classical drama. Saros Cowasjee and Walter Starkie call it a loose chronicle play, a phrase similar to the one John Gassner uses.¹⁵ However, it is not sufficient to note simply the lack of "integral, causally connected rising movement of a structure-of-action play," in Robert Hogan's words.¹⁶ In an attempt to explain the value of this kind of structure for Plough, one looks at the demands made on the form of the play by its theme and scope. Following Gunman and Juno, Plough is a further departure from the structure-of-action play. As David Krause notes, "It is in The Plough that O'Casey achieves a firm control of his craft. Structurally he allows himself a more flexible use of time, place, and action."¹⁷ By allowing himself this flexibility in structure, O'Casey comes closest to the "vast and terrible mass drama" that Ronald Rollins thinks the playwright envisions.¹⁸ Thus the loose, four-act chronicle

¹³Joseph Wood Krutch, "Poet Laureate," The Nation, CXXV (December, 1927), 718.

¹⁴Andrew E. Malone, The Irish Drama (London, 1929), p. 218.

¹⁵Cowasjee, p. 63.

Walter Starkie, "Sean O'Casey," from The Irish Theatre, ed. Lennox Robinson (London, 1939), p. 160.

John Gassner, Form and Idea in Modern Theatre (New York, 1956), p. 35.

¹⁶Hogan, p. 47.

¹⁷Krause, p. 92.

¹⁸Rollins, p. 419.

play is the structure that suits O'Casey's material.

The four acts of the play, then, I would like to discuss, mainly in terms of the war or mass drama. From Act I, each succeeding act shows the approaching war as it changes the lives of the characters. Robert Hogan sees the four acts as four stages: "The main characters are set in four different situations: the first act shows intimations of war, the second a direct overture and incitement to war, the third the war itself, and the last the aftermath of the war. The exterior action, then, presents four stages of growth and decline."¹⁹ In its direct and immediate relationship to the fate of the characters, the war becomes the theme of the play.

In the first act, which is mainly exposition and which presents the norm of tenement life,²⁰ the sound of the workers cheering sets the stage for later problems. The onstage explanation by the Covey is, "Th' job's stopped. They've been mobilized to march in th' demonstration to-night undher th' Plough an' th' Stars." (I, 170) This action Hogan calls the intimations of war.

The second act²¹ sees the men mobilized to fight and inspired by a speaker to sacrifice their lives. Act II of Plough, like the

¹⁹Hogan, p. 45.

²⁰Krause, p. 92.

²¹Act II was originally submitted to the Abbey by O'Casey as a one-act play entitled The Cooing of the Doves (1923). It was rejected by the Abbey Theatre before being included as Act II in The Plough and the Stars.

second act of Gunman, depends on offstage action to carry the plot of the play and to contrast the harsh realities of slum life with the exaltation of war as a noble and cleansing ideal. While the workers are incited to war offstage, onstage action is the comedy in the pub, interrupted regularly by the speaker offstage, whose shadow is visible (the speaker is a suggestion of the imminence of war and of its horror). The result is a juxtaposition of comic and serious elements which runs throughout the act. As an example of such juxtaposition, the first instance is the prostitute's speech, followed immediately by the speaker's beginnings:

Rosie. It's no joke thrying' to make up fifty-five shillin's a week for your keep an' laundry, an' then taxin' you a quid for your own room if you bring home a friend for th' night. . . . If I could only put by a couple of quid for a swankier outfit, everythin' in the' garden ud look lovely--

Barman. Whisht, till we hear what he's sayin'.

/ Through the window is silhouetted the figure of a tall man who is speaking to the crowd. The Barman and Rosie look out of the window and listen. _/

The Voice of the Man. It is a glorious thing to see arms in the hands of Irishmen. We must accustom ourselves to the thought of arms, we must accustom ourselves to the sight of arms, we must accustom ourselves to the use of arms. . . . 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!

(I, 193-194)

While one might argue that the speaker's sentiments are noble and inspiring, that Rosie's are gross and selfish, there is the ultimate acknowledgment that the speaker is making an appeal to death as opposed to Rosie's appeal to life, birth, and love.²² Since the juxtaposition of the speeches makes each one a comment on the other, the two qualify each other, and the viewpoint that suffers is the idealistic vision of the speaker. The incompatibility between his vision and the reality of the situation is presented again by Peter and Fluther when they enter the pub. They are intoxicated by the speaker's words, so much so that the usually detached Fluther announces that the speech had the blood boiling in his veins. By the time the speaker is heard the third time, the characters in the bar are aroused, not by his exhortation to violence, ironically, but by their own belligerence toward each other. The result is first a quarrel between Fluther and Peter, then a fierce, comic quarrel between Mrs. Gogan and Bessie Burgess, and finally a quarrel between the Covey and Fluther. Following the course set by these earlier incidents, the end of the second act is simultaneous action onstage and offstage which contrasts the comic and serious elements. The first is a ribald song by Rosie Redmond as she triumphantly leads Flutheroff, and the second is the sounds from offstage of the bugle and of the commands to the men to march away. Hogan sees this kind of juxtaposition as a choral fusion, a balancing between two strongly opposing forces.²³ For Una Ellis-Fermor, this act exemplifies O'Casey's talent at its best: ". . . the structure of his play, which

²² Ritchie, p. 150.

²³ Hogan, p. 48.

was never conventional or orthodox, but has at its best, as in the second act of The Plough and the Stars, a subtle and original relation to his theme. Here, where disjunction becomes the theme of the play, O'Casey is concerned with the picture of the collapse of a rebellion and the destruction of man's hopes for the birth of a nation and the progress of humanity."²⁴ Both Hogan and Ellis-Fermor recognize the effect that O'Casey's contrast has on the direction of the play, for the juxtaposition of the comic and serious in Act II introduces the tragedy of the war, which continues to be contrasted to the comedy, perhaps a grimmer comedy, in the lives of the characters.

As the play progresses, the background of war becomes more important because, like Gunman, Acts III and IV of Plough are concerned with the war itself. Of O'Casey's technique in presenting the war, Patricia Esslinger says that "Through this act [III] and the next, O'Casey uses the observer and narrator technique to describe the state of Dublin in the siege, for most of the characters in his play participate in the rebellion only vicariously, and none of the actual fighting reaches the footlights."²⁵ David Krause agrees basically with her description.²⁶ However, as much as O'Casey does depend on this classical technique, he also makes great use of offstage sounds. Throughout Act III gunshots interrupt the dialogue, making one continuously

²⁴ Ellis-Fermor, p. 199.

²⁵ Esslinger, p. 148.

²⁶ Krause, p. 113.

aware of the battle. Screams interrupt too: Fluther's is a drunken yell; Nora's, a scream of pain. As time passes, the battle seems to draw closer, but the comic element never disappears. After the first shots are heard, Bessie Burgess rushes in, ludicrous with "a new hat on her head, a fox fur round her neck over her shawl, three umbrellas under her right arm, and a box of biscuits under her left." (I, 224) The excitement aroused in her and the others by the possibility of looting far surpasses their fear of the approaching battle. After an argument over the pram, Bessie Burgess and Mrs. Gogan, in spite of their earlier differences, are happy to share the fun together. Their excitement contrasts sharply to the battle nearby as the boom of a big gun is heard. But, even as the comedy continues, it takes on a different tone, becoming grimmer as it is set against the culminating tragedy. Nora's wild, frantic state and the fact that Langon has been wounded suggest that the war is closing in on its victims. When Clitheroe leaves Nora for the second time, she is lying in the street, weak and sick; the one man who earlier was brave enough to help her is drunk--Fluther is "frenzied, wild-eyed, mad, roaring drunk." (I, 224) Therefore, at the end of the third act, in spite of the rifles and machine-guns firing in the distance, it is Bessie Burgess who goes out to look for a doctor for Nora. As Act IV opens, the sky is red from the burning buildings. The intermittent shooting and shouts from the Red Cross suitably accompany each other but at the same time are contradictory, the one being the messenger of death, the other of life. All these sounds indicate that the people are now trapped. Still, Fluther can worry about the kind of church where he will be forced to

spend the night, a kind of ironic comment that continues up to the climax and ultimate irony when Bessie Burgess is shot as she goes too close to the window in an attempt to keep Nora away from the window. As the play ends, the sky is still red from the burning buildings, a backdrop which makes bitterly ironic the sentimental marching song, "Keep the Home Fires Burning," which the British soldiers sing.

These four acts, or four stages of the war, involve eight interior lines of movement, as Robert Hogan indicates. There is interaction among all of the characters, a complexity paralleled by the variety of moods and situations in the play.²⁷ Shown against a background of violence that threatens to destroy them, these eight face personal crises as well as the more impersonal force of war. There is disagreement among critics about the relationship of the war to the characters. Emery Garrison sees the characters, Nora and Jack especially, acting independently.²⁸ It is certainly true that Jack is no passive victim of the war; he acts independently in joining the I. C. A. and participating in the battle. However, Nora's tragedy--she loses husband and child and subsequently goes mad--seems to be a fate over which she has no control. Her struggles are in vain, even in the beginning of the play. Other critics see the characters as incidental victims of the war. Ronald Peacock says, "His [O'Casey's] characters, vivid as some of them are, are not as important as the larger political

²⁷Krause, p. 92.

²⁸Garrison, p. 95.

tragedy of which they are fortuitous victims."²⁹ Robert Hogan agrees that the characters "have no control over the exterior structure."³⁰ To some extent the characters are victims of the situation and have no control over the situation. Nora is more nearly an innocent victim than Jack Clitheroe, and certainly Bessie Burgess' death is an ironic accident of battle. However, there is one character, Mollser, who, though her tragedy parallels that of the others, is not a victim of the war. Her death is a result of poverty and disease, the oppressive slum life. If one describes the characters as victims of the war and of poverty, it is nevertheless incorrect to describe the play as a political tragedy.³¹ Ronald Peacock seems to think of Plough in such terms when he says, "In themselves they / the characters in Plough / are not in the least inevitable or unique tragic persons, like those of tradition; any set of Dublin people would do."³² Yet O'Casey does show precisely that the people are more important than the political tragedy. They are no less tragic because the action of the war has such scope or is so impersonal. The audience sees the war in terms of the characters, of the war's effect on them.

The Plough and the Stars, the play which represents the perfection

²⁹Ronald Peacock, The Poet in the Theatre (New York, 1946), p. 9.

³⁰Hogan, p. 45.

³¹See comment by Una Ellis-Fermor on p. 35.

³²Peacock, p. 9.

of external action as a structural device in O'Casey's plays, shows a fine balance between onstage and offstage action. With the exception of Act I, the play depends for its success on simultaneous onstage and offstage action. This unique structure allows for comic-tragic contrast throughout the play. And finally, the various lines of plot in the play are united by the war and its effect on the characters.

CHAPTER V

THE SILVER TASSIE

In Sean O'Casey's first three realistic plays there is a continuity which underlines his developing technique. As I have been attempting to point out, each play depends to some extent on external action, a technique which culminates in The Plough and the Stars. After this play O'Casey went on to experiment with new forms; at the same time, he returned often to the technique developed in The Shadow of a Gunman, Juno and the Paycock, and The Plough and the Stars. Since this element of offstage action in other plays will be discussed later, it is important to note the change in O'Casey's dramaturgy after Plough. O'Casey's next play, The Silver Tassie, while it is a rather abrupt break from the earlier plays, is necessary in this discussion because O'Casey is again dealing with war and its effects on men. The playwright defines his purpose in Rose and Crown:

He would set down without malice or portly platitude the shattered enterprise of life to be endured by many of those who, not understanding the bloodied melody of war, went forth to fight, to die, or to return again with tarnished bodies and complaining minds. He would show a wide expanse of war in the midst of timorous hope and overweening fear; amidst a galaxy of guns; silently show the garlanded horror of war. However bright and haughty be the burning of a town; however majestic be the snapping thunder of the cannon-fire, the consummation is the ruin of an ordered, sheltering city, with the odious figure of war astride the tumbled buildings, sniffing up the evil smell of the burning ashes. The ruin, the squeal of the mangled, the softening moan of the badly rended are horrible, be the battle just or unjust; be the fighters striving for the good or manifesting faith in evil.

And he would do it in a new way. There was no importance in trying to do the same thing again, letting the second play

imitate the first, and the third the second. He wanted a change from what the Irish critics had called burlesque, photographic realism, or slices of life, . . .¹

It was precisely because of this new purpose of O'Casey's that the play was criticized both in Ireland when it was offered to the Abbey and abroad when it was first produced. The Silver Tassie, published in 1928 and finally produced in London on October 11, 1929,² was the occasion for O'Casey's break with the Abbey. Not only did the Abbey directors find the play too poor to accept, but also, on its production, its critics were rather harsh. Generally, opinion held that it was not as good as the three Abbey plays.³ Those who found fault with the structure of The Silver Tassie are supported by John Gassner, who comments on its lack of unity and clarity.⁴ If the play was not condemned for its mixture of realistic and expressionistic techniques, then it was praised solely on the basis of Act II, which those critics saw as brilliant experimentation.⁵ Although my purpose here is not to review criticism of The Silver Tassie, these critical comments help to focus the changes O'Casey made in Tassie and help to compare it to the other three plays in its presentation of war and in its use of external action.

¹Sean O'Casey, Rose and Crown, p. 32.

²Sean O'Casey, Selected Plays, p. 798.

³Garrison, p. 109.

⁴John Gassner, The Theatre in Our Times (New York, /1954/), p. 245 as quoted by Garrison, p. 110.

⁵Ritchie, p. 162.

The war in Tassie is World War I, and the setting, following O'Casey's tendency to broaden the scope of the play as in Plough, moves from the Heegan home in Dublin to a battlefield in France and then to a hospital and to a club. When O'Casey submitted this new play to the Abbey, Yeats suggested that the failure of the play arises in part from the fact that O'Casey is dealing with a war in which he has little interest and no experience. O'Casey himself answered these charges:

And now will you tell me the name and give me the age and send me the address of the human being who, having eyes to see, ears to hear and hands to handle, was not interested in the Great War? . . .

So you really mean that no one should or could write about or speak about a war because one has not stood on the battlefield? Were you really serious when you dictated that--really serious, now? Was Shakespeare at Actium or Philippi? Was G. B. Shaw in the boats with the French, or in the forts with the British when St Joan and Dunois made the attack that relieved Orleans? And someone, I think wrote a poem about Tir na nOg who never took a header into the Land of Youth.⁶

As O'Casey points out to Yeats, he was not the first playwright to deal, realistically or otherwise, with something beyond his own experience. Yet Yeats had one more criticism relevant to the treatment of war in The Silver Tassie. He thought that the mere greatness of the war obtruded itself upon the stage and kept the play from being dramatic; in his words, "the whole history of the world must be reduced to wallpaper in front of which the characters must pose and speak."⁷ This theory proposed by Yeats negated what O'Casey is trying to do, to expose the horror of war. Although O'Casey presents the individuals in

⁶Letter to Yeats from S. O'Casey, 19 Woronzo Road, St John's Wood (London, no date) as quoted by Krause, p. 102.

⁷Letter to O'Casey from Yeats as quoted by Krause, pp. 102-103.

Acts I, III, and IV in an attempt to show the effects of war on their lives, his second act is an abstraction intended to show "the horrors experienced not only by the main character, but by all mankind," according to Emery C. Garrison.⁸ O'Casey's purpose, therefore, as he stated it later in Rose and Crown, is incompatible with Yeats' theory of drama. It remains perhaps, as O'Casey suggests, to judge the play by other criteria.

O'Casey's treatment of war in The Silver Tassie, important as it is to the play, differs drastically from earlier techniques in Gunman, Juno, and Plough. Still, there are similarities to be noted among all four plays. Act I of The Silver Tassie is very much like other first acts O'Casey has written. It is expository, presenting the lives of the Heegans and the Forans. Characterized by much comic dialogue and farce, it is reminiscent of the first act of Plough. Also like Plough, in the first act there are intimations of war and of the tragedy that is to come. Although Saros Cowasjee says that there is nothing in the first act "that hints of the tragedy that is to follow,"⁹ I think that the war is already intruding into the lives of the people. Through the window can be seen the center mast of a steamer, the ship of war which will transport Harry, Teddy, and Barney to France. Throughout the act Susie Monican is polishing Harry's rifle and getting his things ready. Moreover, the conversation hinges on two events: the football game being played and Harry's imminent departure. The seriousness of the latter is perhaps dismissed because Mrs. Heegan is concerned, not for

⁸Garrison, p. 113.

⁹Cowasjee, pp. 118-119.

her son's safety, but for the government check which she gets so long as he is a good soldier. Thus, at the end of the act she is relieved, ironically, that the three men depart safely. In these ways, the comedy of the first act has an undercurrent of tragic implications.¹⁰ In this first act, also, external action is used as in the earlier plays. The farce of the quarrel onstage between the Forans is prefaced and followed by sounds from above of breaking delftware and screams from Mrs. Foran. At other moments the narrator and observer technique is combined with offstage sounds to tell the audience what is happening. For example, when the celebrating crowd brings Harry home, his exuberance, vitality, and popularity are defined in part by the crowd which accompanies him. The various sounds--the concertina, the marching crowd, the shouts from the people--are victorious. At the same time, there is from offstage the sound of the ship's siren, a warning to the young men. Finally the light on the ship's mast is seen moving slowly away as the ship's siren gives a departing blast. Harry's victory celebration, which is also a leave-taking to go to war, ends an act which has emphasized Harry's joy in life and the selfishness and superficiality of some of the other characters.

It is apparent, therefore, that Act I is realistic, at least to a great extent, like Gunman, Juno and Plough. Acts III and IV, which will be discussed later, are in the same vein. The problem of the play, as critics have seen it, lies in the second act, which, unlike earlier

¹⁰Krause, p. 110.

O'Casey dramaturgy, is expressionistic. It is with this act that I too am mainly concerned because Act II is O'Casey's presentation of the war (Acts III and IV show the effects of the war on individuals, Harry and Teddy, and the inability of the other characters to sympathize). The setting for the second act is a battlefield somewhere in France. Not only is the setting far removed from that of the first act, but also the entire situation is far removed from the "reality" of the first act. This major change in O'Casey's dramaturgy can be seen in a comparison of The Silver Tassie to Plough or Gunman. The battle in Plough is narrated in a realistic manner, but for Tassie, O'Casey, in the stage directions, says that "Every feature of the scene seems a little distorted from its original appearance." (II, 296) Perhaps the difference arises from the playwright's purpose; as Garrison notes, "The expressionistic action takes place in the war zone in a jagged ruin of a monastery. The playwright's aim is to present war, not only as it is physically, but as it is spiritually."¹¹ Cowasjee concurs: "It may be noted that O'Casey's purpose here is to give us a brief impression of modern warfare and its effects on the human mind. No tragedy is shown except the tragic waste that lies around before the curtain rises."¹² Certainly O'Casey sets out to show in this second act the effect of war on the human mind. That Cowasjee can comment on this effect and say simultaneously that no tragedy is shown leads one to believe that he is thinking in terms of a physical tragedy. The

¹¹Garrison, p. 120.

¹²Cowasjee, pp. 115-116.

tragedy is shown here because the tragedy is the impact of the war on the soldiers, on their minds and on their bodies. Their isolation from the rest of the world, hinted at in Act I, is shown full force in Act II. To David Krause, this isolation is tragic: "We feel the full impact of this tragic isolation / of the soldiers / in the second act when we are suddenly brought into the no-man's land of the war zone."¹³

To accomplish his presentation of war as a nightmare and a tragic experience for mankind, O'Casey changes his technique. It might seem that the technique used in Plough is too limiting for The Silver Tassie. As David Krause continues, "There is a violent change of technique to parallel the violent change of mood--from comic reality to tragic surreality. Here O'Casey creates the shock of war in a horrible transfiguration scene. . . . Instead of telling the audience through exposition that war is hell / as in Plough /, he had found in the techniques of Expressionism a way of showing them a symbolic nightmare of that hell--a new method of developing the tortured figure that the once herculean Harry has become in the last two acts."¹⁴ This nightmare of war achieved through expressionism shows the mass subconsciousness reacting to the war. It is important to note that Act II, unlike the other acts, does not have individually recognizable characters, with the exception of Barney, who is tied to a gunwheel as punishment for the theft of a chicken from friendly civilians. Instead

¹³Krause, p. 113.

¹⁴Ibid.

of Harry Heegan and Teddy Foran there are the 1st soldier, 2nd soldier, and 3rd soldier. There has been speculation about Harry's absence in the second act, and several answers have been suggested. The first London production had the actor who played Harry to appear also as one of the three soldiers. Others have seen the Croucher as a distortion of Harry.¹⁵ Or perhaps he is one of the wounded. All three are possibilities, and that is the point, that Harry could be any one or all of them. As Garrison says, "There is nothing in the script to indicate that Act II is a projection of the ego-world of Harry Heegan. It is, however, a sign of his experience in war. The implications of the playwright's criticism of the brutal automatism of war in the second act serve as a symbol of the horrors experienced not only by the main character, but by all mankind."¹⁶ Therefore, through the use of expressionism in the second act, O'Casey is able to underline the universal theme of a soldier destroyed in war, to use the individual Harry Heegan to project the nightmare of war.

In this nightmare of war, O'Casey deals more in symbols or at least makes them more obvious than in earlier plays. The lacerated fingers of stone and dead hands . . . protruding are prayerful.¹⁷ The symbolism of the church, in the statue of the Virgin and the life-size crucifix, leaning toward the Virgin in supplication because one

¹⁵Krause, p. 121.

¹⁶Garrison, p. 113.

¹⁷Ritchie, p. 166.

arm of the cross is gone, is juxtaposed with the symbolism of war in the gunwheel to which Barney is tied and the howitzer. The setting of the ruined monastery, then, contrasts purposely to the paraphernalia of war.

The juxtaposition of church and war is reiterated in the action. As the Croucher chants his song of death, there is heard from offstage the celebration of the mass:

Croucher. And the hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of a valley.
And I looked and saw a great multitude that stood upon their feet, an exceeding great army.
And he said unto me, Son of man, can this exceeding great army become a valley of dry bones?

/ The music ceases, and a voice, in the part of the monastery left standing, intones: Kyr . . . ie . . . e . . . eleison. Kyr . . . ie . . . e . . . eleison, followed by the answer: Christe . . . eleison.

Croucher / resuming / And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest. And he said, prophesy and say unto the wind, come from the four winds a breath and breathe upon these living that they may die.

/ As he pauses the voice in the monastery is heard again: Gloria in excelsis Deo et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis. /

Croucher / resuming / And I prophesied, and the breath came out of them, and the sinews came away from them, and behold a shaking, and their bones fell asunder, bone from his bone, and they died, and the exceeding great army became a valley of dry bones.

/ The voice from the monastery is heard, clearly from the first half of the sentence, then dying away towards the end: Accendat in nobis Dominus ignem sui amoris, et flammam aeternae caritatis. /

(II, 36-37)

This juxtaposition shows the use of offstage action or sound that O'Casey makes in Act II of The Silver Tassie. Continuing his use of offstage effects to contrast to those onstage, O'Casey presents the music (A small

organ is heard playing slow and stately notes as the curtain rises.) and the chants of the mass to establish a rhythm for the entire act and to define, ironically, the chant of the soldiers. From this point the petition to God and Christ heard from the monastery focuses in sharp relief the bitter complaint of the Croucher. The contrast is furthered by the Croucher's chant, a paraphrase of a passage from the Book of Ezekiel in which the meaning of the Biblical passage has been reversed.¹⁸

By using the rhythm of the mass, O'Casey makes the movement of the rest of the act ritualistic. As Harry Ritchie notes, "The beat of the act comes from two main sources; first the rhythmical, chanted dialogue, the short staccato speeches of the troops, and second the slow and stately notes of the off-stage organ and the singing of the Catholic mass. The irony of the act is created by the juxtaposition of the two rituals, the ritual of God's mercy through the mass, and the ritual of fear and destruction, the worship of the gun and war."¹⁹ Thus it can be seen that O'Casey has not abandoned altogether the technique that he found so successful in his three earlier plays. However, instead of using it as he did in Gunman and Plough, he turns to an effect he first sought in Juno. In the second act of Juno, when Johnny is being warned by two Irregulars, offstage there is the sound of the prayers being said for Robbie Tancred. The juxtaposition of chants in Act II of The Silver Tassie is very similar to that moment in Juno.

¹⁸Krause, p. 116.

¹⁹Ritchie, p. 165.

In both Gunman and Plough offstage sounds play a rather important part in letting the audience know the progress of the raid and the battle, respectively. In Gunman the sounds in Act II denote the approach of the troops, their entrance into the tenement, their arrest of Minnie, and finally the bursting of bombs which precedes her death. Similarly, in Plough, Acts III and IV, the approaching tragedy is apprehended through the noise of battle. Guns, bombs, breaking glass, calls from the Red Cross combine with the increasing glow from the burning buildings. This last element, a use of spectacle, becomes important in The Silver Tassie also. Notably at the beginning and end of Act II, the battle is described in visual terms: Across the horizon in the red glare can be seen the criss-cross pattern of the barbed wire bordering the trenches. In the sky sometimes a green star, sometimes a white star burns. (II, 35) And when the battle resumes at the end of the act, the noise of the battle is absent, but the battle is nevertheless there, represented by the flash of the firing gun, the searchlights moving over the red glare of the sky, and the distant flashes in the darkened scene. In O'Casey's directions that no noise is heard as the men rhythmically load and fire the howitzer, Emery Garrison sees a bitterness in his symbolic presentation of the horror of war.²⁰ Perhaps there is a bitterness, but it is not unsuitable to the rest of the play and to the purpose of the play as O'Casey outlined it in Rose and Crown. The effect of this war, then, is not unlike that of Plough; however, the use of expressionistic technique in The Silver

²⁰Garrison, p. 123.

Tassie, Act II, is an important departure for O'Casey.

Acts III and IV return to the realistic techniques of Act I; these two acts show the (realistic) consequences of war on man.²¹ Moreover, in returning to the individuals of Harry Heegan, Teddy Foran, and Barney Bagnal, O'Casey emphasizes the individual characters who are wounded by the war as well as the allegorical abstractions of Act II. In addition, these last two acts show how the war has affected the people who stayed at home. Thus the distinct change in Susie Monican, her callousness in dealing with Harry and Teddy indicates that the effects of war are extended beyond the soldiers. In connection with the abrupt change which the second act makes in the play, critics have expressed dissatisfaction with the structure of the play. Robert Hogan goes so far as to say that the play would not suffer were the second act omitted. The reason he gives is that the second act is unnecessary since "the play exists to condemn war by showing its effects on an individual."²² O'Casey does show the effects of war on an individual, but Act II of The Silver Tassie enables him to broaden the theme which he had presented in Plough. Allardyce Nicoll's assessment of The Silver Tassie is perhaps the strongest praise of O'Casey's mixture of realism and expressionism:

Another dramatist with aims less wide than O'Casey's would have proceeded throughout in a realistic manner, but for O'Casey the problem of the individual man is dwarfed by the problem of men. After this first act he wants to show the horror of war. Were he to do this in the style of Journey's End our attentions would still be riveted on the single hero, and the breadth of

²¹Krause, p. 118.

²²Hogan, p. 65.

effect desired would be lost. Hence abruptly O'Casey changes his method: from the realism of the opening scenes he moves to an expressionistic, symbolic treatment of the trenches. This done, and the background set, he is free to turn back to the particular, knowing that, if we have imaginatively given ourselves to his vision and have been willing to accept the sharp juxtaposition of dramatic methods, the story of his hero will have been enlarged because of what we have heard and seen of the hell through which he has passed.²³

Finally, therefore, it is necessary to take into consideration O'Casey's purpose when he includes an expressionistic act in a realistic play.

However, it should be pointed out that Act II is not such an abrupt break as it first appeared to critics. There are elements in all four acts which tie them together. First is the emphasis on symbolism.²⁴ The symbolism of the cross, most explicit in Act II, appears in Act I as the masthead of the ship, in Act III as the crosspiece over the beds in the hospital, and in Act IV as the illuminated black crosses on the lanterns. The symbolic colors red and white appear particularly in the talk of drinking wine in the fourth act. Over all is the symbol of the tassie which gives a direct and very personal interpretation to Harry's life: in the first part of the play the tassie represents Harry's vitality and love, and in the last part the tassie has been mangled and bruised as Harry has been mangled and bruised. As a second connection between Act II and the other acts, the ritualistic movement of Act II is echoed in both following acts. The end of the third act is

²³Allardyce Nicoll, World Drama: From Aeschylus to Anouilh (New York, 1950?), p. 809.

²⁴Garrison, p. 118.

a song from offstage sung by the sisters in the convent, followed by Harry's "God of the miracles, give a poor devil a chance!" (II, 79) The juxtaposition of these two prayers follows also the pattern of Act II. And finally, the rhythm of Harry's speeches on page 82, Teddy's on page 89, and their speeches together on page 94, like that of the Croucher in Act II, has the rhythm and phrasing of the Old Testament. From these few examples one can see the use of music and rhythmic speech contributing to the entire play.

Whatever the problems presented by the second act of The Silver Tassie, it is apparent that O'Casey is striving to present a wide expanse of war in order to show its horror. In doing this, he utilizes techniques different from those in Gunman, Juno, and Flough. Even within this change, however, he continues to juxtapose opposing elements through offstage action or sound.

CHAPTER VI

THE TWO RED PLAYS

After The Silver Tassie, Sean O'Casey wrote Within the Gates, an expressionistic play of four scenes which was produced in London beginning February 7, 1934,¹ and The End of the Beginning, a one-act comedy (Abbey Theatre, February 8, 1937).² The latter is notable for its use of offstage effects to create comedy. Not until 1940 did O'Casey return to the theme of chaos and violence which had characterized his early plays. The Star Turns Red, (March 20, 1940), presented at the Unity Theatre, London, was followed by Red Roses for Me at the Olympia Theatre, Dublin, in April, 1943.³ Both plays are based on strikes which lead to violence.

According to Patricia Esslinger, the Great Lockout of 1913 is the basis for both plays.⁴ If so, then these plays return to the Ireland of a much earlier time. Not only is O'Casey working from his memory of that time, but also, as Esslinger notes, the event which is the basis for each play is one in which the playwright was personally involved.⁵ The occasion for the lockout arose from the organization

¹Sean O'Casey, Selected Plays, p. 798.

²Ibid., p. 799.

³Ibid.

⁴Esslinger, p. 66.

⁵Ibid., p. 96.

of The Irish Transport and General Worker's Union, led by Jim Larkin. Fearing the growing power of the union, the businessmen in Dublin asked their employees to sign an oath of allegiance to their employers and a promise not to join the union or participate in its activities. All those who refused to sign such a statement were locked out. The resulting decision of the workers was to strike. Riots followed. Because of the violence, the Irish Citizen Army, the first "Red Army" in modern Europe, became active in protecting the workers. Not surprisingly, the strike and lockout eventually became confused before the strike finally failed and its leader was replaced by Jim Connolly.⁶ For Sean O'Casey, who was a member of the I C A at the time, the failure of the strike was a momentous occasion which had a lasting effect on his ideals, according to Esslinger.⁷ This, then, is the material which O'Casey used in writing his two Red plays about twenty-five years later.

The Star Turns Red

The Star Turns Red, whose main incident is a strike and the violence resulting, is dedicated "To the Men and Women Who Fought Through the Great Dublin Lockout in Nineteen Hundred and Thirteen." (II, 239) However, the time of the play O'Casey identifies as "Tomorrow, or the next day," and the time of action "the last few hours of a Christmas Eve." (II, 240) Star presents a conflict between

⁶Esslinger, pp. 70-76.

⁷Ibid., p. 76.

communism and a combination of forces, the Church front and fascism, identified as the Saffron Shirts. The force of communism is the good which opposes convention and corruption in the other forces. Thus, one can see that the 1930's certainly influenced the play even though its basis was a strike in 1913.

The clash between forces in Star is different from those in the four earlier plays already discussed because there is a hopeful vision of the future in Star, as indicated by the time of the play. In Gunman, Juno, Plough, and The Silver Tassie, war is seen as futile if not evil in itself, leading some critics to call O'Casey a pacifist.⁸ However, such is not the case of The Star Turns Red; the vision of the workers' future calls for sacrifice of the individual. For those who saw O'Casey as a pacifist, therefore, Star is an abrupt switch. In attempting to explain O'Casey's reasons for glorifying the battle in Star when he had condemned it in The Silver Tassie, Saros Cowasjee and Harry Ritchie say that in terms of O'Casey's life the change is justifiable. His condemnation of the degrading slum life, particularly in Juno and Plough, leads him to envision a class war which will set everything right. Therefore, the purpose of the class war in Star is justifiable whereas the battles in Juno and Plough seem futile. In this class war in Star O'Casey shows a polarization of villains (the Church and the fascists) and heroes (the communists). The characters, then, remaining symbols rather than becoming characters, are not generally well developed.⁹ Even the conflict between the

⁸Saros Cowasjee, p. 176.

⁹Ritchie, p. 199.

brothers, potentially dramatic, is lost in the propaganda of their speeches to each other.

O'Casey's failure to create a play as dramatically powerful as The Silver Tassie in the expressionistic Star arises from two related issues. One is his personal involvement in the strike of 1913 which Esslinger says "is too important to him personally to turn into objective drama."¹⁰ The same is true perhaps of the second problem, the communism which he presents in The Star Turns Red; there is no objectivity in his treatment of the conflict in the play. Generally, criticism has hinged on this objection to the communist theme which overrides every other element in the play.¹¹

For the technique of The Star Turns Red O'Casey drew from both the realistic treatment of offstage action as in the first three plays and the expressionism of Act II of The Silver Tassie to present the conflict and battle in Star.

As in The Silver Tassie, music and spectacle establish the opposing forces that clash in the play. The setting of the first act, which is the home of the Old Man and Old Woman and their two sons Jack and Kian, has two windows, one showing the silhouette of a church spire beside which is a large, shining, silver star and the other window showing the silhouettes of two towering chimneys pouring smoke. In this way O'Casey introduces the two sides, Church and workers. He

¹⁰Esslinger, p. 96.

¹¹Ritchie, p. 198.

echoes this statement with the pictures on the walls, one of a bishop, the other of Lenin. Furthermore, as the curtain rises, music heard from offstage is the hymn "O Come All Ye Faithful" counterpointed by "The Internationale" which Jack is practicing on a cornet. All of these contrasts prepare for the conflict between Jack and Kian, the communist and the fascist. These elements of music and spectacle are continued in the other acts. In Act II when the setting is the General Workers' Union, the church spire seems farther away and the chimneys nearer, with the star realigning itself with the chimneys. Act III, back in the tenement, shows the church and chimneys in their original perspective, vying with each other, but in Act IV the chimneys loom larger with the star in between them. Music in the middle of the last act recalls the opening scene of the play because here the hymn "Silent Night" is interrupted by "The Internationale," the song which grows louder as the red star glows from the heavens. Thus the music and spectacle state the theme of the play even as they merge the symbolism of the two opposing forces.

In presenting the physical conflict, O'Casey uses a great deal of exposition, the observer-and-narrator technique, to forward the plot. However, this technique is combined, as in Plough and Gunman, with external action. The drum beat and the sound of marching men in Act II introduce the menace of the Saffron Shirts, but the sound of marching feet in Act III is explained as the Red Guards approaching to take Michael's body away. These preparations for the fourth act and the battle itself introduce the kind of action that is prevalent in the third and fourth acts of Plough. The bugle sounding "Assembly" is a

signal to the workers to stop work and unite in ranks. However, in this battle, there is a change in technique from that of Plough to that of The Silver Tassie. O'Casey shows fighting onstage, but there is no attempt at realism. The fighting is stylized as in The Silver Tassie: Glazounov's Opus 52 is played to represent the noise of battle as the men go through the motions of fighting.

The Star Turns Red thus shows a combination of techniques with which O'Casey had experimented in The Silver Tassie. Unfortunately, the play fails to dramatize the conflict that was so important to O'Casey, and perhaps deserves the reputation as his least successful play.

Red Roses for Me

Red Roses for Me, the second of the two Red plays, was presented at the Olympic Theatre in Dublin in April, 1943, having been published in 1942.¹² Like The Star Turns Red, it is based on the 1913 Lockout; however, it is basically different from Star in its presentation of the events of that year. According to Maureen Malone and Harry M. Ritchie as well as numerous other critics, it is the most autobiographical of O'Casey's plays since The Shadow of a Gunman.¹³ This dependence on autobiographical material, then is a departure from the symbolic Star and a return to the earlier plays. Although one can see in the characters in Star resemblances to the people O'Casey knew in 1913,

¹²Sean O'Casey, Selected Plays, p. 799.

¹³Maureen Malone, "Red Roses for Me: Fact and Symbol," Modern Drama, IX (May, 1966), 147.

the strongest parallel being Red Jim and Jim Larkin,¹⁴ it is apparent that the characters in Red Roses are very closely modelled after O'Casey's acquaintances. Mrs. Breydon resembles Susan Casside, O'Casey's mother; Sheila is Nora Creena, the middle class Catholic girl whose parents disapproved of O'Casey on both social and religious grounds; the Rev. E. Clinton of St. Burnopus is the Rev. E. M. Griffin who was a good friend to O'Casey; and finally Ayamonn Breydon is a self-portrait.¹⁵ Moreover, according to Harry Ritchie, the reason for the play's existence and its close parallel to O'Casey's life is that in 1941 and 1942 O'Casey was working on autobiographical material from 1895 to 1905 which was to be included in the volume Pictures in the Hallway.¹⁶ By using this material in combination with the history of the strike in 1913, O'Casey created Red Roses for Me.¹⁷ Although Ritchie is the only critic to indicate the combination of material from two different periods in the playwright's life, there is little doubt that O'Casey has returned to personal biography in Red Roses.

This consistent use of biographical material leads O'Casey to show again, as in Star, the battle between the workers and their

¹⁴Ibid., p. 199.

¹⁵Malone, pp. 147-148.

¹⁶Ritchie, p. 214.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 217.

employers as one between heroes and villains. In the 1913 strike O'Casey had been a supporter and admirer of Jim Larkin and the Union. So is Ayamonn a strong supporter of the strikers even when his church, his sweetheart, and his mother make other conflicting demands on him. Although the opposition is not shown to be as cruel and oppressive as that in Star, they remain the men in control who do little or nothing to relieve the poverty of the workers. The battle against them in Red Roses leaves little doubt that Ayamonn is on the right side and that he is heroic. In commenting on all of the characters in the play and on Ayamonn particularly, Patricia Esslinger says that his "flaws are those of petulance, not tragedy. The same defect is found in other characters who remain miniatures before the grandeur O'Casey sees in the strike material."¹⁸ Farther on she adds, "But in O'Casey's concern for refining the reality out of his characters, he has polished those of Red Roses for Me too thoroughly. They sink almost to the level of the neighbors, the singer, Roory O'Balacaun, and Mullcanny, who are merely single line impressions."¹⁹ The single line impressions, if they can be called that, of O'Balacaun and Mullcanny are nevertheless strong, comic characterizations. And if, by single line impressions Esslinger means that they are developed no farther than as the Catholic and the atheist in the play, then Ayamonn Breydon certainly rises above them as a character with conflicting interests and a wider view of the events in the play. Moreover, it seems

¹⁸ Esslinger, p. 94.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 95.

apparent that O'Casey wants to show the workers' efforts for a strike destroyed by their religious differences. In this way the other characters do not rise to the grandeur required of them, but Ayamonn does. He is developed as a truly heroic figure willing to sacrifice his life for a worthy cause. Emery Garrison equates him with Juno as one of O'Casey's most significant protagonists with a will that is indestructible and an attitude of humility toward his contribution to the workers' cause.²⁰ Thus it seems that O'Casey's characters in Red Roses are a striking change from those in Star. As David Krause says, "But now he [O'Casey] discarded abstract political songs and slogans and cardboard characters, creating instead a valid world of credible people who are capable of achieving symbolic stature because they live unmanipulated lives of their own."²¹ As a drama of ideas, Star had subordinated its characters to the conflict, reducing them to mere symbols, but in Red Roses O'Casey returns to the same kind of problems that he had presented in his earlier plays, so that, as Saros Cowasjee indicates, "The strike merely forms the background material, as did the political events in his [O'Casey's] Abbey plays; . . . So far it is a positive advance on The Star Turns Red where the workers' struggle against the capitalists was set in the foreground . . ."²²

There is another violent clash which is equally important to the play. Essentially it is between the Catholic and Protestant workers, but it involves also the atheist Mullcanny. To some extent this theme

²⁰Garrison, p. 238.

²¹Krause, p. 164.

²²Cowasjee, p. 184.

of religious division is explored in Star where the Purple Priest and the Brown Priest oppose each other, but in that case the two representatives of the Church indicate the failure of the Church to respond to the needs of the people. In Red Roses the split is more fundamental to the action of the play and the outcome of the strike because the quarrel over religious differences, marked particularly by the fanatical Orangemen Dowzard and Foster, diverts attention and energy from the strike; the effect of the strike is diluted by their internal quarrels. As Guy Boas notes, "Red Roses for Me . . . is a return to the manner of the early plays and to the Irish setting The final scene, in the ground of the Protestant church, drops back into the old Irish battle between Catholics and Protestants."²³ In showing the inability of the workers to unite and to forget their differences even for a short while, O'Casey, it seems, is returning to the theme and attitude of earlier plays (Gunman, Juno, and Plough) in which he seemed to be saying that no rebellion or cause can be successful when it depends on people like Seumas Shields or Peter and the Covey. Thus in Red Roses the quarrel among Mullcanny, Brennan, and Roory is a grim, ironic comment on the sacrifice which Ayamonn will make.²⁴

In other ways Red Roses is a continuation of the techniques developed by O'Casey in The Silver Tassie and The Star Turns Red. The emphasis on symbolism and the use of a dominant symbol throughout the

²³Guy Boas, "The Drama of Sean O'Casey," College English X (November, 1948), p. 85.

²⁴Garrison, p. 226.

play is one aspect of these two plays that O'Casey continues in Red Roses. Fortunately, the symbolism of Red Roses is better developed, better integrated into the play than is true of the symbolism in Star where the characters are not developed beyond this stage. Like Tassie, Red Roses makes use of symbols that are subtler and definitely less propagandistic. Maureen Malone identifies the two dominant symbols as the statue of the Virgin and the "conception of bright colours concealed in profound darkness to be brought forth glowing into the daylight."²⁵ The idea is best stated in the lines of the song: "A sober black shawl hides . . . a rich bunch of red roses." (III, 150) The use of these two symbols recalls the marriage of Christian and communist symbolism in Star and the juxtaposition of religious and war symbolism in Tassie. Through the two symbols the playwright prepares for two miracles: the restored statue, explained by Brennan's generosity, and the resurgence of the workers in Act III.²⁶ Thus it can be seen that O'Casey interprets in terms of poetic symbols, the social and political history of the time.²⁷

The history of the strike, then, already briefly recited, yields a rich lyrical play. Although based on history and a strike that did not succeed, Red Roses is a play which looks forward to the future rather than back to the past. It is like Star in that the hero's death signifies the beginning of the battle rather than the end and expresses hope for the future. David Krause sees Red Roses as a

²⁵Malone, p. 150.

²⁶Ibid., p. 151.

²⁷Ibid., p. 149.

visionary play: "The play is a prophetic allegory for modern man as well as for Dublin. It is O'Casey's most lyrical and affirmative work. . . . In this play he completes the visionary theme he had introduced in The Silver Tassie and Within the Gates. His first three tragi-comedies were concerned with the world as it is; these three morality plays are chiefly concerned with the world as it might be."²⁸ The allegory in Red Roses is made clear by Act III, which is rather similar to Act II of Tassie. As an abstraction or impressionistic scene, Act III of Red Roses affirms life and the causes of battle whereas Act II of Tassie shows despair.

Act III of Red Roses, which Saros Cowasjee says is the finest thing in the play,²⁹ shows a vision of the resurgence of the workers, suggesting that the vitality hidden in the drabness of their lives will one day emerge. This vision is in the third act and is not so abrupt a break as was Act II of Tassie. O'Casey prepares for the change in the first part of the act as well as in the two preceding acts. As already mentioned, the symbolism suggests the change: the repainting of the statue; the constant contrast between dark and light, with the light emerging from the dark (Note the dress of the Inspector, the Rector, and the verger, and the lines of the song). Moreover, Saros Cowasjee thinks that O'Casey's treatment of this scene is rather realistic; he says that Dublin can change suddenly like this.³⁰

²⁸Krause, p. 173.

²⁹Cowasjee, p. 190.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 191-192.

In support of Cowasjee's statement, Harry Ritchie points out a passage from Pictures in the Hallway that is a description of such a change that Sean O'Casey saw as a youth and remembered:³¹

The twilight was getting close to the skirts of day when Johnny swung his chariot on to the quays confining the river like a pair of lusty arms round a pretty lass. Over to the sou'-west the sky was a vivid green mantle, bordered with gold, a crimson gold that flowered grandly against the green, darkening into a gentle magenta higher up and farther away in the sky; and farther away still, the faint glimmer of the first stars was peeping out from a purple glow of purple gloom. . . . He saw golden arrows of the sun shooting up side streets, leading from the quay to God knows where. Here the hard, set, and leering faces of roughs leaning against a corner had changed into sturdy faces of bronze where the sun's shadow lingered, and became darkly golden where the sun's departing beams strayed towards them. The bridges looked like golden pathways, growing grey dauntlessly, turning from pride to get gentleness and peace.³²

The opening of the act is described in terms of greyness, darkness, drowsiness; the scene grows even darker, for the sun is setting. When the other figures are but dimly seen, Ayamonn's head is outlined in a streak of sunlight. In this way the act leads up to the change in the scene, and as it occurs Ayamonn describes it. O'Casey's directions are these:

/ The scene has brightened, and bright and lovely colours are being brought to them by the caress of the setting sun. The houses on the far side of the river now bow to the visible world, decked in mauve and burnished bronze; and the men that have been lounging against them now stand stalwart, looking like fine bronze statues, slashed with scarlet. / (III, 199)

Along with dazzling light, poetry, music, and dance create the vision.³³

Then the vision begins to dim, and the scene returns to its former

³¹Ritchie, p. 231.

³²Sean O'Casey, Pictures in the Hallway (New York, 1956), p. 335.

³³Ritchie, p. 229.

drabness. Thus the impression lasts only for a moment, but it is strengthened by the fact that everything in the play has looked forward to this moment and by the fact that the audience cannot tell where the dream ends and reality begins.³⁴

The preceding comments have given some indication of the relationship of the characters to the strike and the threat of violence. However, it is necessary to be more explicit because Red Roses, like the earlier plays, makes use of external action to present the violence of the strike. In addition, the four acts of the play follow the general pattern of earlier plays.

Act I is set in the home of Ayamonn Breydon and his mother. Exposition introduces early the topic of the imminent strike. Throughout the act continual reminders are the top of a railway signal flashing green and red lights and an occasional whistle from the engine, accompanied by the sound of the passing train. The drabness of the workers' lives is reflected in the weather--the cloudy sky and falling rain. As in The Shadow of a Gunman, the threat from the outside world is introduced by a parade of interruptions. They serve also to explain the different, conflicting claims on Ayamonn made by his mother, Sheila, his religion, and his union.

Act II continues in the same setting with the same kinds of interruptions, dominated by the religious controversy. There is a conflict both offstage and onstage to indicate the fierceness of their convictions. Onstage Roory O'Balacaun the Catholic, Brennan the Protestant, and Mullcanny the atheist argue vehemently. When Mullcanny

³⁴Ritchie, p. 229.

leaves, their comic quarrel is followed by a more serious conflict offstage:

/ A hubbub is heard in the street outside; voices saying loudly "Give him one in the bake" or "Down him with a one in th' belly"; then the sound of running footsteps, and silence. /

(III, 175).

It is later explained that Mullcanny brought on this outburst by trying to convert an angry crowd. He returns to take up the quarrel with O'Balacaun and Brennan, but the crowd remains outside, threatening injury to all the people in the building because of Mullcanny's presence there. The violence that threatens from offstage is contrasted to the second comic quarrel among the three fanatics, and the comedy of their argument is heightened by the fact that all of this time they are crouching on the floor, afraid of being hurt by the stones and breaking glass. Roory O'Balacaun's speech is particularly funny because of his position:

Roory / creeping over rapidly till his face is close to that of Mullcanny's--fiercely -/. We stand on the earth, firm, upright, heads cocked, lookin' all men in th' face, afraid o' nothin'; men o' goodwill we are, abloom with th' blessin' o' charity, showin' in th' dust we're made of, th' diamond-core of an ever-lastin' divinity!

(III, 175)

This technique of showing the violence offstage in light of the comedy onstage is a return to the technique of the earlier plays, particularly the second and third acts of Plough. The other religious theme, already introduced in Act I, is that concerning the statue. While Ayamonn tells the three men to get up off the floor, a murmur of song is heard. The song, a prayer for a cheerier way to die, is sung by Eeada, Dympna,

Finnoola, and unidentified men, whose mask-like faces appear at the door. Heard intermittently until the end of the act, the song expresses the despair of the people, and as such it is fitting comment on the remainder of the act. The railwaymen and the Rector appear, each one asking Ayamonn to do something different. His final decision is to support the strike.

Act III makes the change of scene to the Liffey Bridge, where O'Casey shows the vitality that underlies the drab lives of the people. As in the second act of The Silver Tassie, the use of offstage action is subordinated to the idea with which O'Casey is working and thus qualified by it. Music is important here because in the scene when Finnoola dances, the tune is that of a Gavotte, played on a flute by someone somewhere. The passing of this bright scene is accompanied by the approach of trouble. As the scene darkens perceptibly, in the distance can be heard the sound of many feet marching in unison.

(III, 202) The tramping, a threatening sound, continues as Ayamonn takes his leave of the people on the bridge. Then, above this sound is heard the sound of voices singing quietly. Therefore, the determination and hope of the people are expressed through the external action in Act III.

As in Star, the clash between forces does not come until Act IV. There are really two; one of which is the climax of the religious controversy. Dowzard and Foster come in following signs of an uproar; booing, a shower of stones, and more booing. Their dialogue explains that the crowd turned against them because they objected to Popery in the forces of the workers. Their quarrel with the workers prefaces the

clash between the workers and the police. To indicate the progress of the battle there are the sounds of the bugle call, the galloping horses, the rifle fire, a realistic presentation of the battle offstage like the earlier plays and unlike Star and Tassie. Again, as in all the plays, the juxtaposition of action onstage and action offstage is important. As the men and women run frantically to escape the charge of the police force, Dowzard and Foster dance on the cross of daffodils which Ayamonn had sent to the church. Almost simultaneously, Finnoola reports Ayamonn's death. The end of the act, Ayamonn's funeral, makes use of both spectacle, in the lighting of the church, and music, from the organ offstage and from the bagpipe, also offstage, which plays "Flowers of the Forest."

In many ways Red Roses for Me represents a return for O'Casey to the type of drama he was writing when he first began as a playwright. It has a background of civil disturbance less realistic than Gunman, Juno, and Plough, but the violence of the strike is introduced through action offstage. Of the four acts, the first two have little external action concerning the strike. Act I introduces the subject of the strike by exposition. In the second act the incidents offstage concern a religious controversy, another theme of the play. Act III, a scene which shows Dublin transformed from the dull and dirty to the beautiful and sublime, uses external action also; cheers remind the audience of the strike, tramping feet indicate the soldiers going to break up the meeting, and at the same time the sound of singing emphasizes the people's spirit and determination. Music and traditional elements which appear in other plays also appear in this one: galloping horses,

volleys of rifle fire, and the lament for the dead. Again O'Casey uses offstage action to complement action onstage. Like the three early plays, Red Roses has a background of violence and depends on external action to dramatize that violence.

CHAPTER VII

OAK LEAVES AND LAVENDER

After the two Red plays, the world of drama heard again almost immediately from Sean O'Casey. His Purple Dust, although published in 1940, was not produced until December 6, 1944 at the Boston Tributary Theatre in Boston, Massachusetts.¹ A comedy along the lines of John Bull's Other Island, it makes use of offstage action for comic effect. The following play was A Pound on Demand, a one-act comedy produced at the American Repertory Theatre in New York in January, 1947 (published in Collected Plays, 1951).² Both of these comedies preceded the tragi-comic Oak Leaves and Lavender which was published in 1946 and first produced in May, 1947 at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, London.³ Oak Leaves and Lavender is yet another return to the theme of war and man's suffering in war. Written just after and based on World War II, Oak Leaves is obviously O'Casey's answer to Yeats' criticism of The Silver Tassie. It will be remembered that in Yeats' letter to O'Casey about Tassie, he said, "The mere greatness of the World War has thwarted you; it has refused to become mere background, and obtrudes

¹Sean O'Casey, Selected Plays, p. 799.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

itself upon the stage as so much deadwood that will not burn with the dramatic fire. Dramatic action is a fire that must burn up everything but itself; there should be no room in a play for anything that does not belong to it; the whole of history of the world must be reduced to wallpaper in front of which the characters must pose and speak...."⁴

O'Casey's final response to Yeats' advice came in 1946 with Oak Leaves and Lavender, which he subtitles A World on Wallpaper. Although Saros Cowasjee thinks that in this way O'Casey is sneering at Yeats' dramatic theory,⁵ it seems that the playwright has really attempted to reduce the whole history of the world to background for the characters.

The time of the play is the Battle of Britain, and therefore the setting is England, a manor house. O'Casey's comment on World War II is quite different from the way he presented World War I in The Silver Tassie; here he presents the English as strong and courageous and the cause for which they fight a necessary one. Oak Leaves is based on the English response to the blitzkrieg. And to some extent the play is autobiographical according to Harry Ritchie, for O'Casey uses details from his "own experience in hiding in his improvised basement shelter."⁶ As in earlier plays, particularly The Plough and the Stars, almost every point of view concerning war and the conflict in this particular war is represented in the characters. Drishogue, the young pilot who speaks eloquently for communism, is eager to go to war, not for love

⁴Krause, p. 102.

⁵Cowasjee, p. 195.

⁶Ritchie, p. 233.

of England but for the people and the heritage which the English people represent. His argument about the worthiness of the fight is countered by Edgar Hatherleigh, who enjoys life and simply does not want to face the possibility of death. O'Casey's sympathetic presentation of Drishogue is a surprising change from Tassie in which his sympathies lie with a viewpoint like Edgar's. However, in Oak Leaves he seems to be saying that the war is necessary to protect the people. In connection with this attitude, he treats very harshly the character, Mrs. Deeda Tutting, whose support and admiration of the German Nazis is contrasted to Drishogue's eloquent support of Russian communism. O'Casey treats unsympathetically also the conscientious objector in the play. There are other distinguishable viewpoints, the most notable being the simple desire to live and love, represented by Jennie and Monica. With all of these different characters and their conflicting beliefs, O'Casey has assembled a community that shows the disorder and chaos created or at least encouraged by war.⁷ It is not unlike the chaos that reigns in Plough.

In addition to the conflicts among the individual characters that are directly concerned with the war, there are conflicts of peripheral concern to the war. The old animosity between the English and Irish comes up again because Drishogue and his father are Irish; Feelim finds it necessary to defend the Irish against any criticism of their failure to participate in the war. There is also a conflict between father and daughter in Abraham Penrhyn's disapproval of his daughter's

⁷Cowasjee, p. 196.

conduct with Drishogue. However, above all these conflicts stand the two forces in the play made evident by the title Oak Leaves and Lavender; the threat and inevitability of death is present in the scent of lavender, and the life force which opposes it is recalled by the many references to oak leaves. Thus the play can be interpreted as O'Casey's celebration of life as it appeared in other plays, the war being a force of uselessness and waste.⁸ Robert Hogan sees in the two pairs of young lovers an "affirmation of life and youth and physical love . . . in contrast to the negation of life by the war outside the window and the radio that lights up with the swastika."⁹ Moreover, O'Casey connects the two, youth and death, in his dedication, "To little Johnny Grayburn who, in his sailor suit, played football with me on a Chalfont lawn and afterwards gallantly fell in the Battle of Arnhem." (IV, 2)

In looking at O'Casey's technique of presenting the war, it is necessary to remember that in Oak Leaves he is dealing not with an Anglo-Irish or civil conflict as in most of his plays that have been discussed, but with a world war whose scope is comparable to that of The Silver Tassie. Of O'Casey's attempt, Robert Hogan says, "It is certainly true that the world is reduced to a backdrop before which the players comport themselves. . . . The room in Dame Hatherleigh's house becomes a pace removed from the war, a stage on which the characters

⁸Unpubl. diss. (Utah, 1958) by Gerald A. Larson, "The Dramaturgy of Sean O'Casey," p. 24.

⁹Hogan, p. 111.

may retire from the offstage actions and display their attitudes and reactions."¹⁰ While there is some truth in the idea that the Hatherleigh house is a retreat, removed from action, it seems that it is the nature of the war that determines its treatment in the play. The scope is greater; it is not a war fought on land as in Plough or even Tassie. Rather it is fought in and from the sky. And in its removal it has become an even more impersonal force. Nevertheless, the death and destruction which it threatens are always imminent, and the lives of the characters are changed by them.

In attempting to reduce the whole history of the world to wallpaper in front of which the characters can act and speak, O'Casey has used a further innovation in his drama. It is the use of a "Prelude of the Shadows" which is echoed in a kind of epilogue, the last scene of Act III. As David Krause says, "In its general conception and structure the play represents yet another of O'Casey's original innovations, with its masque-like Prelude and Epilogue that links the semi-realistic plot to the realm of prophetic fantasy."¹¹ These two scenes also provide a link between the past, the present, and the future, as Drishogue says later in Act I, ". . . the past has woven us into what we are." (IV, 26) And the Young Son of Time who appears in the Prelude is replaced by Dame Hatherleigh in the Epilogue. Thus these two scenes make clear a cyclical, inevitable change which is repeating itself once again in the Hatherleigh house during World War II.

¹⁰Hogan, p. 107.

¹¹Krause, p. 161.

The setting, which remains the same throughout the play, is a manorial house whose stylized lines and furnishings can be envisioned as machinery to make the weapons of war. The dancers in the Prelude move slowly and stiffly as in a dream, and their conversation centers around the fact that their peace has been disturbed, that England is at war, and that they fear the torch which they carried for England will be extinguished. The danger to England which they verbalize is presented also by the Young Son of Time and the Lavender Seller. The Son of Time is dressed in vivid emerald green but from his shoulders hangs a deep sable cloak, a threat of old age and death. Another warning of death comes from the scent of lavender and the Lavender Seller's song, which is heard from the street outside. This threat of death, the presence of death, is echoed throughout the play when various characters smell lavender and ends the play when the Lavender Seller's song is heard again in the epilogue. These two scenes, then, provide a kind of unity for the play for the reasons just mentioned as well as for the reason that one character recites the legend of Sir Nigel, who went away to war and died, leaving a young widow. Moreover, several times the dancers are mentioned; the superstition about a haunted house keeps alive the story. By moving from the universal to the particular and then back,¹² exactly the opposite of what he had done in Tassie, O'Casey provides a continuity which is important to the play.

The particular, World War II, is presented through the use of external action, as in all of the other plays except Tassie. It has already been mentioned that the music and the song of the Lavender Seller

¹²Cowasjee, p. 196.

in the Prelude come from offstage. An element which more specifically identifies the threat of war is the red glare which appears in the sky. From this fantasy O'Casey moves to the particular in Act I. In the first act, which is expository, the background of the war is explained through the dialogue and through the preparations onstage. The ineptitude of the soldiers as they prepare for blackouts gives rise to comedy, an effect achieved by offstage action. Preparations offstage are also important; in the middle of the act the tramp of marching men is heard and as the tramping grows louder (closer), orders are shouted. This is the sound of the Home Guard drilling. Again their ineptitude has a comic effect. As they are given orders to turn, a pike crashes through a window. Such comedy contrasts with the real menace which the soldiers must face; however, in Oak Leaves and Lavender the threat is an abstraction. The Nazi menace is indicated by the wireless cabinet lighting up with a swastika, accompanied by the notes of the first line of "Deutschland uber Alles" and a voice saying, "Germany calling, Germany calling, Germany calling." This threat is made more significant by the fact that it interrupts a conversation between Edgar and Drishogue on death. (IV, 29-30) Again the connection between the war and the two young men is emphasized as they exit with their lovers; the Home Guard is heard drilling. (IV, 35) And a little later, as Dame Hatherleigh imagines the destruction which the Germans are causing, the swastika lights, the song and voice are heard, and this time there is the sound of marching feet, heavier and more rhythmical than that of the Home Guard, sounding as if every boot were shod with steel. (IV, 37) Finally this same warning ends the act. It is heard

after the argument between Drishogue and Deeda Tutting over Germany and Russia, and immediately following it a warning siren calls all of the characters out of the room. (IV, 53-54) Thus O'Casey gives concrete meaning to the warning from the wireless.

In Act II the drilling of the Home Guard continues, heard intermittently. The warning which comes from the wireless is not used until the end of the act, but there is an important change. Twice the house trembles and the windows shake, an indication that the bombing is getting closer. As In Plough, the war seems to be closing in on the people. And they react with fear and panic until word comes that arms have arrived from America. At the end of the act, news that Edgar and Drishogue must join active service is followed by the lighted swastika on the wireless, the trumpets playing "Deutschland uber Alles," and the voice. As O'Casey indicated in directions, "The rush of the German warplanes is heard in the rushing swing of the music of 'The Ride of the Valkyries' coming close, and then fading into the distance, as several tongues of flame shoot up into the sky seen through the windows." (IV, 83) "The Ride of the Valkyries" continues as all of the people rush out to save the burning buildings.

In Act III the machinery which was only suggested by the setting earlier has become real now. The flames from the burning buildings are visible from outside, the jib of a crane swinging seems to vie with the fire in a battle of construction and destruction. As the people rise to their task, the wireless gives a variety of signals: first is a V sign accompanied by the musical notes for BBC; later the swastika and "Deutschland uber Alles" are repeated; its final message is a flashing

of the Union Jack and the Soviet Flag while a voice encourages the people to hope and work. The war finally enters the room in the shape of a bomb which Abraham Penrhyn finds, but as is evident, the movement is toward victory and hope rather than defeat. Even when Drishogue's death is announced Monica softens the blow for his father: "There's more to come; a living spark from himself that will soon be a buoyant symbol of our Drishogue who is gone!" (IV, 107) Thus the idea of life and death existing together is repeated. The final scene or epilogue is reminiscent of the final scene in Red Roses because it begins with the lament for the dead Edgar. However, it is also a return to the Prelude of the play, showing Dame Hatherleigh becoming one of the shadows that dance in the house.

It seems that Oak Leaves and Lavender is a mixture of the techniques which O'Casey began developing with his first plays. The external action, represented by the blasts from bombs and the flames of fire is realistic, in many ways the same use of external action as in Plough. However, the use of the wireless to demonstrate the threat of the Nazis and to tell the progress of the battle is the kind of technique which O'Casey began developing in The Silver Tassie. Also, the unity and continuity created by the first and last scenes and the universal applications which they imply are elements with which O'Casey began working in The Silver Tassie. But unlike Tassie, Oak Leaves and Lavender is not a bitter condemnation of war. While O'Casey contrasts the waste and destruction of war with the affirmation of life in his characters, he indicates that the causes of the war are just, that it must be fought.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

Oak Leaves and Lavender was not O'Casey's last play; after it he wrote several more plays, including Cock-a-Doddle Dandy, The Bishop's Bonfire, The Drums of Father Ned, Behind the Green Curtains, and several one-act plays. However Oak Leaves and Lavender was the last play in which O'Casey dealt with the theme of war and chaos. It is the last of his seven plays on this topic. Written over a period of approximately twenty years, these seven plays show the theme of war treated in widely varied ways. The historical and biographical background of the plays, which covers thirty years, seems to have contributed much to the shaping of O'Casey's drama.

As a kind of unit, the first three plays, Gunman, Juno, and Plough deal with the Anglo-Irish conflict, a long period of rebellion and civil war which weakened Ireland and her people. In these plays, then, O'Casey is showing the Irish working toward independence but hampered by their own fanaticism and internal quarrels. There are almost more sides than can be counted; nationalist versus loyalist, Republican versus Free Stater, Catholic versus Protestant, labor versus business, Irish Volunteer versus I. C. A. member, socialist versus capitalist, pragmatist versus idealist. Although this list may begin to look like an exaggeration, it is not, for O'Casey shows all of these conflicts in the first three plays, where such disharmony threatens total ruin to the

country. Here O'Casey is dealing with very specific issues in these civil conflicts.

From this period of Anglo-Irish strife O'Casey moves to a much more general treatment and universal application of the chaos of war. In The Silver Tassie the war is World War I, and the conflict between specific forces is never presented. Rather, O'Casey attempts to present the idea, the abstraction of war in a nightmare that warps the souls and bodies of men. It is a presentation of the horror of war which every man in every war experiences. His concern here is not with the external, realistic events in war but rather with the entire experience and memory which these events shape.

As such, The Silver Tassie is a noticeable break in O'Casey's drama of war, because after it he returns to the civil conflict in Ireland in two plays: The Star Turns Red and Red Roses for Me. Both of these, however, are a departure from the first three plays in that they show a class struggle against the evils of capitalism and facism. Because these plays do not show the efforts of the people so fragmented as in Gunman, Juno, and Plough, the opposing forces in the battle are more clearly defined. However, it is necessary to note a distinction between the two. In Star there is no ambivalence, no conflicting interests in sympathetic characters. The lines of battle are very clearly drawn between the communists who are the heroes of the drama and the combination of Nazis and Church Front who are the villains of the people. While Red Roses has its hero and its villains, there are other conflicts which tend to complicate the clash between workers and employers. The major complication is the religious controversy, a theme

which appears also in earlier plays. Thus Red Roses, though a close parallel to Star, is closer in many ways to the first three plays.

From this point O'Casey returns to the more universal World War II in Oak Leaves and Lavender, a treatment of world war different from that in Tassie. All of the different attitudes toward war, which O'Casey had presented at one time or another in his drama, are represented: the communist, the Nazi, the conscientious objector, the coward, the traditionalist, the heroic figure who is willing to die for a worthy cause, the person who simply wants to live and enjoy life. Again, their squabbles provide conflicts within the major one, but O'Casey does not indicate, as in his Dublin trilogy, that they destroy the unity of the cause. Rather, he shows the greatest force in the play as one bound up in a desire to protect the people and their heritage. Therefore, the causes for fighting the war are again treated sympathetically, as in Star and Red Roses.

There are other ways in which distinctions can be made among the seven plays. The group comprised of the first four plays concern conflicts whose causes are not worth the suffering and sacrifice required of the people. In connection with this attitude, the characters who are willing to sacrifice themselves for these causes seem to be vain, idealistic people, like Johnny Boyle and Jack Clitheroe. David Krause says that they are not heroic: "An anti-heroic vision of life provides the unity of theme and the diversity of character and action in O'Casey's first four plays, . . . In all these plays the theme revolves around a series of illusions of heroism which point to

the basic conflict."¹ The characters treated most sympathetically in Juno and Plough are those who object to war and bloodshed or who become innocent victims of such events. Contrasted to this is O'Casey's presentation in the last three plays of heroic character, a heroic vision which dwells, not on the futility of war as in the first four plays, but on the hope of the future which these sacrifices insure. The characters, like Jack, Ayamonn, and Drishogue expose themselves to danger because they believe in a cause and are willing to die for it. Therefore, it seems that, parallel to the anti-heroic and heroic visions is an attitude toward the conflict which each play presents, an attitude growing out of the playwright's viewpoint. O'Casey's rather critical objectivity in Gunman, Juno, and Plough and his thorough condemnation of war in Tassie provide a contrast to his support of the causes in Star, Red Roses, and Oak Leaves.

Finally, O'Casey's technique of presenting war in these seven plays is as varied as his attitude and scope in each play. In all the plays external action is used to some extent to represent the conflicts. In the first three plays, The Shadow of a Gunman, Juno and the Paycock, and The Plough and the Stars, O'Casey's treatment of war is realistic. Offstage action is used to describe the raid and its progress in Gunman, to warn of Johnny's impending doom in Juno, and to present an entire battle in a city in Plough. It is in this last play that O'Casey uses external action to its best effect, maintaining a balance between offstage and onstage action so that each one is a

¹Krause, p. 66.

continuing comment on the other. There are such moments in Gunman and Juno, but Plough is an extended treatment of this kind of action. As Una Ellis-Fermor says, the structure of the play thus has an original and subtle relation to the theme of the play, the disjunction.² In this consideration of O'Casey's use of external action in his plays about war, it becomes apparent that The Silver Tassie is a major break from the first three. The treatment of war in this play is in no way realistic; war is an abstraction which O'Casey sees as a nightmare in the minds of men. However, he does not abandon the device of external action; it appears often as music and spectacle in this play, particularly in Act II. In addition, Act II of Tassie is like the other plays in that onstage and offstage action occur simultaneously so that they comment on each other. The last three plays, The Star Turns Red, Red Roses for Me, and Oak Leaves and Lavender are mixtures of the two techniques represented by the Dublin trilogy and The Silver Tassie. External action in the three is sometimes realistic, as in the street fight in the second act of Red Roses and the sounds of battle in Oak Leaves. But it can also be expressionistic, as the description of the battle in Act IV of Star and the use of music to approximate the rush of German warplanes in Oak Leaves. Therefore it is evident that external action is used in realistic situations to describe war and in non-realistic situations to evoke a response to the war. The relationship between war and external action in these seven plays by Sean O'Casey is a subtle creation which changes with each play.

²Ellis-Fermor, p. 199.

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